

## CULTURA SOCIO-EMOȚIONALĂ LA ÎNVĂȚAREA ÎN GRUPURI

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*În metodologia modernă de predare a limbii engleze ca limbă străină/sau a doua limbă, există deja abordări care sunt utilizate efectiv în grupurile multinaționale de cursanți. Cu toate acestea, într-o lume în continuă schimbare, noi provocări au apărut și continuă să apară pentru educatori. De exemplu, când amenințarea pandemiei de COVID-19 planează asupra multor țări de pe diferite continente, inclusiv Moldova, iar educația a trecut doar la online. Strategia și tactica de predare/învățare trebuiau să fie adecvate noului model de învățare. Învățarea online a trebuit să treacă într-o atmosferă foarte emoțională atât pentru profesori, cât și pentru studenți. Acest articol descrie experiența noastră în introducerea componentelor de învățare social-emoțională în predarea limbii engleze ca limbă străină/sau a doua limbă în perioadele de pandemie și post-pandemie în grupuri multinaționale de studenți din Republica Moldova, la Universitatea Americană din Moldova.*

**Cuvinte-cheie:** engleză, predare, învățare socio-emoțională, pandemie COVID-19, grupuri multiculturale.

### SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING CULTURE THROUGH GROUP ACTIVITIES

*Up to the present time there exist some approaches to Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) that are used effectively in multicultural classes. Nevertheless, in the constantly changing world there appeared new challenges for educators. For example, when the pandemic of COVID-19 threatened many countries on various continents, and education started its existence only online. The strategy and tactics had to be appropriate for teaching/learning online in highly emotional atmosphere for both teachers and students. In the given article there is the description of our experience of implementing Social Emotional Learning (SEL) components in TEFL classes during the pandemic and post-pandemic periods in the multicultural teaching/learning environment in the Republic of Moldova, at the American University of Moldova.*

**Keywords:** English, teaching, social and emotional learning, pandemic COVID-19, multinational groups.

### CULTURE SOCIO-ÉMOTIONNELLE À L'APPRENTISSAGE EN GROUPE

*Dans la méthodologie moderne d'enseignement de l'anglais comme langue étrangère/seconde, il existe déjà des approches qui sont réellement utilisées dans des groupes multinationaux d'apprenants. Cependant, dans un monde en constante évolution, de nouveaux défis sont apparus et continuent de se poser pour les éducateurs. Par exemple, lorsque la menace de la pandémie de COVID-19 plane sur de nombreux pays sur différents continents, y compris la Moldova, et que l'éducation n'est passée qu'en ligne. La stratégie et les tactiques d'enseignement/apprentissage devaient être adaptées au nouveau modèle d'apprentissage. L'apprentissage en ligne devait se dérouler dans une atmosphère très émotionnelle pour les enseignants et les étudiants. Cet article décrit notre expérience dans l'introduction de composants*

*d'apprentissage socio-émotionnel dans l'enseignement de l'anglais langue étrangère / ou langue seconde pendant les périodes pandémiques et post-pandémiques dans des groupes multinationaux d'étudiants de la République de Moldova, à l'Université Américaine de Moldova.*

**Mots-clés:** anglais, enseignement, apprentissage socio-émotionnel, pandémie de COVID-19, groupes multiculturels.

## СОЦИАЛЬНО-ЭМОЦИОНАЛЬНАЯ КУЛЬТУРА ПРИ ОБУЧЕНИИ В ГРУППАХ

В современной методике преподавания английского языка как иностранного/или второго языка уже существуют подходы, которые эффективно используются в многонациональных группах обучающихся. Тем не менее, в постоянно меняющемся мире, перед педагогами возникали и возникают новые вызовы. Например, когда угроза пандемии COVID-19 нависла над многими странами на разных континентах, в том числе и в Молдове, а образование перешло в режим только онлайн. Стратегия и тактика преподавания/обучения должны были подходить для новой модели обучения. Обучение в режиме онлайн должно было перейти в очень эмоциональную атмосферу как для преподавателей, так и для студентов. В данной статье описывается наш опыт внедрения компонентов социально-эмоционального обучения на занятиях преподавания английского языка как иностранного/или второго языка в периоды пандемии и пост-пандемии в многонациональных группах обучающихся в Республике Молдова, в Американском университете Молдовы.

**Ключевые слова:** английский язык, преподавание, социально-эмоциональное обучение, пандемия COVID-19, многонациональные группы.

### Introduction

Every few decades, experts in Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) reconsider what metacognitive strategies, principles, didactic materials, and methods will direct and regulate the learning process and contribute to success in the classroom. The life itself makes the challenge for teaching/learning process as it happened at the modern time of the pandemic and post-pandemic periods of COVID-19. TEFL teachers in many countries met the challenge and tried to overcome the negative consequences of teaching online. In our turn, we attempted to find the right or appropriate solution for high-quality and effective teaching of English online in the context of the emotional instability of our students that was caused by fears and insecurity for their health and their family members, as well as for the future success in learning.

As a result of participating in international conferences and webinars during that period where other TEFL educators from various countries were

sharing their ideas how to stimulate students for TEFL learning we, in our turn, started to introduce components of *social and emotional learning* (SEL) in our TEFL classes in the American University of Moldova. *Social and emotional learning* (SEL) is a framework that was developed almost thirty years ago when it was termed by CASEL, the organization that was working with social emotional skills. Nowadays SEL has the direct ties with positive teaching numerous academic disciplines that align with contemporary academic standards. By August 2020, 29 states of the USA had developed SEL standards for teachers and students caused by the pandemic accelerating urgent calls for more attention to learners' emotional health and well-being. CASEL put forward the definition of social-emotional learning (SEL): It is "...the process through which all young people and adults acquire and apply the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to:

- develop healthy identities,
- manage emotion,
- achieve personal and collective goals,

- feel and show empathy for others, awareness of others' inner states,
  - establish and maintain supportive relationships,
  - and make responsible and caring decisions.”
- CASEL, 2022 [1].

