

The Role Social Emotional Learning (SEL) Plays in the Education of Refugee ELs

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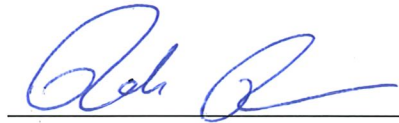
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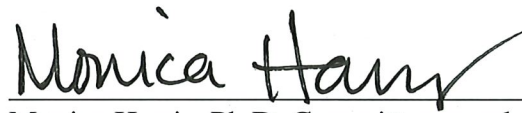


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Abstract

BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE: The purpose of this project is to explore and collect data to demonstrate areas of need in the modern education system. Specifically, this research focuses on the socioemotional learning scenarios that may be absent in the teaching of refugee ELs. Lastly, this thesis works to provide suggestions about how to use this data to further develop best practices in teaching to better serve all students. **SUBJECTS:** The subjects in this thesis are refugee English Language Learners (ELs) in classrooms throughout the Midwest region of the United States; with a specific focus on a public high school labeled: “School A.” **METHODS:** This thesis utilizes data collected through an EWI Dashboard system designed for this specific high school. In addition, SEL strategies and student performance and comfort are considered in this study. **RESULTS:** The results were not able to show a strong correlation between the implementation of SEL strategies and positive educational experiences for refugee ELLs in the classroom, however it did raise considerations as to how refugee ELs are being supported in the modern education system. **DISCUSSIONS AND CONCLUSIONS:** Based on the research findings in this thesis project, one will be able to conclude that schools need to work more diligently to implement SEL teaching practices in modern classrooms; while also providing unique labels to help provide additional supports for refugee students. These strategies help to create safe learning environments which lead to increased feelings of comfort and safety amongst students. As a result, students, especially refugee ELLs, are more likely to have more positive experiences in the classroom.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Introduction

The field of education has consistently faced the challenge of adapting to meet the needs of the students it serves. As populations change, so do the needs of school communities. In recent years, the United States has seen an increase in refugee populations throughout the country. The UNHCR estimates that there are over 35.3 million refugees worldwide (UNHCR, 2022). Since 1975, the United States has welcomed over 3 million refugees, who now reside in all 50 states (UNHCR, 2022). These statistics show how important this population is to the cultural and societal make-up of countries all over the world.

As this population continues to grow, it is crucial for educational institutions to consider how to continue pursuing the goal of providing equitable educational experiences for all. Like other populations of students, refugees have a unique set of needs that must be met if they are to maximize their growth inside and outside of the classroom.

This study originated from the experiences my students and I were having in the classroom of a public, urban, high school in the Midwest. It was strange how districts were simply identifying these learners as English Learners (ELs) without creating a designation acknowledging their status as refugees. Many of my students had experienced traumatic situations while fleeing war-torn countries. They had to go through great lengths to make it to the United States and when they arrived many had unreliable housing and small (if any) communities of support. As they were simply grouped with students who spoke a language other than English, this could mean that they were being viewed in the same manner as students that did not have to go through those experiences, but spoke a language other than English. I felt that many of my refugee students' unique needs were being overlooked and therefore I wanted to

explore ways to offer them more support, while also using the research platform as a way to advocate for more inclusive and effective systems to support refugee student populations not only in my district, but across the world.

Purpose

The purpose of this thesis is to initiate a discussion about how educational institutions are serving their refugee student populations through the lens of social and emotional learning (SEL). The thesis further ways to ensure that equitable learning experiences are being provided through this lens. I hypothesize that these SEL strategies that are used by educational institutions provide additional support for refugee learners who may be overlooked in classroom settings. Therefore, educational institutions that implement the SEL provide a more equitable learning environment for their students.

Scope

English Learners (ELs) are faced with the overwhelming task of adapting to new cultural norms while working to acquire fluency in an unfamiliar language and learning the required content at the same time. This comes with the added pressure of meeting academic standards in classrooms that often do not have adequate resources (Santiago et. al, 2021). In addition to inadequate curriculum to provide differentiated instructions to engage ELs based on their particular language proficiency levels. This problem becomes amplified when examining the life experiences of refugee ELs. Many come from environments of instability and trauma. This can lead to struggles building relationships with peers and teachers, causing added stress during the learning process (Cho, 2019). Further, because of the unstable environment and traumatized

experience, these students have a significant need for “Social Emotional Learning” (SEL) support in classrooms too, which requires teachers to have the capacity for establishing safe and supportive learning environments to catalyze the growth and development of refugee ELLs. For the purpose of this study, SEL refers to: “the process through which all young people and adults acquire and apply the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to develop healthy identities, manage emotions and achieve personal and collective goals, feel, and show empathy for others, establish, and maintain supportive relationships, and make responsible and caring decisions” (CASEL, 2021).

All too often, refugee students struggle to acclimate to school as they are still experiencing adversity even after they migrate to a new country (Radhouane, 2023). One of the root causes of this phenomenon is the fact that many refugee ELs have experienced interrupted access to education while they were at the refugee camps. To address these needs, schools identify ESL endorsed/licensed teachers to teach newcomers. Within these classrooms, teachers focus heavily on linguistic support with the intention of eliminating the language barriers for these students so that they could do better in schools. However, the results are not optimistic as Wofford (2018) argued that refugee ELs do not achieve the same fluency proficiency at the same rate as their peers. This has a profound effect on their comprehension and fluency in their second language acquisition (L2 acquisition). It led to the reduced effects of classroom teachers’ efforts of linguistic support to these students. Similarly, the proficiency level of their first language (L1) has a great impact on the L2 acquisition. Scholars have shown the important connection between L1 understanding and L2 acquisition. For instance, if a student struggles to comprehend aspects of reading in their first language, it hinders their motivation and ability to progress in their second language (Derwing, 2009). Ultimately, refugee ELs need to be provided

with adequate resources and support to consistently achieve adequate fluency when learning another language (Miller, 2009).

