

ELT STUDENTS' ETHICAL CHALLENGES THROUGH THE LENS OF SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING (SEL)

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Abstract

In increasingly multicultural English Language Teaching (ELT) settings, ethical concerns are not merely pedagogical but also emotional and interpersonal. The study here explores the ethical challenges for undergraduate ELT learners and looks at how Social Emotional Learning (SEL) abilities play a role in overcoming these challenges. Taking the qualitative case study approach, data were collected through semi-structured interviews, reflective journals, and observations of classrooms of 20 students of English Language Education Study Program Universitas Samudra. On the basis of thematic analysis, three broad categories of ethical issues academic integrity, group conflict, and cultural tensions were analysed through the framework of SEL including self-awareness, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. Results indicate that students possessing higher SEL abilities resolved moral dilemmas in more positive manners, while students without such abilities tended to use avoidance or feel emotional distress. The study highlights an urgent need to integrate SEL values into ELT instruction to create ethical consciousness and emotional resilience in students. Implications are reform in teacher preparation, course redesign, and ongoing cross cultural examination of ethics and emotional development in language learning contexts.

Keywords: *Emotional; English; Multicultural; Pedagogy; Teaching;*

1. Introduction

With the world today more multicultural and globalized than ever before, the ELT profession today encounters not just pedagogical but also deeply intense moral concerns (Johnston, 2003; Hafernik et al., 2014; Brown, 2024). With English as a language slowly becoming a lingua franca of the world, English language classes today more than ever are multicultural classrooms where various cultures, values, and worldviews converge. Though the diversity makes learning richer, it creates sophisticated moral issues to inclusivity, justice, respect, and identity (Picketts et al., 2021). Both the teachers and the students have to navigate issues of linguistic diversity, power relations, cultural sensitivity, and academic integrity. While academically attention is directed more towards ethical pedagogy, a few studies focus on the responsibilities and ethical issues of teachers without excluding the ethical lives of the students themselves (Bradford, 2019; Hart, 2022; Gimbert et al., 2023).

Students are not passive learners in learning contexts; instead, they actively negotiate, interpret, and react to moral issues within the process of learning and social interaction (Omodan, 2023). Moral issues such as plagiarism, peer competition, nepotism, team work, intercultural myths, and performance pressure on students' academic achievement directly affect students' well-being and study performance (Jenlink & Jenlink, 2018). It is therefore crucial to critically examine the ethical concerns that students experience in an effort to build a full picture of ELT's ethical climate.

During such matters, Social Emotional Learning (SEL) is a possible platform from where ELT ethical problems could better be discussed and addressed (Smith, 2023). SEL, according to Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL), comprises five core competencies: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making (CASEL, 2020). These competencies not only build people but also promote ethical practices to engage respectfully and reflectively with different communities (Megawati et al., 2023). SEL in schools has been seen to promote academic achievement, enhance the climate of the classroom, and reduce behavioural challenges. In the context of ELT in particular, SEL skills are necessary to facilitate students to empathize across cultures, collaborate in group work, resolve conflicts, and make responsible, ethical choices (Gimbert et al., 2023; Martinez & Gomez, 2024). As language learning is relational and emotional, which is the foundation for the consideration so incorporating SEL in ELT is not additional but necessary (Pentón, 2020). Although theoretical alignment between SEL and ethical development is high, empirical linkage between SEL and ethical experience among ELT students remains limited.

Past research has acknowledged the transferability of SEL to general academic and affective functioning, but fewer have explored, in practical terms, what SEL competencies do to ELT learners' experience, understanding, and reactions to real classroom based moral challenges. In addition, existing models overlook daily ethical bargains students must conduct whether resolving group conflict, cultural stereotypes, or biased grading policies (Osler, 2016; Streufert, 2024; Hoque, 2025). In other words, students' micro-level ethical transactions become largely invisible in ELT ethics studies and SEL writing. By exploring ELT students' moral conflicts through the lens of Social Emotional Learning, this study goes beyond the dominant teacher-based models to place on centre stage students' own voices, experiences, and emotional lives. It offers a new contribution in that it characterizes ethical decision-making as not an exercise in moral reasoning, but as inextricably intertwined with students' social emotional development.