So, state and school districts' SEL programs have been ranked or highlighted in a number of education forums, think-tanks, webinars, and panels, in spaces like blogs and on government educational websites. Thanks to online international conferences and webinars for a wide corps of educators around the world during the period of pandemic-19 many urgent issues have been discussed for finding out the educational strategies for going on proper learning/teaching process and keeping students from overwhelming stressing situations that were caused, from one part, by COVID-19 and, from the other part, by the limitations in personal communication, eyes-into-eyes interaction.

The output of these academia's disputes has witnessed that the main problem of drawbacks in communication in class is not the format of proper class activity, that is, if it proceeds in the physical format, in classrooms, or it happens online. Many observations have been done during communication among students and teachers/instructors, and a lot of valuable conclusions have been made by researchers concerning creating the atmosphere of productive input and output in learning/teaching process online during the pandemic period. In turn, we made our choice, namely, it was keeping to SEL standards in teaching and learning TEFL.

**Objectives of our research.** The overall objective of this article is to share our teaching experience of using the components of SEL in TEFL, especially in intercultural communication in class. The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) has become a leader of the SEL movement since first introducing the term more

than two decades ago. It helped grow social and emotional learning (SEL) from a promising theory to an essential part of education. It has outputs both to life of students today and after their graduation. SEL is important for the surrounding environments of students, for example, for universities, families, caregivers, communities etc.

The starting point of the given article is to present a meta-analysis of SEL standards applied to intercultural communication in TEFL and intercultural education in English in various national and multinational societies. In addition, we are pointing out which strategy and ways of social-emotional learning might be implemented in TEFL classes.

We have designed that the components of SEL that involved the elaboration of self-regulatory skills had to aid in the process of managing emotions, making effective decisions, expressing and feeling empathy, developing healthy relationships for becoming successful in all stages of learning English as a Foreign Language in multicultural classes, and, finally, it will help to teach through and across cultural barriers at hard times of the pandemic.

The participants of our experiment of TEFL with the inclusion of SEL components have been the students who had to learn English successfully online during the pandemic COVID-19 and in traditional classrooms in the post- pandemic periods. The main conclusion that we made at the end of analysis of our experiment is the following, the components of *social-emotional learning (SEL)* have provided the safe and healthy conditions for fruitful teaching/ learning in the multicultural classes at the hard and stressful time of the pandemic and post-pandemic periods at the American University of Moldova.

Teaching and developing Social and Emotional skills appeared to be vital to our students' wellbeing, and in the article we will show that the English Language classroom is a perfect environment for developing and using SEL strategy and methods

for decreasing stress. In addition, we will also give practical tips how to incorporate components of SEL into TEFL classrooms without sacrificing academic content to be taught according to curriculum.

Another point of discussion in the article is culture. Unfortunately, in most education environments, culture as a concept in all its interpretations is often taken for granted, and sometimes it remains beyond the consciousness of learners or even teachers. From our point of view, it is absolutely a wrong supposition that culture might be neglected in educational process. Vise versa, we think that faculty, instructors and teachers should pay a special attention to cultural factors, namely, they are to analyze both the cultural background of any group of students and the cultural contents of didactic materials.

Finally, we would like to share the results of our own experiment of applying the approach and methods of SEL components integration in TEFL in multicultural classes at the American University of Moldova in the pandemic and post-pandemic periods. As well, some sample classroom activities will be described and analyzed. The article is, primarily, aimed at TEFL educators, but it might be useful for a large part of teachers and instructors in various academic groups with numerous and different specialties in multicultural educational institutions.

**Methods of research.** The techniques of research have been founded on the acknowledged ones in TEFL [2, pp.197-204; 3]. Among them there is case study, quasi and qualitative experiments, meta-analysis, descriptive research, activity theory, error analysis, action research, research and development (R&D), and survey method. During the period under the analysis the concrete research method as a systematic procedure has been used to solve the defined research task. The whole research has covered three main items, such as research design, data collection procedures, and data analyses. The proper research design has embraced many different parts of analyses.

Research on intercultural communication has been conducted using, primarily, *three* different methodological approaches, namely, *social scientific*, *interpretive*, and *critical* ones. Each of these methods reflects different philosophical assumptions about the world and how we come to know it. *Social scientific methods* often involved quantitative data collection and research approaches, such as *surveys* and *experiments*. *Interpretive methods*, in turn, have been used for qualitative data collection, and research methods, such as *interviews* and *ethnographic observation*, have been also implemented. From the general perspective, it has been accepted that the intercultural communication is created through interaction of people who participate in it as members of different cultural communities. *Critical methods* often included qualitative data collection and research approaches, such as interviews and textual critique of oral and written feedback of TEFL learners.

### Course of research

It is known nowadays that English has become a lingua franca or the international language around the world. Now English is not only studied as a separate discipline, but also many international educational institutions around the world provide all their services in English. Moreover, English as a foreign language is studied by people from different national cultures, in various cultural environments, and in the countries, where English is not one of the official languages of the state. That is why in English classrooms there is always the need of task to overcome the misunderstanding of culture of English speaking countries that is reflected in teaching/learning didactic materials by breaking the national stereotypes of learners.

Culture always exists in any language itself in its various forms. Moreover, elements of English speaking countries culture are studied through the language and alongside the development of four

main language skills, that is, speaking, listening, reading, and writing. Thus, the study of English is closely connected with the study of culture of English speaking countries. In our experiments we have analyzed how the national culture of our students influenced on the perception of English speaking countries culture embedded in the didactic materials and on the quality of the communication with the parties from various national backgrounds in class. The perception of cultural differences sometimes caused outright surprise and denial from the part of students. It might ruin the smooth flow of class and communication, especially during the pandemic, when the general emotional background in society, as a whole, was depression and anxiety. In search of the tool or remedy to create the favorable atmosphere for intercultural education in TEFL classes we decided to apply the inventory of social emotional learning in our practice at the beginning of the pandemic period teaching online.