Although various supports for ELs, particularly, for refugee ELs are in place, such as after school tutoring, pull-out or push-in, and sheltered individual instruction to support ELs content learning, aiming at the growth and progress of ELs, ELs school achievements are not as expected. For instance,

As shown in **Table 1.1**, the *Michigan Student Test of Educational Progress (M-STEP)*, the state’s standardized achievement test, revealed gaps in content proficiency across subject areas and grade levels.

Table 1.1: M-STEP ELA and Math Content Proficiency Gaps in 2020-21

	3 rd Grade (%)		4 th Grade (%)		5 th Grade (%)		6 th Grade (%)		7 th Grade (%)	
	ELA	Math	ELA	Math	ELA	Math	ELA	Math	ELA	Math
All Students	42.8	42.3	44.2	36.5	43.7	29.6	<u>38.6</u>	28.6	40.7	32.3
ELs	26.7	30.2	23.2	19.9	13.7	9.4	<u>6.2</u>	6.1	9.0	9.2

*The assessment data shown above strongly suggest that pure academic support to ELs is not enough for these students’ school success.

Assumptions

In many cases, because of the instability and trauma that many refugee students had, students often have difficulties adjusting and adapting to their new schooling environments

(Thorstensson, 2012). The stresses of additional responsibilities and pressures result in these students having difficulties meeting academic standards and lack of demonstrated consistency in attendance. Therefore, the need for more support to support these students' academic growth is critical. These additional supports can come in many forms, but laying a foundation utilizing strategies based on SEL can help ensure that students find themselves in a positive, welcoming, classroom environment.

Additionally, other factors, such as emotional and mental drains and even racism and bias, contribute to hindering the progress of refugee ELs in the educational field (Shaeye, 2017). Teachers, administrators, and policy makers that have preconceived beliefs about refugees may fail to create the appropriate environment to catalyze learning for these students (Duran, 2019). Within such an environment, learning a second language is often intimidating. Therefore, it is crucial that refugee students are provided with an equitable educational experience where they are given opportunities to progress in the language acquisition process.

Refugee students have critical needs to address the trauma that many of them have experienced. While SEL strategies will not solve all of these needs, they can certainly assist in creating the positive environment needed to support academic and emotional growth. Trauma can have a negative impact on educational goals, such as language acquisition (Kaplan, 2016) but it can also hinder the ability of a student to interact and thrive in a new environment. By addressing the social and emotional needs of each student; schools can work to ensure that refugee ELLs do not slip through the cracks as they wrestle with experiences of trauma.

Further, many individuals in the educational field lack the resources and knowledge needed to accommodate for a lack in L1 fluency. More effort and funding must be devoted to determining best practices when teaching a second language; while scaffolding learning to help

refugee ELLs achieve growth and progress (Guerra, 2016). School districts need to reflect on the current methods being used in classrooms to ensure that all students are being provided an equitable learning experience (Wright, 2019). Ultimately, more priority needs to be given to providing support systems for refugee ELLs who have experienced interrupted education and trauma; in the hopes of improving the likelihood of these learners' gaining fluency in the English language.

Research Question

This project is to examine the role that the SEL plays in building a positive learning environment to accommodate the needs of refugee ELLs in a large midwestern school district. Specifically, attention will be given to traditional high schools in this public district of over 14,000 students. The focus of this school district is because this midwestern public school system is one of the largest districts in its state. The school district is encountered with numerous challenges; one of which is providing services for growing numbers of refugee ELs. Based on the Refugee Education Center (2021), over the course of the past decade, the population of students who identify as “refugees” has grown at a rapid rate (Niu-Cooper, et al., 2022, p. 131) summarized the pattern in the following

I(i)n Michigan, K–12 schools have also experienced an increase in their EL population. Michigan schools saw more than a 10% increase each year from 2013 to 2017 (MI School Data, 2018). Some pockets in Michigan, for instance Kent County, experienced a 12.19% increase in 2013-2017 (MI School Data, 2018).

In many cases, these students also come from countries that speak a primary language other than English. Therefore, these students are faced with the task of adapting to life in the United States while also tackling the complex avenues of the language acquisition process.

As the refugee population continues to grow, teachers are often faced with the difficult task of creating an equitable learning environment that catalyzes the growth of all students, including refugee ELs. While research-based literacy strategies are important, districts often do not prioritize the social emotional needs of these at-risk learners. This project seeks to answer the question on the impact building a safe environment through addressing the social emotional needs of refugee students on their school performance. This question has two sub-research questions: 1) What role does SEL play in classroom environment change? And 2) Within a classroom environment where the SEL is in place, do refugee students' school performance get better? If so, to what extent?

The project hypothesizes that using SEL strategies will have a positive impact on building a safe classroom environment and as a result will contribute to improved refugee ELs academic success and behavioral outcomes in school.

While it may be a difficult task at times, it is the duty of all districts to ensure that learners feel safe, welcomed, and empowered. This can only happen if all students are given access to teachers equipped with the resources and strategies needed to create an equitable learning environment. This thesis project seeks to examine the benefits of SEL strategies on impacting these students' classroom environment, while examining their behavior and academic performance in school.

Significance

This work is significant, particularly, to refugee education. Historically, based on the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) statistics, in 2002, 27,000 refugees resettled in the U.S. compared with the original ceiling of 72,000 due to the terrorists' action on September 11, 2011 (Haines, 2010). However, in the years after 2003, the number rose to approximately 50,000. In 2008, 60,000 refugees were admitted into the U.S. and 75,000 in 2009 (Haines, 2010). During these years, the number of refugee populations world-wide fluctuated between 452,548 and 281,219, the peak reaching 843,498 in 2006 when the collapse in Iraq occurred (UNHCR, 2009). With such vast numbers of refugees resettled in the U.S., it is clear that the children and grandchildren of these resettled people are in today's K-12 school classrooms. How to aid these children to be successful in American schools is a question that deserves attention. The conclusion was drawn from the reality of the rapid increase of ELs continuously in U.S schools and in Michigan.