To these gaps, the present research is guided by three core research questions: (1) What are ELT students' ethical challenges during their learning activities? (2) To what degree do ELT students' social emotional skills influence their responses to ethical challenges? and (3) How can Social Emotional Learning (SEL) be integrated into ELT settings in a way that helps students develop morally? These questions attempt to uncover not only students' character of ethical issues, but also their affective resources on which they draw in dealing with such issues, and also propose pedagogies to cultivate moral and emotional intelligence in ELT settings. Therefore, the objectives of this study are threefold: one, to categorize and identify the ethical challenges faced by ELT students; two, to examine how social emotional abilities of students are connected with their making of ethical choices; and three, to investigate and recommend means of implementing SEL philosophies in ELT practices, and overall development of students in ethics and emotion.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Ethical Concerns in ELT Contexts

For English Language Teaching (ELT), ethical concerns traditionally have revolved around the teacher roles of fairness in assessment, equity, and learner diversity respect (Johnston, 2003; Hafernik et al., 2014; Bradford, 2019). However, such teacher-centered models overlook the students' ethical lives how they handle plagiarism, bias, and intercultural conflict in real-life classroom contexts (Jenlink & Jenlink, 2018; Hart, 2022; Gimbert et al., 2023). As noted by Omodan and Skosana (2023), co-labor among students largely involves potential for conflict, especially in multi-culture classrooms where social expectations and norms are diverse.

Students navigate through a spectrum of ethical challenges: uneven group contributions (Grant & Shandell, 2022), teasing accents (Jamali, 2022), and teacher prejudice (Kubota et al., 2023). The concerns are compounded in multilingual classrooms where cultural notions of academic honesty and cooperative work differ (Gu & Brooks, 2008). Classroom diversity, as noted by Riquelme (2022) and Wang & Grogan (2024), does not necessarily guarantee inclusion without being maintained through ethical and culturally responsive pedagogies.

2.2 Social Emotional Learning (SEL) in ELT

Social Emotional Learning (SEL) is increasingly at the core of the students' personal, academic, and ethical development. CASEL (2020) defines SEL as the incorporation of self-awareness, social awareness, relationship skills, responsible decision-making, and self-management. SEL has been proven to promote students' well-being, emotional regulation, and motivation for learning (Martinez & Gomez, 2024; Wicaksono & Saraswati, 2024). SEL is particularly pertinent in ELT because of the inter- and intrapersonal demands of second language acquisition, such as peer collaboration, intercultural communication, and negotiating identity (Pentón Herrera, 2020; Oxford, 2021).

Empirical findings emphasize that classroom moral behavior is closely linked with emotional competence. Students who are more regulated emotionally and stronger in perspective-taking are more likely to deal with moral problems in a more positive manner (Ndawo, 2021; Fuller et al., 2021). However, prior research tends to take SEL and ethical development as overlapping areas of study, rarely considering how the skills in SEL mediate students' responses directly to ethical challenges in ELT classrooms. This study provides an innovative input by placing ELT students' ethical lives squarely at risk, rather than as a secondary possibility to teacher instruction. Although there have been examinations of ethics in ELT or SEL benefits individually (Brown & Donnelly, 2022; Smith, 2023), there has not been much research on how SEL directly shapes student moral action in classroom problems.

Moreover, although earlier studies by Oxford (2021) and Megawati et al. (2023) have explored the affective dimensions of second language acquisition—particularly emphasizing motivation, empathy, and learner well-being—they primarily approached these constructs from a broad theoretical or pedagogical perspective. Notably, these works did not incorporate a focused empirical investigation of how ethical reasoning is developed through students' lived experiences in the language classroom. This study addresses that gap by adopting a case study methodology centred on students' perspectives, thereby offering a context-specific analysis of how social-emotional learning intersects with ethical decision-making in language learning environments. Unlike previous research, this study proposes an

empirically grounded model that integrates ethical reasoning into second language education, advancing a culturally responsive framework that links moral development with language acquisition in concrete, classroom-based settings.