Our main research activities have been commonly directed to prove a hypothesis of effectiveness of applying components of SEL in TEFL in general, and in teaching/learning culture of English-speaking countries, in particular. We have used two different scientific methods, namely, quantitative and qualitative analyses. Quantitative approach referred to research design involving deductive thinking to prove hypotheses of effectiveness of using components of SEL in TEFL. The data under analysis have been quantified and, therefore, this kind of approach generated some types of research methods such as survey, experiments, quasi experiments, and correlation studies. The data analysis consisted of some steps, such as coding, comparison, integration, and interpretation. This technique also comprised some methods, such as phenomenology, ethnography, case study, narrative inquiry, participant observation, biographical study, and grounded theory.

In an attempt to solve the investigation problem,

we have conducted a descriptive research involving 20 students undertaking an undergraduate degree program at the American University of Moldova. We have collected the factual data through the observation of interactive role play, the collection of written feedback from the students, the organization of interviews with students either face-to face or through gathering emails, and the surveillance of focus group interviews. The study finally revealed the answers as follows: the embedment of components of SEL methods and techniques have contributed to healthy, smooth and productive teaching/learning English as a Foreign Language in both formats of classes, that is, online and offline

TEFL as a discipline among other challenges has a big problem of dealing with personal emotions of the participants of learning/teaching process because each of parties involved in it has his/her own set of values, beliefs, religion belongings, personal / nation experience, picture of the world, stereotypes etc. Also, affective filters in many educational environments prevent the free flow of clear thinking and smooth communication among the participants. It is also important to point out that language learning prescribes communication across national prejudices, personal bias, jaundice, acrimony, biliousness, and personal misunderstanding. How to achieve the atmosphere of wiliness to communicate with the participants of language learning community such as, in our case, a group of students? What scientifically approved classroom management is supposed to prevent these negative and inhibitory factors that are slowing down the pace of class learning and prevent students to keep the safe level of trust and wiliness to participate in class activities for developing main four language skills, namely, speaking, listening, reading, and writing? Also, are there other educational skills that should be developed and mastered, such as critical thinking or knowledge-based ones that are assigned for accumulating special knowledge and



developing specific professional skills in various fields of sciences and arts? In modern educational environments practically there are no monoculture groups of learners because of wide spread historical and modern migration of people of various ethnos. In most cases TEFL classes are multicultural, that is why the teacher of today plays the role of manager of intercultural communication in his/her class, and he/she is to support a healthy balance of emotions and reactions among students.

It is known that research on intercultural communication and education is characterized by great theoretical and methodological discord of the topic (4). The variety of these scientific works have so far concentrated either on common themes [5], contributing disciplines [6], or on theoretical-conceptual components, in particular the notion of *culture* [7;8;9, pp. 10, 2, 165-177;10], and *identity* [11]. Despite these diversities, phenomena of cultural difference are, nevertheless, meaningful for the communication process [12].

Most authors in the sphere of intercultural communication and education seem to agree that educational institutions have to respond in one way or another to the interweaving of cultural, economic, technological, and other processes on an international plane, in order to prepare students for the exigencies of a rapidly changing and interconnected world [13]. Therefore intercultural competencies have become essential to many educational programmes, either as an integrated part of existing modules, stand-alone units or entire degree programmes. Thus, it is assumed that communication is intrinsically bound up with cultural presuppositions, values, and identities, and that all these can potentially lead to misunderstandings, stereotypes, and prejudices. Overcoming the problems of ethnocentrism, such as in particular, the idea that one's norms, values and forms of being, acting and relating are universally valid and superior to those of others, is one of the

principal goals of intercultural education. The whole research on intercultural communication and education is not only essential in interpretation of culture as a concept, but it is also rather important for being applied in TEFL [Risager, 2010].

Nowadays a large part of advocates of intercultural communication and intercultural education who focus on English as a lingua franca try to work out the metacognitive strategies for TEFL keeping the cultural components. By analyzing systematically modern metacognitive strategies in new intercultural environment for TEFL in everyday teaching practice in online and offline in the American University of Moldova it has become clear that the implementation of components of SEL is absolutely required.

The core of pedagogy of SEL is in the approach of developing students' ability to refine self-regulatory skills that aid in the process of managing emotions, making effective decisions, expressing and feeling empathy, and increasing healthy relationships to become successful in all stages of life. The main theory and philosophy of SEL is presented on the official website of ***Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning***, the nation's leading organization advancing the development of academic, social and emotional competence for all students (CASEL). Language teachers did not remain apart, but on the contrary they plunged in developing and applying SEL strategies in learning/teaching process in TEFL.

To our mind, SEL has appeared to be a powerful combination of evidence and support. The findings below come from multiple fields and sources, and they include analyses of hundreds of studies that show SEL leads to beneficial outcomes that are related to social and emotional skills, attitudes about self, civic engagement, social behaviors, conduct problems, emotional distress, and academic performance. It has become more important for educators to make the links between SEL and learning of various

disciplines, culture, community, and proper identity.

Teachers can solicit each student's own account of what the word "culture" means to them and develop lesson plans that can integrate content-area knowledge, particular skill sets in knowledge, and SEL frameworks. This should include helping students to explore their own cultural identities through communication with peers overcoming affective filters that are harmful for intercultural communication. In our practice of TEFL we have been widely used work in pairs and small groups taking into account the participants' level of proficiency in English. The level of proficiency in pairs and small groups depends on the activity goal to be achieved by the end of mutual students' work in pairs and small groups. Despite the language proficiency in a pair or a small group the starting point in communication is a warming up activity. This stage of communication is a trigger for socializing and waking up positive emotions towards parties.