Table 1.2: *ELL Students Enrolled in Public Elementary and Secondary Schools, by State:*
Selected Years, Fall 2000 through Fall 2017

	2000	2005	2010	2014	2015	2016	2017
U.S.	3,793,764	4,471,300	4,455,860	4,670,356	4,794,994	4,858,377	4,952,708
MI	49,279	65,419	56,474	81,678	89,597	94,921	97,837

*Data cited from Niu-Cooper, et al., (2021)

Further, within these years, students from refugee populations increased enormously as well. For instance, the average EL population from Swahili, one of the two languages the

majority of African refugees use, demonstrates a bigger growth rate than the average EL increase (cited Niu-Cooper, et al., 2021; the National Center for Education Statistics, 2020).

Table 1.3: *English language learner (ELL) students enrolled in public elementary and secondary schools, by home language, grade, and selected student characteristics: Selected years, 2008-09 through fall 2017 (NCES-Language, 2020).*

	2008-09	2009-10	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14	Fall 14	Fall 15	Fall 16	Fall 17
Swahili	3,498	4,439	6,011	6,391	7,093	7,065	8,480	11,994	16,099

*Data cited from Niu-Cooper, et al., (2021)

Such rapid EL population increase added new challenges to schoolteachers who expect all students to be successful. Children’s school success heavily relies on their teachers’ effective practices in the classroom. As Shahriar (2020) states, creating a safe learning environment is an important aspect of effective teaching. Within such an environment, students are more likely to learn when they feel comfortable, safe, and supported. On the contrary, when students are placed in high stress situations, they often fall victim to what Stephen Krashen describes as the “affective filter” (Krashen, 1983). This metaphor refers to the effect that a student’s attitude, confidence, and comfort can have on their ability to absorb and learn information (Krashen, 1983). This occurs when learners are placed in “high stress” environments. These situations lead to increased anxiety amongst learners and can have a negative effect on their willingness to participate, engage, and connect. This hinders their ability to learn. As a result, it is crucial that educators work to establish environments that combat the “affective filter” and assist in increasing the opportunities students have to be successful.

While the “affective” filter can affect all students, it is even more of a risk to English Language Learners, especially refugee ELLs. In many cases, refugee students have come from backgrounds of instability and trauma. Therefore, in addition to being exposed to an unfamiliar educational environment; they are also faced with the task of working through anxiety associated with the language learning process. A study conducted by Demir and Zaimoglu (2021) revealed that anxiety related to language learning had a profound impact on the decision-making ability of students (Demir, 2021). This affected their ability to process information and added additional stress in situations that would not have caused such a response if approached in their native languages. This showcases the importance of integrating SEL teaching strategies to aid in the language acquisition process through addressing the emotional needs of ELLs.

As the population of refugee students, in the state of Michigan, continues to grow (Refugee Education Center, 2021) it is critical that school districts explore and implement effective strategies to ensure that refugee ELLs are given equitable opportunities to be successful inside and outside of the classroom. While many teachers are using research-based language teaching strategies, the emotional needs of students are often not a priority. Therefore, additional attention needs to be given to examining successful SEL implementation to better serve refugees in modern classroom settings. Ultimately, this project seeks to provide a platform to continue this discussion while encouraging the implementation of best practices when teaching refugee ELLs.

This project seeks to explore the potential benefits of implementing SEL teaching strategies to better serve refugee ELLs in today’s classrooms. This is still an emerging area of research and therefore, I hope that the data collected and analyzed in this thesis will provide greater insight into how to better serve students that can often be overlooked in the classroom. Because the body of research around this subject is still growing, this project will work to

establish correlations and connections between existing research while working to contribute new data and analysis to published work in the field.

In addition to contributing to existing research in the field of education, I hope that this thesis project will help to continue the discussion surrounding ELLs in modern classrooms while catalyzing further investigation into ways to better serve the growing refugee population of students. Lastly, as an educator, I hope that my research can be used in the process of developing best practices for the teaching profession. SEL strategies have been reaching classrooms across the world and it is important to ensure that their benefits reach all groups of students. Everyone deserves representation and I hope that this project will help to make a contribution to the quest to provide equitable education for all learners.

Definition of Terms

The following terms will be used throughout this project. Their definitions are provided below to give clarification:

Refugee = people who have fled war, violence, conflict, or persecution and have crossed an international border to find safety in another country (UNHCR, 2021).

English Learner (EL) = a student who is not a native speaker of the English language and is working to gain fluency. Also, can be referred to as English Language Learner (ELL).

Social Emotional Learning (SEL) = the process through which all young people and adults acquire and apply the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to develop healthy identities, manage

emotions and achieve personal and collective goals, feel, and show empathy for others, establish, and maintain supportive relationships, and make responsible and caring decisions (CASEL, 2021).

Intervention = a strategy used to teach a new skill, build fluency in a skill, or encourage a child to apply an existing skill to new situations or settings (Wright, 2021).

Early Warning Indicators (EWI) = categories established to distinguish areas that may cause roadblocks to student success.

Affective Filter = A metaphor that refers to the effect that a student's attitude, confidence, and comfort can have on their ability to absorb and learn information (Krashen, 1983)

Academic success and School Achievement = how different schools, promoting modified versions of larger cultural ideas of success, foster distinct understandings of what it takes to succeed" (Nunn, 2014).

Trauma = A psychological risk factor that can include variance in depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) symptoms (Hinchey, 2023).

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Theory/Rationale

This study seeks to establish a correlation between SEL intervention strategies and improved academic and behavioral performance of refugee ELs in the classroom. Currently, there is a gap in research when it comes to connecting these areas, however there is the possibility for substantial benefits to a historically underserved population. Research shows that the implementation of SEL based strategies can have a profound effect on the ability of students to feel safe and willing to learn (Brackett, 2019). As Krashen suggests, this can lower their affective filters and increase the chances that they are able to retain information, such as engaging with the language acquisition process.

In addition, there are implications for improved behaviors of students when SEL interventions are used in the classroom. Studies show that students often improve in, “...areas of self-awareness, students more accurately identify their emotions and utilize more specific language to describe how they are feeling. Students are also better at self-management as they have specific strategies that they use during the school day to deal with strong emotions” (Smith, 2023). These potential results help to display the importance of equipping refugee ELs with the skillset to navigate their lives in a new language and new country; all while addressing the intense emotions that can be associated with trauma. Overall, this study hopes to connect the growing field of SEL with the often-overlooked field of refugee education.