3. Research Method

3.1 Research Design

This study employed a qualitative case study approach to explore the ethical concerns among ELT students based on the Social Emotional Learning (SEL) model. Case study approach was employed since it provides intensive, naturalistic questioning of complex events in real life (Rule & Jhon, 2011; Tight, 2017). Bounded research system was a specific cohort of undergraduate ELT students at one of the state universities in Indonesia and their attitudes, emotions, and coping with ethical dilemmas in their study context. Based on a case study, the research was not only made in order to tackle ethical issues, but also to understand the interactive dynamic between the ethical reasoning, students' emotional regulation, students' social awareness, and context factors regulating their behaviours. Working through a case study provided an adequate degree of autonomy to tap into the richness and depth of participants' everyday life and be faithful to a demanding and systematic analytic process within the study's research question (Hancock et al., 2021).

3.2 Participants

The study of bounded included 20 undergraduate ELT students in the English Education study program at Universitas Samudra. The respondents were chosen based on purposive sampling in relation to active participation in ELT courses, willingness to reflect on ethical experience critically, and general acquaintance with SEL concepts. The sample consisted of second-, third-, and fourth-year academic students to obtain a range of perspectives founded on different degrees of academic maturity and exposure to diverse classroom experiences. Participant demographic variability was purposively sought to increase the richness of insight into how different students approach and resolve ethical issues. The students were considered "embedded units" within the entire single-case design so that each student's as well as overall patterns of response to the ethical questions and SEL competencies could be examined.

3.3 Data Collection

Data collection took a triangulated route over a span of three months using semi-structured interviews, reflective diaries, and classroom observations to build up a rich and valid case study database (Stanley et al., 2024). In Semi-Structured Interviews, the participants were given an individual, educational-based interview of 45 to 60 minutes. The interview was conducted using open-ended questioning designed to elicit rich narrative-like descriptions of ethical dilemmas, challenges, conflict-handling styles, and how SEL skills had impacted their ethical choices. Sequential questions made respondents reflect very introspectively about their inner thinking patterns and external behaviours.

For six weeks, participants maintained reflective diaries of any situation or event where ethical dilemmas were encountered. Questions were also used to guide entries, asking to relate events in detail, emotional response, interpersonal interaction, decision-making, and reflection on how SEL skills were applied or challenged. Non-participant observation was also conducted on selected ELT classes where project tasks, cross-cultural debates, and collaborative learning are the norm. Emphasis was given to naturalistic

occurrences of moral problems, group living, peer interaction, and conflict. Field notes were used to differentiate verbal and non-verbal reactions for capturing and situating interview and journal data. Triangulation of method strengthened by means of interviews, reflexive diaries, and observation provided increased credibility and richness to the study through correlation of evidence derived from multiple sources.

3.4 Data analysis

Data analysis was conducted in a linear thematic manner to identify and clarify major patterns in ELT students' moral challenges and the use of Social Emotional Learning (SEL) abilities. The procedure for analysis was divided into brief and manageable following steps:

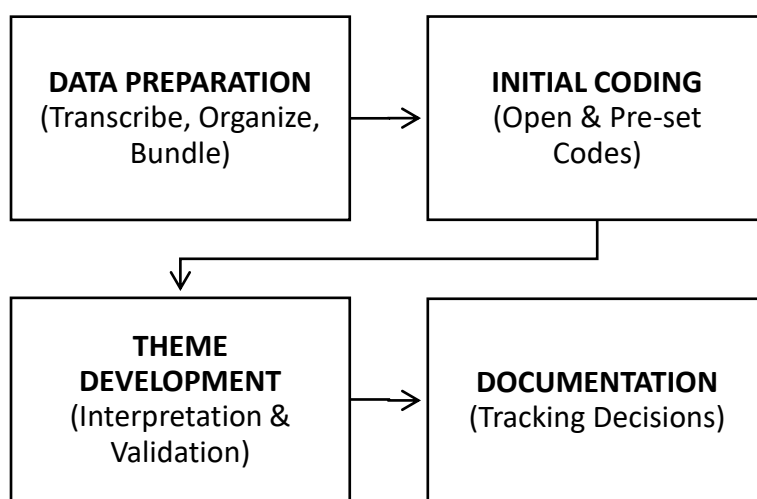


Chart 1. Procedure of the Analysis

All interviews were transcribed verbatim, while reflective journal entries were analysed thematically. Observation notes were organized chronologically to align with events discussed in the interviews and journals to allow for comparison across data sources. The researcher read all of the materials thoroughly to have an overview and searched for recurring words, phrases, and sentences related to ethical issues and SEL competencies. Both open coding (emerging directly from the data) and a priori codes based on SEL competencies—i.e., empathy, self-regulation, and decision-making—were utilized. Similar codes were grouped under broader themes. For instance, empathy and "taking others' viewpoints" were grouped under self-regulation in ethical decision-making. Emotional control and making responsible decisions were also emerging themes.

The themes were then checked and clarified for accuracy, relevance to research questions, and coverage of the full range of ethical dilemmas and SEL skills. In the final step, the researcher interpreted these themes in relation to how ELT students perceive ethical dilemmas and apply SEL skills. The interpretation was supported by direct quotes from each data source. For the purposes of clarity and transparency, the researcher documented coding decisions and theme development along the way.

4. Results and Discussion

This section presents thematic analysis of ELT students' ethical issues and how they respond through Social Emotional Learning (SEL) skills. The analysis follows the pattern of qualitative analysis and brings together various sources of information—interviews,

reflective diaries, and classroom observation—providing triangulated findings. Chart 2 shows the conceptual model developed from the findings.