The greetings in the SEL framework can be presented on a computer screen on a slide or a white/blackboard, for example: "Hello/Good morning! How are you feeling as we begin the class?" etc. The possible answers from the part of the students might be the following: "I am exhausted after many things I have done this morning!", "I am excited!", "Happy!", "Curious!", "A little bit tired but I am interested in this session!", "Great!", "I feel a bit confused because last night's homework was difficult, and I would like to talk to someone about it.", "I feel frustrated because I was unable to complete last home assignment." etc. It is a helpful teaching procedure, and it is advisable the students have a list of the adjectives that describe the range of feelings. In a week students can use automatically these adjectives. Further on, the teacher can ask students to give the explanation why they are feeling this way. Working on the distance, in the online format via , for example, google.meet or zoom, cloud-based video conferencing tools, that let you host virtual one-on-one or team meetings

easily, and the students might respond in the chat; it also helped introduce SEL components in the class environment. After scanning the responses in the chat the teacher could ask the students to give some additional comments on their answers. In order to implement Social-Emotional Learning components in our online teaching we have used some Google applications, for example, *peardeck.com*, **a digital tool that allows teachers graphic control when using Google Slides**. It is loaded as an add-on, and it works seamlessly within the Google suite to offer powerful student-engaging content with Social-Emotional Learning components.

Acknowledging students' feelings and emotions before jumping into instruction is important. A warm welcome is an opening practice/a ritual/a routine that is planned ahead of class. It should be speedy. It allows the teacher to quickly scan all of the emotions that students are entering with. This means that your warm welcome or check-in should occur at the beginning of class before instruction begins.

Why is a practice like a warm welcome or a check-in needed? When the warm welcome or check-in completed, it adds to a supporting and inclusive classroom environment that all students are welcome. It builds a sense of belongingness for students and, in turn, they feel more invested in their own education. Since all students' emotions are seen or heard through this practice, it creates a friendly environment. Thanks to a warm welcome or check-in practice students are learning how to identify and navigate their emotions and how to begin with the routine that supports and creates a more positive mindset which, in turn, limits disruptions during class. So, in addition, having this practice at the beginning of the day provides opportunities for students to feel connected or engaged at the start of class. Thus, the warm welcome or check-in is a powerful procedure for preparing students for fruitful work during the session. The Google tool, pear deck, appeared to be **very powerful for prioritizing**

*social-emotional learning and students’ engaging because students can have fun while learning different concepts and principles.* Every student is different with their own unique needs, opinions, experiences, and emotions. To learn, they need to feel supported and valued as individuals.

From a start Pear deck transforms lessons into powerful formative assessments and active social-emotional learning experiences in one seamless environment. Pear deck is the proof that learning is more than academic, it is also social and emotional [14]. Feedback is an important element of developing

critical self-awareness of themselves as thinkers and learners. Self-awareness encompasses individual psychological characteristics such as labeling one’s feelings, relating feelings and thoughts to behavior, accurate self-assessment of strengths and challenges, self-efficacy, and optimism. In order to widen the students’ vocabulary for describing human feelings, moods, and states we used some websites where, for example, there is the list of feelings when people may have when their needs are being met (Figure 1).

The feelings when people may have when their needs are ignored - see Figure 2.

**Figure 1. The description of feelings when your needs are satisfied**

<p><b>AFFECTIONATE</b>  compassionate  friendly  loving  open hearted  sympathetic  tender  warm  <b>ENGAGED</b>  absorbed  alert  curious  engrossed  enchanted  entranced  fascinated  interested  intrigued  involved  spellbound  stimulated  <b>HOPEFUL</b>  expectant  encouraged  optimistic</p>	<p><b>CONFIDENT</b>  empowered  open  proud  safe  secure  <b>EXCITED</b>  amazed  animated  ardent  aroused  astonished  dazzled  eager  energetic  enthusiastic  giddy  invigorated  lively  passionate  surprised  vibrant</p>	<p><b>GRATEFUL</b>  appreciative  moved  thankful  touched  <b>INSPIRED</b>  amazed  awed  wonder  <b>JOYFUL</b>  amused  delighted  glad  happy  jubilant  pleased  tickled  <b>EXHILARATED</b>  blissful  ecstatic  elated  enthralled  exuberant  radiant  rapturous  thrilled</p>	<p><b>PEACEFUL</b>  calm  clear headed  comfortable  centered  content  equanimous  fulfilled  mellow  quiet  relaxed  relieved  satisfied  serene  still  tranquil  trusting  <b>REFRESHED</b>  enlivened  rejuvenated  renewed  rested  restored  revived</p>
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The source of data: <https://www.cnvc.org/training/resource/feelings-inventor>



**Figure 2. The description of feelings when your needs are not satisfied**

<b>AFRAID</b> apprehensive dread foreboding frightened mistrustful panicked petrified scared suspicious terrified wary worried <b>ANNOYED</b> aggravated dismayed disgruntled displeased exasperated frustrated impatient irritated irked <b>ANGRY</b> enraged furious incensed indignant irate livid outraged resentful <b>AVERSION</b> animosity appalled contempt disgusted dislike hate horrified hostile repulsed	<b>CONFUSED</b> ambivalent baffled bewildered dazed hesitant lost mystified perplexed puzzled torn <b>DISCONNECTED</b> alienated aloof apathetic bored cold detached distant distracted indifferent numb removed uninterested withdrawn <b>DISQUIET</b> agitated alarmed discombobulated disconcerted disturbed perturbed rattled restless shocked startled surprised troubled turbulent turmoil uncomfortable uneasy unnerved unsettled upset	<b>EMBARRASSED</b> ashamed chagrined flustered guilty mortified self-conscious <b>FATIGUE</b> beat burnt out depleted exhausted lethargic listless sleepy tired weary worn out <b>PAIN</b> agony anguished bereaved devastated grief heartbroken hurt lonely miserable regretful remorseful <b>SAD</b> depressed dejected despair despondent disappointed discouraged disheartened forlorn gloomy heavy hearted hopeless melancholy unhappy wretched	<b>TENSE</b> anxious cranky distressed distraught edgy fidgety frazzled irritable jittery nervous overwhelmed restless stressed out <b>VULNERABLE</b> fragile guarded helpless insecure leery reserved sensitive shaky <b>YEARNING</b> envious jealous longing nostalgic pining wistful
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*The source of data: <https://www.cnvc.org/training/resource/feelings-inventory>*