The High Stakes of Academic Achievement

There are numerous different definitions pertaining to “academic success”. However, in many districts, it is a blend of, “...performing larger cultural ideas of success, fostering distinct

understandings of what it takes to succeed” (Nunn, 2014). Essentially, this is a make-up of content growth and behavioral growth. Reducing student behavioral infractions, consistent attendance, and good grades/scores on assessments all are measurement techniques that can help districts set indicators to measure achievement.

However, in many cases, there are high stakes associated with the pressures of attaining student success; especially when addressing the refugee student population (Thorstensson, 2012). It is difficult to focus on learning while faced with the challenges of addressing trauma and instability. This is the reality faced by many of these students (Reyes, 2019). At the same time, the current educational system pushes for achievement results; and often ties these assessments to accountability benchmarks. As a result, it is crucial for rapid and consistent interventions to be provided for refugee ELs to make sure that they are provided with equitable opportunities to achieve academically, behaviorally, and socially (Radhouane, 2023).

Resources for Refugees

Refugee students need to be provided with equitable access to resources. This includes not only those that help with language learning, but those that help with emotional regulation and coping with trauma (Wofford, 2018). In many cases, schools do not have systems in place to identify and provide supports specifically tailored to their refugee learners and this can lead them to slip through the cracks as they attempt to navigate their life inside and outside of the classroom (Thorstensson, 2012). Ultimately, by working to reveal the potential benefits of SEL strategies in the education of refugee ELs, it is the hope that resources and attention can be devoted to boosting their chances for growth and success.

The Negative Effects of Bias and Racism

Another roadblock facing refugee ELs is the racism and bias prevalent in today's society. Duran acknowledges this harsh reality and challenges practitioners to work to provide support to minimize the damage that can be done by such factors (Duran, 2019). These outside forces can not only impact the instruction that occurs in the classroom, but it can compound the trauma that many refugee students have already been forced to endure. The ability that teaching SEL has to help students cope and establish relationship support systems can be an influential factor in ensuring that they are provided with the experience and tools needed to help them achieve success and pursue their goals (Rizkalla, 2020).

Social Emotional Learning (SEL)

Literature on EL school success has been focusing mainly on improving ESL instructions and managing after school ESL programs. Within the domain of improving ESL instruction, numerous studies have been done on supporting ELs' language acquisition. For example, Kaplan examined the negative effects of trauma on language acquisition (Kaplan, 2016), while Capstick explored how translanguaging can assist in L2 development (Capstick, 2020).

Literature argues that the language acquisition process varies among ELs (Turan, 2018). Every student has a unique background made up of experiences that inevitably have an effect on their learning. This results in students progressing at different speeds despite preconceived notions instructors might have about a learner's initial abilities (Case, 2015). While educators and students should all adopt a growth mindset to language acquisition, it is still important that a positive classroom community is created to ensure progress.

Researchers, such as Derwing, have published many articles delving into the various benefits that come with the explicit teaching of linguistic strategies such as phonetics and syntax (Derwing, 2013). However, even with explicit instruction, language acquisition requires time, patience, and determination. Educators do not only have the responsibility of teaching language in the classroom but should be utilizing the field of linguistics to help provide students with the tools and mindset to be successful in the real world. Authentic learning often is something that occurs through experience and therefore student motivation should be supported with patient instruction as students attempt to navigate the complex arenas of semantics and pragmatics. Ultimately, classrooms are made up of diverse groups of learners who learn at a variety of different speeds. Ensuring that educators are patient, competent, and prepared to engage all students through authentic learning experiences will help to promote growth and development throughout the language acquisition process (Krashen, 1983).

In addition to the literature related to or on English language instruction to learners, literature also focused on language acquisition from learner's psycholinguistic perspectives. This consists of, "... language processes, production, and comprehension. Language processes are either central or peripheral. Language production includes intention, planning, lexicalization, and articulation. Language comprehension consists of perception, word recognition, parsing, and interpretation...these processes undergo different linguistic levels: phonological, phonetic, morphological, syntactic, semantic, and then discourse analysis" (Alduais et. al, pg. 5, 2022).

Meanwhile, a key component of language acquisition is confidence. This is showcased in Stephen Krashen's examination of the "affective filter" (Krashen, 1983). Krashen elaborated on this aspect of language acquisition, showcasing the importance of comfort and the feeling of safety. Krashen argued that students who were placed in a high-stress environment would not be

able to progress in the acquisition process because their anxiety would raise their “affective filter” and prevent them from truly engaging with the content. This educational theory is a vital component of SEL as it emphasizes the importance of a safe and welcoming learning environment. Based on Krashen’s theory, one could argue that students who do not feel supported and empowered will ultimately struggle to demonstrate growth. As a result, research suggests that the implementation of SEL strategies can help to create safe, welcoming, environments that will assist in catalyzing learning (Cho, 2019).

SEL as a Theoretical Framework

Social Emotional Learning (SEL) has a variety of characteristics that help to contribute to its growth in the field of education. At its core, SEL is founded on the idea that young adults will benefit from developing knowledge and skills to establish healthy identities (CASEL, 2022). As a result, SEL assists in reaching the learner as an individual, equipping them with the tools they need to cope with change and demonstrate resiliency in their classrooms and in their lives.

SEL is divided into a series of frameworks that seek to address areas that can influence the development of a student. Categories such as: Communities, Families and Caregivers, Schools, and Classrooms are aligned with current academic and social learning standards to showcase the areas of influence that affect a student’s individual awareness pertaining to their social and emotional needs. In many cases, researchers argue that an increased understanding of SEL principles, strategies, and frameworks can assist practitioners in meeting the unique individual needs of students (CASEL, 2022). Ultimately, it is the hope that children are able to use this system of support to build a skillset that allows them to effectively address and regulate their emotional needs.