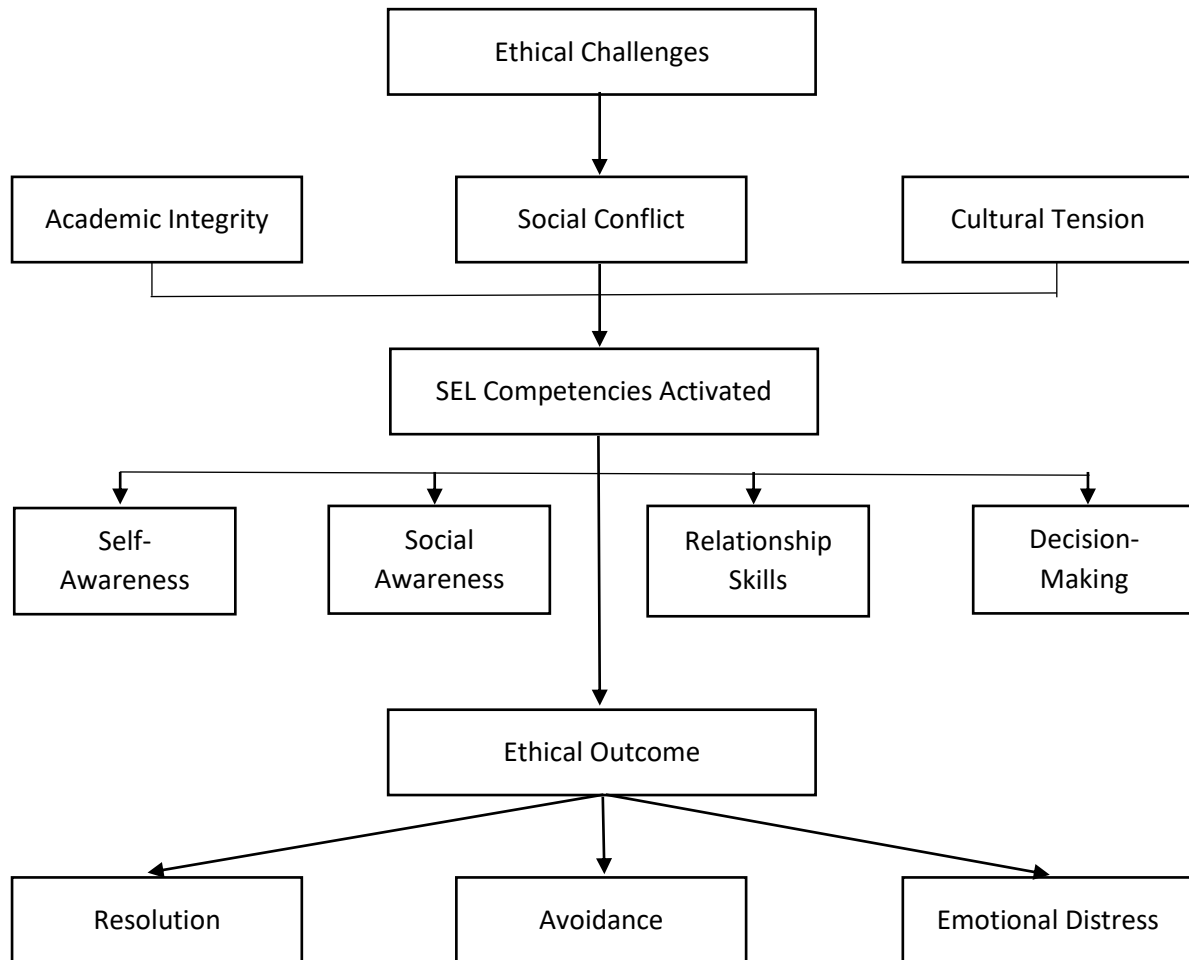


Chart 2. Conceptual Findings

Chart 2 illustrates the process by which ELT students are faced with ethical challenges, work with related SEL competencies, and come out with various ethical solutions. The model is built on three broad dimensions: nature of ethical challenges, SEL competencies, and resulting student actions or emotional states.

4.1 Ethical Challenges in English Language Teaching (ELT) Setting

The diaries and stories of participants showed a gamut of ethical challenges that are traditionally faced in the academic setting. They comprised academic dishonesty (e.g., copying and plagiarism in group work), peer inequality in group work, bias or perceived bias by lecturers, and conflicts arising from cultural and linguistic differences. For instance, one of the participants captioned: *"I was devastated when my group mates just copied from the internet, but I did not want to be the one to report them because it will destroy our friendship."* (Participant 7, Reflective Journal). This encapsulates a profound tension between personal integrity and social concord—a never-ending dilemma in collectivist cultural settings such as Indonesia. Similarly, students attested to the experience of culturally insensitive comments during classroom discussions, particularly when discussing cross-cultural issues in ELT materials. "Sometimes students laugh if a friend is speaking

English with an accent. It may seem little, but to that person, it is really embarrassing and it hampers their confidence." (Participant 3, Interview)

These findings validate earlier studies that multicultural classrooms do not automatically qualify as inclusive unless taught ethically (Riquelme, 2022; Kurian, 2024; Bosio, 2024). These are not isolated incidents but are embedded within the sociocultural and institutional context in broader society, pointing to deep-seated power disequilibrium, equity, and identity negotiation in language learning (Wang & Grogan, 2024; Anyanwu, 2025).

4.1.1 Academic Integrity Issues

Students typically described having difficulty with plagiarism, unequal contribution to group assignments, and copying answers. "*I kept quiet because my friend had copied the assignment, and I did not want to lose their confidence.*" (Participant 8) Academic dishonesty, particularly in multilingual, multicultural ELT classrooms, is likely to stem from diverse cultural conceptualizations of originality and cooperation. For example, knowledge culture students who prefer repetitive memorization may unknowingly plagiarize since they are not used to Western scholarship conventions (Gu & Brooks, 2008).

Similarly, free-riding on collaborative effort where some members of the group put in minimal effort and benefit from others' success raises ethical concerns, especially in those cultures that place great value on group success at the expense of personal effort (Grant & Shandell, 2022). Such concerns create for teachers the challenge of balancing equity with an awareness of culture while imposing academic expectations.