The lists of positive and negative feelings are used at various stages of TEFL class, namely, at the beginning, after the completion of a group activity, and at the end of class. The teacher asks the students to be as honest as they can to describe their feelings that are either positive or negative. The students should pick up the word or words from the lists, read it aloud or write in a group or class chat. It helps for development of both students' individual *self-awareness* and their *social awareness*. It is a good beginning for starting class asking the students: "How are you feeling right now?" And then the teacher has a finger on the pulse of the class, and he/she can figure out what is going on in class, for example, if everybody is feeling really negative for some reason, the teacher should clarify what has happened. This is a really good way to check-in from the emotional side of students.

As far as Pear deck is concerned, it, in its turn, not only provides the variants for emotional check-in online, but it also promotes *self-management* which includes regulating students' emotions, stress management, self-control in culturally diverse environment, self-motivation, setting and achieving goals in learning. Using the Teacher Dashboard in Pear deck tool, teachers can guide students when they feel stuck, correct a misconception, or describe what was perfect in a specific response. For individual students, teachers can use the Teacher Feedback tool in Pear deck to give timely or specific guidance and help students develop self-awareness and critical thinking. When teachers publish *Student Takeaways* in Pear deck, students have a script of the lesson and their own responses. Thus, students can use it for review the lesson. Also, teachers can access the Takeaways document to leave feedback, correct the student's mistakes, prompt further learning, and promote self-awareness and self-management of each student.

Another learning Google tool, Padlet, also proved to be appropriate for SEL components incorporation.

Moreover, cultural components can be included in assignments for mutual communication in pairs and small groups online or offline formats. Padlet workspace is perfectly appropriate for this activity. The examples of some lesson plans in SEL format with culture elements could be the following:

- Develop individual reports of how you view your national culture and the culture of Moldova.
- Compare yourself with someone in your group/ pair-share and report to the whole group.
- Identify which stories that you have read in your life can be connected with you emotionally and why.
- Engage texts that address internal migration in Moldova and migration to the US of different groups.
- Research web resources and databases for census in Moldova/USA/Great Britain/Canada /Australia and immigration data.
- Develop a short 10-minute interview with two family members from different generations or a community member to encourage classroom group to speak on the topic "Family Connections and/or Classroom- Community Connections".
- Characterize your family and local community highlighting national characteristics, such as the themes on cuisine, songs, hobbies, musical instruments, etc.
- Explore public oral histories via the Library of Congress and select one family or local community member to conduct a longer interview via a role-play in a small group.
- Collect Google pictures of some national cultural artifacts and describe your emotional attitude to them.
- Write/Share a reflection on your experience in general national culture of Moldova/USA/Great Britain/Canada /Australia and national culture of your group mates.

Our practice has shown that in classroom setting Padlet works well with such activities as

brainstorming, discussion, and project work. It also perfectly suits for discussion and project work as home assignments. Students can learn through Padlet anytime anywhere with any internet-enabled devices such as smartphone, tablet, and computer with internet connection. There is no software needed to be downloaded to use Padlet. Students can share their works on Facebook, Google+, e-mail or even embed the URL of their blog. It can be added in Google classroom platform and be developed or changed during the whole semester and longer. Teachers can post a particular topic or issue, and students have also the possibility of posting their opinions on the subject. This is a great building block for teaching students how to write their opinion or persuasive essays.

There is the evidence that Padlet provides a platform for students to actively participate in their learning various subjects including culture issues through collaboration and sharing ideas. Using Padlet students were aware of their own learning and improved their performance in communication with their peers. The findings of the present and the previous studies have supported the effectiveness of Padlet in learning/teaching culture issues. Here, we should mention the fact that today students like to use memes and gifs from their national culture. In case of embarrassment the explication is obligatory. Another issue of culture in intercultural groups is also important, that is, what model of communication and debate is preferable. Is it more according to a model of co-existence or integration? For example, our students at the American university of Moldova are expected to assimilate to certain cultural norms at university and in our classrooms. Also, there is a public space for culture of communication and debate when it comes to different cultural norms, but communicants should be familiarized with them.

One more point for educators is what possible benefits of including SEL content in the English

language classroom exist, in general, and in teaching/learning English-speaking countries' culture/civilization, in particular. It goes without saying that emotions and well-being are always present in the classrooms, affecting participation, teaching/learning, and academic success. If students can perform well on their academic disciplines, but they cannot get along with their peers or cannot work through stress, are they going to be successful in life? This means we should look at students' backgrounds, experiences, and perspectives of ethnically diverse students as conduits for teaching them more effectively [15].

Culture includes many things, some of which are very important for teachers to know because they have direct implications for teaching and learning. Among these are ethnic groups' cultural values, traditions, communication, learning styles, contributions, and relational patterns [15]. Thus, cultural component is always in the focus of teacher's mind during the intercultural education. To full extend, it also refers to TEFL with the elements of SEL. How can teachers be so called culturally responsive? The first commitment that teachers should do is to feel what action from the teacher's part could improve their students' academic performance. The second commitment is the teacher's intention to develop students' relationships and understand how to incorporate their students' culture backgrounds into commitment of teaching practices. And the next commitment is the teacher's positive, but not negative attitude to his/her students and respect of their unique cultural differences and their pictures of the world.