Table 2.1: *SEL Framework (CASEL, 2022)*



As portrayed above, in **Table 2.1**, SEL methods break down a child’s development into five separate categories: Self Awareness, Self-Management, Social Awareness, Relationship Skills, and Responsible Decision Making (CASEL, 2022). In addition, these are connected to the study of psycholinguistics. Menn and Dronkers write that a student in their study had, “...drives for excitement, control, belonging, and comfort kept him practicing making those [language] sounds himself, and then to start using them to interact with other people and to mean things” (Menn & Dronkers, pg. 309, 2017). These psychological connections to language connect with the five categories of CASEL and help paint a picture of how SEL can be used to not only provide emotional support; but support with language acquisition as well.

Overall, these areas showcase the variety of components that can impact a student’s ability to engage and learn from the world in which they live. Essentially, advocates of SEL

showcase research that demonstrates the positive short-term and long-term effects of SEL teaching in classrooms across the country. In their 2021 report, CASEL published research that encompassed over 270,000 students. In these studies, the organization was able to showcase improvement in student mental health, academic performance, and relationship building amongst peers (CASEL, 2022). Ultimately, the objectives of SEL are centered on promoting student awareness of self while equipping them with positive coping skills to build relationships with their school and community; all while maintaining a firm sense of their own identity. In this way, there are implications for how it can be used to best serve and support refugee ELs as they navigate trauma while engaging in the language acquisition process (Mancini, 2019).

Refugees and Trauma (the need for SEL to support refugee students' emotions)

According to the Refugee Education Center, there are over 25.4 million refugees across the world (REC, 2022). In most cases, these individuals come from environments of instability and violence in their home countries. As a result, they are often subjected to traumatic experiences during childhood, adolescence, and even adulthood that can affect their daily lives; in addition to their educational experiences. In a recent study, researchers examined the impact that traumatic experiences had on refugees adjusting to life outside of conflict zones. In this case, many of the participants exhibited signs of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). This diagnosis revealed the intense level of resilience needed by these individuals as they seek to integrate into new homes and communities (Fino, 2020).

In addition to PTSD, these side-effects are compounded by instances of discrimination and xenophobia in areas where refugees have resettled. Duran published a study in which she explored the need for support systems for refugee students that all too often were facing racism

from their new communities. This lack of reception further amplified the trauma they faced from fleeing areas of conflict and only added to the need for advocates and mental health services (Duran, 2019).

Refugees who have endured traumatic experiences are in dire need for a sense of belonging to the community in which they live. A study conducted by Rizkalla and Segal (2020) examined the positive effects had by intimate relationships amongst refugees working to integrate in new communities. This study serves as an example of the need individuals have to belong and how this need can be magnified when dealing with populations that have been exposed to trauma (Rizkalla & Segal,). Ultimately, trauma can interfere with an individual's academic and social growth. In many cases, students are not equipped with the strategies and support systems needed to cope with such events. As a result, it is necessary for educators to work hard to provide solutions conveyed through the medium of a safe learning environment; in doing so, this has the potential to illuminate the correlations between SEL and refugee students' needs.

SEL and The Importance of a Safe Learning Environment/Motivation

A safe learning environment is a crucial component of student motivation. Turan (2018) conducted a study that explored the various effects of affective factors in the language learning process. In her study, she noted that affective factors have a profoundly negative effect on the language acquisition process. There exist numerous studies that have exhibited similar results; many of which can be connected to Krashen's work with the affective filter in the 1980s. Based on this research, it becomes clear that students need to feel comfortable in their learning environment in order to make progress when it comes to achieving academic and social goals.

If students feel safe and comfortable in their learning environment, they are more likely to be motivated for learning (Krashen, 1983). This can help to lower their affective filters and enhance their experiences with the language acquisition process (Krashen, 1983). Tony Capstick contributed to publications in this area of student development by focusing specifically on translanguaging. This strategy is used in EL classrooms throughout the country as a way to engage learners from different countries by making them feel more comfortable and free to use their native language. By relieving some of the pressures of language learning instructors were able to create a safe and nurturing environment that helped to motivate learners leading to more rapid levels of growth and success.

Another example of the positive effects of a safe learning environment comes from a study conducted by Shahriar and Jones (2020) showed the benefits of establishing a safe space for students to learn in a classroom in Tanzania. This study further emphasizes the importance of safety and comfort when seeking to support student success. Students that felt a positive sense of security were more likely to demonstrate growth towards their academic and social goals. Essentially, SEL strategies in the classroom can assist in creating more stable environments which can assist in helping students feel more comfortable. Refugee learners that are fighting against instability, trauma, and other factors that can hinder motivation can truly benefit from a classroom environment that caters to their safety and well-being. Ultimately, this can help them make great strides towards accomplishing their social, emotional, and language goals.

Conclusions

As research continues to expand with regard to Social Emotional Learning (SEL), it is important for educators and scholars to work together to explore the ways in which it can be used

to help all students. In many situations, refugee ELLs are overlooked in classroom settings. While a lack of resources and support systems are large battles to face, SEL strategies can be implemented in daily classroom routines to help close gaps and provide meaningful interventions for learners. Essentially, SEL can be used to empower staff to cultivate more inclusive and equitable learning environments.

Overall, research has continued to show that SEL has powerful benefits for students in modern classrooms. It not only helps to provide much needed support systems with mental health but helps students to connect with their peers and community. CASEL studies show that the integration of SEL systems into daily routines can not only have positive short-term effects, but powerful long-term effects with regard to the ability students have to accomplish their goals and create positive self-awareness (CASEL, 2022). SEL can help to encourage students to explore and determine their own identity, while also equipping them with skills and strategies that can aid in their ability to become resilient learners. Student mental health, comfort, and safety all contribute to their learning experiences. SEL can help to address all of these categories and thus can help catalyze student growth. The success of SEL interventions has a direct correlation to creating positive learning environments that can lower the affective filters of all students, especially refugee ELLs. Ultimately, it is crucial that all students are able to engage in an equitable learning process and SEL strategies can be used to help accomplish this goal.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Methodology

This thesis sought to determine the effectiveness of SEL strategies when working to support the academic and behavioral growth of refugee ELs. This quantitative study was designed to study patterns in “risk factor indicators” amongst refugee EL students in a large, urban Midwest school district with the hope of showing decreasing percentages of students being labeled “at risk.” These indicators were tracked every two weeks for every student in the school. For the sake of the study, only data pertaining to the refugee students in the school was analyzed. This data was then isolated and grouped by marking period to provide opportunities to explore potential trends or patterns in the findings. Ultimately, this analysis was used to attempt to showcase a correlation between academic/social growth and SEL interventions amongst the refugee ELL student population.