4.1.2 Peer Pressure and Group Conflicts

The majority of the students had witnessed group conflict, unequal distribution of workload, or silence within conflict. "*There were just two of us who worked seriously in our group. I wanted to say something, but I didn't know how*" (Participant 6). Ethical dilemmas also commonly occur in group learning contexts, where students feel pressured by their group to conform to group norms, even when the latter are unethical.

Empirical research demonstrates that learners in collectivistically oriented education systems prioritize group harmony above individual disgruntlement and are more inclined to free-ride, copy from others, or even cheat to avoid social rejection (Tan et al., 2021; Badawi, 2024; Tan, 2024). This predisposition underscores the imperative of pedagogical practice to cultivate ethical autonomy with cultural sensitivity.

4.1.3 Cultural and Linguistic Discrimination

These encompassed instances of ethnic and accent-based stereotyping, as well as mockery. "*When I got a word wrong, people would laugh. It was not amusing to me.*" (Participant 15) The most insidious ELT ethical problems are those that stem from identity- and language-based prejudices. English non-native speakers (NNES) frequently experience accent discrimination, derision of their language competence, or even racial stereotyping because of their "otherness" (Jamali, 2022; Kubota et al., 2023).

These biases not only chip away at student confidence but also justify linguistic imperialism give priority to native speaker norms and suppress the heterogeneous Englishes (Moghadam & Barani, 2025). Teachers should, thus, cultivate critical language awareness (Shapiro, 2022) in an effort to re-configure these hierarchies and create an inclusive classroom setting.

4.2 SEL Competencies as Mediators in Ethical Decision-Making

The findings indicated that students who had stronger SEL abilities, particularly in self-awareness, empathy, and responsible decision-making exhibited more reflective and constructive response to ethical dilemmas. For example, students with high self-awareness were likely to recognize their emotional triggers and refrained from sudden actions: "*When I was blamed for something I didn't do, I wanted to shout, but then I tried to think calmly and explain my side.*" (Participant 12, Interview)

Empathy emerged as a key competence in handling multiple points of view and resolving group conflict (Fuller et al., 2021). One observation note indicated how a student ended a conflict of opinion by repeating the opposing argument from the other person's point of view, exercising social awareness and relationship competence in action. Moreover, decision-making was informed by the students' inner moral compass, which was usually linked to their emotional self-regulation:

"Although I did not agree that my friend allocated the work in such a way, I chose to speak with her privately rather than argue with her in public" (Participant 9, Journal). Students lacking these skills responded with avoidance, withdrawal, or emotional distress. The results support that ethical behavior is not merely cognitively based but highly dependent upon emotional and relational abilities—precisely what SEL is intended to correct (Gimbert et al., 2023). In the presence of an ethical dilemma, students employed multiple levels of SEL abilities. As shown in Chart 2, four overarching SEL domains were highest:

4.2.1 Self-Awareness: The Foundation of Emotional Regulation

Self-awareness is the ability to know and understand one's own emotions, triggers, and tendencies in behavior. Those students who acquire this competency are able to regulate their reactions more effectively, so they don't engage in uninformed decision-making that creates more conflict. Students who recognized their emotions (anger, guilt, anxiety) prior to reacting were most likely to employ de-escalating techniques.

As they reflect: "*I was angry when my group would not listen to my ideas, but I knew screaming would not help. Instead, I took a few deep breaths and waited until I was calm to explain why I was angry.*" (Participant 12), this response is an example of emotional intelligence—the student recognized their anger but employed an adaptive over an aversive response (Skiba, 2024). This ability to regulate themselves is important in academic and professional settings where collaboration is the standard.

4.2.2 Social Awareness: Empathy and Perspective-Taking

Social sensitivity is the capacity to perceive other individuals' feelings, perspectives, and cultures. Empathy-exercising students would be more inclined to settle disputes peacefully and form more nurturing peer relationships (Wicaksono & Saraswati, 2024). Students who considered situational factors (e.g., pressure, individual difficulties) when attempting to interpret others' actions were less likely to react defensively.