Teacher's identity that includes education, life experience, social and professional roles in a lifetime, acquaintance with other cultures, visiting foreign countries, and hobbies/interests helps to understand the context of learners' cultures. As far as students' identity, TEFL teachers are to plan the activities that

will support the development of correct and realistic students' identity. Personal identity is the core of social, emotional, and academic development; it is the key of success in study and future professional career. As a TEFL teacher, we have used various activities to enable students to express many parts of their identities, for example, it might be a PPT presentation, a portfolio, a profile, CV, personal story on Padlet, role plays, etc.

To our mind, identity is really connected to several parts of interactions that TEFL teachers have with their students, as well as the interactions that students have with each other sharing their life and learning experiences within their cultural community. It not only supports the identity development but also the relationship the students build with other students in multicultural groups linking into greater *social awareness*. So, social awareness and relationship building are two overlapping competences; and these two areas can be built through the following practices which include having or developing a growth mindset inquiry-based instruction, opportunities for a paired small group or the whole large group to interact for building cultural awareness of not only themselves but cultures that are different from their own, opportunities to collaborate on projects and assignments and to make comparison of existing connections between their peers and the connections they can find in the literature and readings. This is not a complete list of ideas that are tied to these competences, but these are here to help build *social awareness and relationship building through culturally responsive SEL*.

We have observed that a teacher's social awareness and relationship skills make a difference to students for years to come. TEFL teachers that have a negative view of their students are less likely to succeed and less likely to show positive behaviors up to several years later. So how teachers perceive their students and how they think about them has

a long-term effect. Thus, the teacher's relationship skills and social awareness may be stronger with students than the teacher's colleagues. It happens when the teacher has more interaction with his/her students than with colleagues; it depends how much time the teacher spends with each group.

Another SEL competency that we have revealed in an empathy interview, a one-on-one conversation with the student to have a deeper understanding of an issue, is *cultural response*. An empathy interview is conducted to gain greater awareness and understanding of an issue or concern in order to find out ways to resolve it. It is a great way to develop connections and trust with the person that is being interviewed. So, as with any activity an empathy interview opens students up to sharing information. Setting *empathy interview* norms before the teacher starts it is extremely important. Here there are just some ideas. We always made sure that students were entering the interview with the mindset of learning and a deep attention without any distractions. Students should not interrupt the interviewee when the interviewer is responding. If the interviewer wants to ask an additional question in the middle of a response, he/she should try to avoid it and not to cut off responses or challenge the response. The focus is really on the interviewee and the experiences that are being shared. And then lastly, the interviewer asks open-ended questions. These will lead to a greater conversation.

This activity is tied to both *social awareness and relationship building*. Let us look how empathy interviews work. Empathy interviews can be questions that are developed by the students or by the teacher. These interviews can take place between a student and a student or a student and a group of students; the questions should be centered on a certain topic, for example, "Describe the time when you feel challenged and how you responded to it. "or "What helps you learn?". Another topic may be

“Tell me about the time you felt successful.”. These empathy interviews gave my students opportunity to develop the skill of listening attentively and absorbing information.

It is a good idea of sharing an example of an empathy interview starter, namely, a question that helps your students learn about each other. It may be the following ones: “Tell us something new that you have learned about your group mate!” or “Tell me about the difficult situation you have gone recently!” Other variants might be “How have you spent the last weekend?”, “What makes you feel relaxed?”, and “Tell me about your interests and hobbies!”

Another important stage in empathy interviews is the interviewer’s reflections on the ended interview. He/she can ask themselves some questions, such as:

- How well did I follow the empathy interviews norms?
- What do I understand about my interviewee’s experience?
- What are the challenges my interviewee experienced?
- What questions did I miss or would ask again in the future?

Sometimes these questions are asked in the classroom or they remain as a part of home-assignment. Anyway, this *procedure of self-reflection* develops students’ critics on their behavior and search of ways of improving it. But sometimes the amount of pressure to want to do everything is the secondary stress that teachers feel from their students’ trauma. All of these things lead teachers to feel stress. When feeling this stress, teachers tend to show lower levels of social adjustment in academic performance. Researchers from the Pennsylvania State University have come to the conclusion that when teachers are highly stressed, students show lower levels of both social adjustment and academic performance [16]. The way to prevent feeling stress is to start with self-care.

What is *self-care*? Some people say that self-care is about buying something to make you happy or doing something that leads to something that is material as buying clothing or a new device but that is **not** self-care. *Self-care* is actually the healthy habits and taking action for preserving overall health. This can be sustained by creating a self-care plan of reflecting on key areas and finding the ways to identify possible roadblocks. In short, we can innumerate some of them:

- healthy habits;
- taking actions to preserve health, such as:
  - creating a self-care plan;
  - reflecting on key areas;
  - understanding possible roadblocks.

Let us dive into this topic on self-care a bit further. When creating a self-care plan, there are **six key areas** to be included; they are physical, mental, emotional, spiritual, professional ones, and relationships. Under professional self-care we bring the ways to develop ourselves professionally and to learn to separate work and personal life. For students we can just shift the focus on the students’ role for physical self-care as eating healthy and regularly, making breaks, taking time off as needed. Under emotional self-care we recognize the activities/hobbies that people enjoy outside of work. Under spiritual self-care we accept the ways of engaging or reflecting spiritually. And lastly under relationship self-care we agree to take the ways of maintaining a healthy relationship with the people you care about. In sum, developing and practicing a self-care plan for teachers and students impacts overall health, the growth mindset, and finally, influences the quality of process of teaching/learning.

In addition, the important issue is the creation of space for students to organize their thoughts and share their ideas. And lastly, teacher should have the behaviors that meet their students’ expectations; the duty of teacher is to keep a standard of behavior



that they model for his/her students and to do these standards align with the teacher's cultural practices of students. These are key reflective areas to be more culturally responsive.