Rationale

This study aims to fill a gap in literature based on existing research addressing the needs of refugee ELs in today’s American education systems. This population of learners has had to overcome traumatic experiences and are often faced with even more instability when they enter into the education system (Davila, 2012). This study worked to quantify student risk factors to help document the experiences of refugees in a school and classroom setting. By attempting to correlate the decrease or increase in risk indicators, it was the hope that this approach would provide data to pair with studies that have suggested the potential benefits of integrating SEL strategies to support student growth.

School Context

This study involves data analysis from one of the large, Midwest, urban school districts. The school district is ranked the eighth largest in the state; serving over 15,000 students and employing around 3,000 individuals. In addition, the student population is made up of learners from over 80 different countries with over 70 different languages spoken amongst pupils throughout the district (GRPS, 2021). These statistics demonstrate the necessity for comprehensive, culturally responsive, educational practices. Diversity is an asset to this school district. At the same time, it brings challenges surrounding inclusion and appropriately differentiated curriculum. All learners have unique educational needs.

This project focused on examining existing data to determine the impact that social emotional interventions have on students in a large, urban, midwestern public school district; referred to as “Midwest District A”. Specifically, existing data were drawn from a local high school, referred to as “School A”. This building is classified as a “traditional neighborhood” public high school. This means that staff provide services for students in 9th-12th grade in their respective neighborhoods. While other schools in Midwest District A require an application or test-in process; School A serves their community without such conditions. This high school is home to an expanding population of refugee ELs and therefore provides meaningful data for this subject as a microcosm for the city it serves. In addition, as there are no uniform data indicators to label students as “refugees” they are often simply enrolled under the “English Learner” classification. While this means they will receive language support, it does not account for their very unique social emotional needs (Kaplan, 2016). Ultimately, this study works to identify and isolate these learners to try to determine ways to better serve their unique needs inside and outside of the classroom.

Participants

This study focused on analyzing existing school data while utilizing additional data collected in a dashboard customized for the district. It was designed to test the hypothesis of whether or not SEL interventions were effective in catalyzing the academic and social growth of refugee students. According to MI School Data, in the 2021-2022 school year, School A had 381 students ranging from 9th-12th grade. 92% of these students were classified as being economically disadvantaged and about 11% were labeled as being English Language Learners. Midwest District A does not include information about whether or not a student classifies as a refugee. This is common in most districts across the country and leads to the broad identifier of “EL” being used. However, this label simply means that the student does not have English as a first language. As stated in earlier chapters, this is a barrier to the success of refugee students as they have experiences and needs unique to their situations. Initially, I hoped to be able to isolate refugee students for the sake of this study, but a lack of district identifiers led me to look at data from students with a birth country other than the United States that were also labeled as English Learners. While this certainly does not mean they are all refugees; these identifiers were the closest characteristics that could be used to address some of the experiences that would be relatable to refugee ELLs.

Data Collection

This study utilized de-identified and pre-existing Early Warning Indicator (EWI) data in a large, urban, public school district in the Midwest. The EWI System data was made available to all staff at School A, and as stated earlier, was updated throughout the course of each school year. Every student enrolled at School A was included in the dashboard and the data collection

was simply meant to identify students that needed additional, positive, interventions to help them be successful.

The data was collected in a bi-weekly dashboard housed in a shared Google Drive between staff at the school. For this study, students that were labeled as English Learners who had a birth country other than the United States were used to mimic some of the characteristics of refugee students. This further shines a light on the need for more comprehensive approaches to providing for the unique needs of refugee students.

Data/Data Set

To answer the research question, this study selected the Early Warning Indicator (EWI) Dashboard data generated by School A in the Midwest School District. The dashboard is created by a corporation in the city where School A is located and was funded through a local grant. Data was updated every two weeks and the data were analyzed by an EWI team made up of staff in the building. During the data analysis meetings staff reference referrals that are made throughout the week and brainstorm interventions to be implemented during the next weekly cycle. For this study, data was examined during school years from 2019-2022. This process was centered on utilizing targeted, positive, interventions to boost a student's sense of belonging and engagement with the school environment. In addition, it should be noted that the implementation of the EWI Dashboard was labeled as an SEL intervention strategy for the school as a whole. This was connected to the fact that there would be a system of continuous monitoring for staff to utilize to provide increased opportunities and resources to construct support systems for students of all levels based on their unique set of needs.

Table 3.1: Example of EWI Dashboard

Grade	ELL	SE	Entry Date	NW GPA	HS Credits	WIDA	MAP Read	MAP Math	MSTEP ELA	MSTEP MATH	SAT	Off Track Indicators	#Abs	#Susp	ELA	MA	SC	SS	
10	Y	N	08/25/2020	2.3	9.5	3.7	40	5	2	1			1	6.5	0	E	N/A	D+	D
09	N	N	08/25/2020	1.4	2.5		10	13	1	1			0	7	0	A	D+	N/A	C-
11	N	N	08/25/2020	2.875	16.5		53	22	2	1			0	0	0	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
11	N	Y	08/25/2020	1.667	14		6	3	1	1			1	23.67	0	C	D-	N/A	E

The interventions that were used varied based on each student, but most involved customized “check-in/check-out” schedules, incentive-based goal setting, and even assigning teacher champions to advocate for and individually support individual learners. However, for all students, the use of social emotional learning strategies is the core of the intervention to address the unique needs of individual students. These strategies include actions such as: individualized behavior plans, “check-in-check out”, teacher champions, mentoring, rewards-based goal setting, counseling, therapy, ensuring student needs outside of school are met, support groups, restorative circles, and numerous other techniques that work to support and encourage social emotional growth and understanding.