And as the students explained, "*At first, I thought my classmate was being rude when he interrupted me. But then I thought maybe he was nervous about the presentation too. That helped me stay patient instead of snapping at him*" (Journal Entry 14). This is just one instance of how perspective-taking can defuse tension. Instead of expecting ill will, the student reframed the situation with empathy and it turned into a more positive exchange.

4.2.3 Relationship Skills: Communication and Conflict Resolution

Healthy relationship skills—assertive communication, active listening, and problem-solving together—are critical for maintaining healthy relationships with peers and mentors. Students who learned these skills better handled group projects and conflicts. Students who resolved conflict privately and with respect (contrasted with confronting or avoiding issues in public) had healthier, longer-term relationships.

As student remarked *"I talked to her one-on-one after our group discussion. I said, 'I think we misunderstood each other—can we sort that out?' That way, we sorted it out without embarrassing anyone."* (Participant 3) Such a move demonstrates maturity in conflict resolution. By using the non-confrontational and private strategy, the student preserved the relationship while still tackling the problem.

4.2.4 Responsible Decision-Making: Ethics and Consequences

Accountable decision-making requires examining the potential outcomes of actions, considering ethical implications, and choosing constructive alternatives. Students who reflect before acting make more logical and fair decisions, even in emotionally challenging situations. Students who reflected on a situation (rather than acting impulsively) were more likely to seek out fair solutions.

As student elaborated *"When I noticed that my friend received a better grade for inferior work, I felt it wasn't fair. But rather than complaining bitterly, I booked a quiet meeting with the lecturer to inquire about the grading standards"* (Participant 10). The reaction indicates critical thinking and emotional maturity. Rather than responding angrily, the student tried to find clarification in a professional manner, respecting authority as much as fairness.

These results validate the CASEL (2020) framework and are consistent with Oxford's (2021) relational theory of language learning, where interpersonal connection and emotion are central. Students with greater SEL competencies demonstrated ethical resilience, while others engaged in avoidance or emotional withdrawal.

4.3 Ethical Outcomes: Resolution, Avoidance, or Emotional Strain

Students' responses to ethical dilemmas varied significantly based on their level of social-emotional learning (SEL) development, highlighting the critical role that emotional intelligence plays in ethical decision-making (Ndawo, 2021). The study revealed three distinct patterns of outcomes—resolution, avoidance, or emotional strain—each linked to differing degrees of SEL competence.

4.3.1 Resolution Through Negotiation or Confrontation (High SEL Development)

Students with great SEL skills demonstrated they could handle moral dilemmas in a constructive manner. Rather than responding impulsively, they approached dilemmas with self-knowledge, wisdom, and problem-solving. Some resolved issues with logical, composed dialogue to resolve the issue, while others sought compromise or mediation to reach a level-headed solution. Their capacity for emotional regulation allowed them to remain composed under pressure, and thus, they achieved solutions that preserved individual integrity along with social harmony.

4.3.2 Avoidance for the Sake of Harmony (Moderate SEL Awareness)

Students with intermediate SEL understanding generally had difficulty standing up for themselves in moral dilemmas. Although they saw the ethical dimensions of the dilemma,

their aversion to conflict caused them to value harmony over morality. Most used silence, withdrawal, or passive acquiescence to sidestep the dispute. Although this tended to maintain relationships in the moment, it also kept issues brewing beneath the surface, and could create resentment or repeated moral transgressions.

4.3.3 Emotional Distress and Disengagement (Low SEL Competence)

Weak SEL students frequently did struggle greatly with emotional distress in the face of moral conflicts. Caught between guilt, shame, or powerlessness, they were unable to work productively with their emotions. Some reported losing motivation, feeling disconnected from school, or even experiencing physical problems such as insomnia stemming from unresolved conflict. As one student (Participant 17) described: "I couldn't sleep after the conflict." I felt guilty, but I also felt powerless." This group's inability to cope with emotions or to constructively solve problems often left them remaining in distress for an extended period, negatively impacting their mental health and school performance.