In a real life we show our level of social emotional learning when we interact and connect with other people. Also, the fruit of social emotional learning is revealed when we have empathy and function in a team, when we manage our time and help other people with our experience, when we communicate with people or whether we solve a problem either with other people or alone. We have observed that the main SEL knowledge and skills that our students have acquired during teaching English as a Foreign Language are:

- **self-awareness** - understanding one's own emotions, thoughts, and values and how they influence behavior across contexts;

- **self-management** - managing one's emotions; identifying and using stress-management strategies;

- **social awareness** - understanding the perspectives of and empathizing with others, including those from diverse backgrounds

- **relationship skills** - setting personal and collective goals; establishing and maintaining healthy, supportive relationships and effectively navigating settings with diverse individuals/groups;

- **responsible decision-making** - making caring and constructive choices about personal behavior and social interactions across diverse situations; using planning and organizational skills.

What are practical outputs of Social-Emotional Learning in the future life and careers of our students? Our answers are the following: empathy, team work, time management, mentoring, communication, problem solving.

During the discussion of the topic that was given by us or the debate of some issues in the text, a special attention has been paid to the following *self-awareness competences*:

- recognizing strengths in the other/others;
- showing concern for the feelings of the other/others;
- understanding and expressing gratitude;
- identifying diverse social norms including unjust ones.

The students have been taught a few skills in *social-awareness* either in the procedure of finding a solution when they have disagreements, or in the role-play for communicating clearly in the situation of misunderstanding.

Also, some *relationship skills* have been developed for working with people that are different from us, but we should cooperate with them. In order to help students to develop relationship skills during TEFL classes we have used some activities, such as: pair work; a group project; creation of rules for communicating; role-playing; collaborative tasks.

As far as *decision making* is concerned in TEFL classes, we have developed the skills of recognizing rules of a group and respecting them when we could/can solve problems, understand consequences and show that by watching out for the well-being of others. We have taught our students to act in positive and acceptable ways for surrounding society with concern for safety and apprehension of effects of what we do on the people.

The main road for students to SEL competences is a lot of interaction and group cooperation in a real life situation in order to motivate and encourage each other to build natural relationships. Also, students should aware of self-management by working on *problem solving skills* and by helping respect each other. Group work contributes to building SEL competences. In our TEFL class group work helps students improve both their language skills, of course, and their social emotional learning competences skills. Now we can agree that some of the benefits of group work are the following, namely, it reduces teacher's talking time; it appeals to different learning styles;

it helps students assist and encourage each other. Also, it builds closer relationships with classmates both in the physical presence classroom and during online classes. It provides students the chance to authentically use the language, and it also gives the framework for practicing the four language skills, English pronunciation and grammar. Here are a few tips for setting up group work in a lesson plan. They can be the following:

- start by setting language and SEL objectives for the activity itself;
- set clear steps for the activity;
- alternate choosing groups and letting students choose;
- give space and time around the key points in the lesson plan;
- focus the teacher's action;
- ask reflection questions.

Organizing the group work the teacher should be rather strategic about placing students in groups or pairs. We have observed that group work enhances SEL competence learning; we could visualize exhibiting SEL skills of our students. To give a mental picture or visualization let us look at a situation from our TEFL class. Three students were working in a group to discuss questions with a handout from the teacher. One of the group members was doing most of the talking. After three or four minutes of talking in front of the group the student stopped and asked his/her groupmates about what they were thinking about his/her demonstrating SEL competences. He/She confirmed his/her competence of self-awareness because he/she was aware that he/she was probably talking too much. And he/she also demonstrated some relationship skills because he/she wanted to make sure that all the people in his/her group had a chance to speak and share their opinions. He/She took this action to adjust his/her behavior with relationship with his/her group partners to learn together.

Now let us take some examples of group activities that we have used to practice *self-management, self-awareness, and relationship skills*. They may be, for example, *group discussion activities* or *vocabulary jigsaw group activities*. As we have seen in the example given above, students naturally practice SEL competences while working in pairs or groups. However, if we, teachers, know about SEL competences, we can intentionally structure our group work activities in order to maximize students' English learning and development of SEL competences skills. One of the examples of such a group discussion activity was the topic "Characteristics of a Good Listener" combined with the language point "giving advice using the modals "should", "could" and "must".

The group's aim was to create 3 presentation slides to present them to the class. The time frame was about 25 minutes for the groups to work together and 15 minutes to present the results of their discussion. Our objective was that students would be able to use modals to talk about the topic or to create a dialogue with the grammar point (using the modals "should", "could" and "must". So, our SEL competence objective in group work was the students' practice of *self-management, self-awareness, and relationship skills*. The time for group work could be changed; it depended on our decision. How did this activity work? We set up groups and gave them instructions. The students needed to brainstorm characteristics of a good listener. The students wrote together a short dialogue between two friends to prove good listening skills. They could place the dialogue on presentation slide/s with six or eight lines and add a title slide, pictures, and graphics for visual appeal.

As far as the roles of students in a group are concerned, we should mention that each group member took the responsibility for his/her role. In our practice of organizing group activities we used the role of the *leader* or *facilitator* who guided the group

in their jobs and tasks. It was the student who was guiding the group's work and gave some assistance. The student who fulfilled the role of a *writer* wrote down the brainstorm ideas; in general, this stage of a group work is very important. Later on, the writer of the group would also script out the dialogue, and the *speaker* or *spokesperson* for the group was responsible for presenting the slide/s to the whole class. The *creator* or *visual aid designer* produced the slide/s on the computer using the notes from the note taker. And then a *time keeper*, as the fifth role in the group, watched the time. Sometimes the teacher might take care of the job of a time keeper; it depended on if the teacher would prefer to have a group of four or if he/she would like to have the five. In our usual practice each individual in the group activity chooses a job to do. To our mind, it is the key to this activity. Another important procedure is choosing roles that may take a few extra minutes from class time for the students to meet, to negotiate with each other in order to decide which role they want.