The intent was to design and implement these strategies based on the discussions of EWI team members. The dashboard helped to drive the referral process but also the topics of each meeting. Teachers would use a Google Form to refer students to the database while also documenting any current interventions they were working to implement. Then, the EWI team would explore the Google Forms at weekly meetings to brainstorm additional ways to provide extra support for struggling students. While many of the severely at-risk students were already being targeted by other school initiatives, the hope was to address student needs before they were

given that designation. This structure was designed to help provide students with opportunities to boost their understanding of their own unique SEL needs.

These strategies helped to show how positive relationships could be a factor in their success while helping students to have a safe and supportive environment as they worked to improve their self-motivation, awareness, and management of emotions. While this EWI system applied to all students, this study examines the impact that SEL approaches have on refugee populations as they work to adapt to their unique educational settings in the U.S.

For the purpose of this study, the EWI data was isolated from the fall of 2019 through the fall of 2022. This assists in providing a sample of the tracking process, while providing a time period that encompasses roughly three school years. This window assists in providing context for discussions around how SEL intervention strategies can have a positive effect on refugee ELs over the course of their educational experience; with the hopes that the benefits will stay with students as they pursue their post-graduation goals.

In addition to looking at demographic data, it focuses on data collected through the Early Warning Indicator (EWI) dashboard used at School A to track and implement positive interventions to support students that are labeled “at risk.” This dashboard was updated every two weeks throughout the school year. Each updated data set would identify students and assign a risk level based on four pre-defined indicators: attendance, suspension incidents, ELA class grade, and Math class grade. Students that had 0-1 indicators flagged were deemed to be at little to no risk. Two indicators would reveal a moderate risk, while three to four indicators would flag a student as being at severe risk. This risk level was tied to the likeliness a student had at being able to avoid dropping out and going on to graduate with their diploma.

Analysis

The data in this study has been analyzed by working to examine trends over the course of school years from the fall of 2018 until the spring of 2022. It was the hope that utilizing the computer generated, EWI Dashboard, to look at high percentage clusters (or lack thereof) of “risk indicators” would yield a correlation between the implementation of SEL strategies and the increased success of refugee ELs. It should be noted that data was impacted by the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in March of 2020. The shift to virtual and hybrid instruction led to unexpected interruptions in class routines that led to additional complications with attendance and academic performance. Traditional instruction resumed in the fall of 2021, putting students and staff back on a five day, in person, school schedule.

Student EWI Dashboard data as well as teacher referrals and tracking forms were used in the analysis process but, there were not enough formal teacher referrals collected (only around 15) to utilize that portion of the data. However, collecting bi-weekly data indicators and documenting the number, and percentage, of refugee students that had one, two, three, or four “at risk” categories highlighted was a way to showcase student academic and behavioral growth. Essentially, the intent was to establish a correlation between student achievement (referencing the four EWI indicators) and positive SEL interventions. Ultimately, it was the hope that the data from School A can then be supplemented with existing research in the field to help draw conclusions and continue the discussion pertaining to best practices in supporting refugee students in school systems across the country.

Summary

Overall, the data in this project seeks to provide an answer to the question: “can SEL strategies be used to support the unique needs of refugee ELLs to build an equitable environment for them?” While refugee students were not able to be specified within the data set, it is the hope that the findings will open a discussion about how current educational practices can be improved to provide better support for all learners. Refugee ELLs are all too often overlooked in current educational systems and devoting time to establishing structures of support, grounded in the SEL framework, can help to improve the self-awareness, motivation, and relationship building abilities of learners to help them achieve achievement in areas of literacy, language acquisition, and overall academic growth.

Chapter Four: Results

Context

This study sought to examine the impact of social emotional learning interventions on the success of refugee ELs through building safe, supportive, and nurturing environments. I chose to use the student population at School A to begin this research, with the hope that it would spur future conversations and studies surrounding this topic. School A is a traditional public high school in an urban, Midwestern, setting in the United States. According to the most recent 2022-2023 data provided by the state, School A serves 369 students: ranging from grades 9-12. In addition, 88% of the students at School A are classified as being “economically disadvantaged” while almost 11% are English Language Learners.

This study explored and utilized already existing data to see if there were any patterns or correlations that arose. While School A only has a small population of ELL students, this population has grown substantially over the last few years and projections seem to suggest that this trend will continue. As mentioned in previous chapters, ELLs have unique needs both inside and outside of the classroom. However, even more support is needed for students that would be classified as refugees.

As the data was being examined, it became clear that there is no explicit identifier to classify refugee status in this Midwest School District; or the entire state for that matter. While students have status indicators for ELL, Homeless, Special Ed, Economically Disadvantaged, Racial, Migrant, and many others, none of these include the term “refugee.” This reality further emphasizes the fact that refugee students are being overlooked. In the current system, if a student is a refugee they would be included in the same grouping as any other student with “immigrant

status”; thus, failing to acknowledge the unique classification and needs of this population of learners.

In attempting to narrow the focus towards refugee students, I utilized the EWI Data Dashboard as well as PHLOTE reports generated from district data housed in the Synergy platform. The PHLOTE includes all bilingual students and also includes columns stating their birth country. Being born in another country and speaking another language certainly does not make one a refugee, but due to a lack of a refugee “indicator”, this was a starting point for the analysis to occur.

Table 4.1: *Sample PHLOTE Report*

School Name	Student ID	Last Name	First Name	Grade	Date of Birth	Family Language
School A	00000001	Student Last	Student First	09	01/01/2008	Kinyarwanda
Student Language	Country of Origin	Bilingual Status	Migrant	IEP Indicator	WIDA Score	Date Enrld In U.S.
Kinyarwanda	RW	A	N	N	2.4	10/06/2020

After identifying the students who were born in a country other than the United States, another filter was added to focus on learners who were born in current/former conflict zones. The midwestern city where the school is located historically has welcomed families from places such as Bosnia, Rwanda, Syria, Afghanistan, Somalia, Sudan, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. School A specifically has a growing population of students from Central and Eastern Africa. While there is no “official” refugee label used by the district; many of these students identify as such and have shared their experiences living in refugee camps before arriving in the

United States. As a result, data was filtered to only include students from central and eastern African countries, in the attempt to provide a more accurate lens of the refugee population unique to School A.