These results are in agreement with Maddocks (2023), who theorize that students with higher emotional intelligence have increased resilience and reduced psychological tension in morally ambiguous situations. Furthermore, ethical issues were cross-tabulated with SEL skills and indicated the strongest correlations among group-focused ethical issues and relationship/empathy skills. Cultural tensions evoked social awareness, while plagiarism was related to self-regulation and decision-making. (See Table 1)

Ethical Challenge	Self-Awareness	Social Awareness	Decision-Making	Relationship Skills
Plagiarism	✓✓	✓	✓✓✓	✓
Group Work Imbalance	✓	✓✓✓	✓✓	✓✓✓
Accent Mockery	✓	✓✓✓	✓	✓✓
Lecturer Bias	✓✓	✓	✓✓	

*(✓ = minor relation; ✓✓✓ = strong thematic relation)

Table 1. Cross-Tabulation with SEL Skills

This empirical evidence affirms the conceptual connection between SEL and ethical conduct that Brown & Donnelly (2022) originally suggested, as it demonstrates how social-emotional competencies among students directly influence their style for managing moral dilemmas. The result shows that well-developed SEL skills enable constructive conflict resolution through self-awareness and emotion management, while underdeveloped skills lead to evasiveness or distress - testifying to the crucial role of SEL in making ethical choices. This guarantees us that SEL not just complements ethics education but also its psychological foundation, allowing scholars with emotional mechanisms to convert moral awareness to ethical behaviour (Gary-Maple, 2025). Empirically linking SEL to ethical outcomes, this study guarantees us of its broader relevance for educational justice and equity.

Well-developed SEL skills in students allow them to respond to moral dilemmas with fairness and firmness, whereas such students without SEL skills disengage or perpetuate inequalities. These findings establish systemic inclusion of SEL in school curriculum and discipline policies, positioning it as a learning tool, not just a tool of learning, but as an essential framework for cultivating personal moral maturity and classroom group justice - ultimately building learning environments where ethical thought and emotional well-being reinforce each other.

5. Conclusion

It examined the students of English language teaching (ELT) and their ethical issues, and how their social-emotional abilities influenced their responses. Using in-depth interviews, reflective diaries, and classroom observations, the study discovered that ethical issues in language learning contexts can be emotionally challenging. The findings indicated that students who had higher emotional intelligence and interpersonal skills were more capable of managing such dilemmas, whereas students who had fewer social-emotional competencies often became overwhelmed by negative emotions or disengaged. The findings suggest that social-emotional skills play a key role in shaping students' moral decision-making in the classroom. Common ethical dilemmas in ELT—from plagiarism to cultural misunderstanding—appear to demand not only knowledge of rules but also emotional restraint, empathy, and communication skill. It is therefore recommended that language instruction be designed in an explicit manner to build learners' social-emotional competencies alongside linguistic capacity. In the same way, it is preferable that teachers be supported to recognize and develop these competencies within their classrooms, building environments in which ethical behavior develops naturally through emotional intelligence, respect, and compassion for others. Rather than offering ethics as a set of externally imposed prescriptions, this stance interprets ethical development as integral to learners' holistic development.

By putting students' social-emotional development at its core, this study offers a reimagined vision of language learning ethics—one that equips learners to navigate moral complexities through self-awareness and relational attunement rather than code-like compliance. Several limitations must be noted, however. The study was contextually bound to a single institutional setting and employed a relatively small sample size, which may delimit the generalizability of the findings. Further, the focus on student voice, while productive, does not account for the influence of teachers' beliefs, school policy, or broader sociocultural forces in also shaping ethical life in classrooms.

These limitations could be addressed in future studies through the implementation of comparative or cross-cultural designs, multiple stakeholders (e.g., policymakers, administrators, teachers), or longitudinal methods to investigate how emotional competencies and ethical sensibilities evolve over time. Investigating the impact of overt social-emotional learning interventions in diverse ELT contexts would also provide more insight into practical implementation and longer-term sustainability. Such questions would also continue to position ethics not as a separate topic, but as a constant, integrated process in language education—closely connected to learners' identity development and intercultural competence.

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