There is a challenge issue for the teacher, namely, to decide what reflection questions can encourage students to reflect on their social emotional learning in this group discussion activity. The examples of reflection questions can be the following: "What do you think about the topic of our discussion?", "How can we improve the discussion next time?", "Did you enjoy our class today?", "Did you enjoy working in the group?", "How much of what you are learning is meaningful and practical to you?", and "What is the most interesting thing you have learned today?" etc. There were in our practice proper reflection questions that were directly targeting the competences of *self-awareness*, *self-management*, and *relationship skills* that were used in the group discussion activity. Some examples of the questions include: "How did it go when you started with your group?", "Explain did members agree with an ease on how to do the group assignment?", "Explain when choosing the roles, how

did you decide to pick up yours?" The students thought on their answers to respond, and their responses related to SEL. Not once the students marked that a group work activity helped them effectively develop *the skills of problem solving, responsible decision making, critical thinking, tolerance, flexibility, active listening, giving clear feedback, creativity, and presentation skills/public speaking skills*.

In order to monitor how successfully SEL components have been embedded in our TEFL classes we have conducted some surveys, in mid-term and at the end of semester. Here are some samples of survey questions for our TEFL classes:

- How does group work help you practice social emotional competences?
- What SEL skills do you have?
- How are your SEL skills connected to group work that you had in language class?

The students had a list of social emotional competences to refer to TEFL that the students were supposed to have in mind to develop. Here are some of the highlights and insights shared by a couple of the students in the surveys. In her answer Kate from Moldova said that she had taken the opportunity of creating good relationships with classmates from Nigeria when doing group work having in mind the list of social emotional competences. And another student from Romania, Daniela, responded that her engaging and working with the students from Africa in the same team helped her to apply the components of social emotional competences. She could feel comfortable to work in multinational/multicultural group on the general topics on national cultures, and she managed to learn new things from other cultures that she had not known before. The students were able to think, reflect, and make connections between group work activities in TEFL class on culture topics and SEL competences. In sum, their SEL skills were developed.

In addition, we should point out the relationship skill of "demonstrating cultural competence" which

is very important for our multinational groups in the American University of Moldova. Here, scaffolding is a useful tool for bridging cultural gaps. It may have various forms as an individual narration about the local national culture or discussion of texts with cultural contents from various cultures. It really makes the difference of the mindset of multicultural student group. The two more very important points in teaching culture in TEFL are to expose students to authentic materials and to compare students' own culture with that of the target language. Finally, TEFL teachers know that *language and culture are flip sides of the same coin*. After all, any language is a verbal expression of culture. It conveys the experience of the people during the whole period of their existence. From this assumption TEFL teacher can explain why there are so many French borrowings in the English vocabulary, in general, and almost all words for English cuisine. The American writer Rita Mae Brown once said: "Language is the roadmap of a culture. It tells you where its people come from and where they are going."

As far as another SEL competence, "responsible decision-making" is concerned in the CASEL theory, we can point out three main strategies for its development, namely:

- identifying solutions for personal and social problems;
- learning to make a reasoned judgement after analyzing information, data, and facts;
- anticipating and evaluating consequences of actions.

Here we can mention a very useful activity in TEFL, so called "decision tree". Being in pairs or small groups, students build "decision tree" adding stickers with their proposals for solving the problem that was offered for decision. The assumptions for the proposals were the following; they should not violate other people's rights and freedom.

## Conclusions

To sum up, we have used the SEL components in our multinational/multicultural TEFL classrooms both in online and offline teaching/learning formats during two years of COVID-19 in the Republic of Moldova at the American University of Moldova. We have noticed that the group work activities in multinational/multicultural TEFL classrooms helped develop not only language skills, such as, listening, speaking, reading, and writing, but also social emotional competences, namely, empathy/awareness of others' inner states, function in a team, time management, help to other people with your experience, productive communication for problem-solving for us or other people etc.

Thanks to our experience of integrating social-emotional learning components in TEFL multinational/multicultural classes and the surveys that have been carried out among our students we can accept that social-emotional learning focuses on students to become better learners. It consists of various components, but all of them are aimed at improving the quality of education in modern environments. Also, it is based on engaging teachers and students in professional and personal development establishing the roadmap for it, namely, from self-awareness to self-management, then to responsible decision-making and then to relationship skills and social awareness. Of course, there is no one real boundary between social awareness and relationship skills.

The social and emotional health of students should remain a priority in education for the foreseeable future. With such a prevalent need a developmental understanding of the reach of current SEL initiatives in the classroom, particularly for language learners, utilization of strategies and methods of SEL that engage students in authentic communication and in accelerated TEFL learning are the key for raising the unique challenges of the contemporary classroom.

Research and analysis of methods and techniques of SEL in TEFL have shown a significant difference in multinational communication and intercultural education. The analysis of results of applying the metacognitive strategies of SEL have witnessed a positive impact on a wider range of outcomes, including academic performance, healthy relationships, mental wellness, and more.

In final conclusion, on the basis of our practice we offer to include in planning TEFL lesson with SEL components the following procedures:

- integrating SEL components into part of the lesson or throughout the lesson;
- using small groups in order to make students comfortable when speaking or sharing their work;
- applying technology to aid with teacher's instruction;
- including culturally responsive materials or texts.

We have seen evidence and testimonials from advanced students that the classroom behavior has become more positive, and the class atmosphere turned out to be most surprisingly less stressful for students themselves. Implementation of social emotional learning components in TEFL classes during the pandemic and in the post-pandemic period significantly helped the students learn to interact with others. Interaction of students during group work activities let them get awareness of their inner states and feelings. The students have been learned how to “direct”/“manage” their feelings.

Also, the point of development of empathy, awareness of others' inner states, has been taken into account in interaction between multinational students, and it has been taught through role play or work on mutual project in group activities of multicultural classes. We sincerely believe that the communication across national cultures is a gateway to social emotional learning because it is actually

about inhabiting another person's mind with another picture of the world and mindset that allow to see many cultural things from different points of view. All of the above said helped the students to become more skillful in relationships with others in class and beyond it; they could find out about different cultures and people.

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