After the PHLOTE report was matched with the EWI Data Dashboards, I separated the final EWI report of each Marking Period (MP1) from the data set. This urban, midwestern, school district uses a two-semester school year, with each semester being comprised of two marking periods. Report cards are given to students at the end of each marking period as a way for them to monitor their progress throughout the school year and ensure that they complete the necessary steps to receive credit for their classes. These checkpoints provide a unique opportunity to measure, not only the growth of students, but the effect that interventions and monitoring may have had on their development. Ultimately, the EWI marking period data helped to highlight whether or not refugee ELs were being supported in ways that improved their academic and behavioral outcomes throughout the course of the school year.

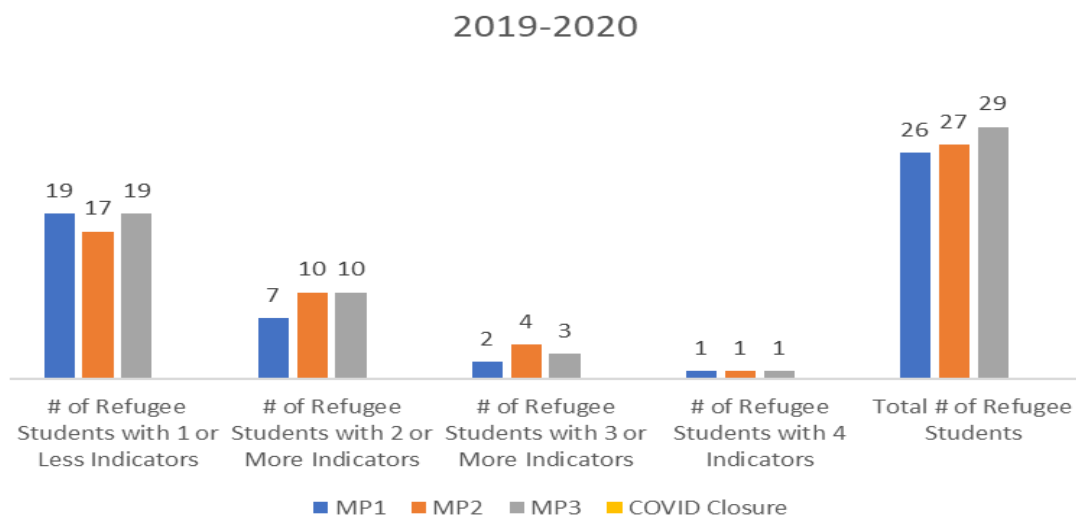
Findings

While the data in this study did not provide a concrete conclusion with regard to the potential benefits of SEL interventions on refugee students; it did offer a few unique perspectives and points of discussion when it comes to the experiences of refugee students in schools across the country. First and foremost, this study did not show an explicit correlation between SEL interventions and increased academic/social growth of refugee EL students. **Table 4.2** and **Table 4.3** on the following page showcase the distribution of “risk indicators” amongst refugee ELs from 2019-2021.

While the data did not show a correlation between SEL interventions and student improvement, it did reveal a few notable patterns. First, most refugee ELs had one or less indicators during the first and third marking periods of each school year. While at first glance this may seem like a notable observation there are some speculations that arise to explain the reason for this occurrence.

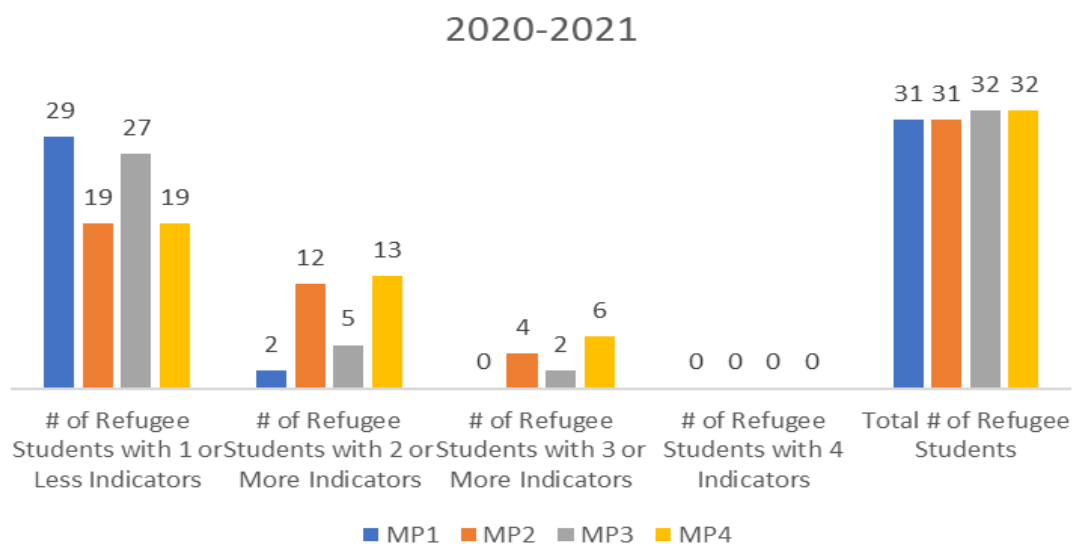
School A uses 10 week increments for each marking period. The first and third marking periods mark the start of the school year, after summer break, and the beginning of the second semester, which starts after the winter holiday break. The EWI Dashboard does not reset for absences or discipline data (that is a running total for the whole school year) however, academic grades reset at the start of every new semester so students can begin with a fresh start. As the end of MP1 and MP3 are only 10 weeks into the start of new semesters, this could have an impact on why so many students displayed less indicators at those times. Meanwhile, at the end of MP2 and MP4, students were completing the end of a 20-week semester, and the burden of minimizing “risk indicators” may have been too heavy, even as staff attempted to implement SEL interventions while providing additional support systems.

Table 4.2: *EWI Risk Indicators of Refugee ELs*



As one can see in **Table 4.3**, while the population of refugee ELs increased, the patterns remained relatively consistent to those seen in **Table 4.2**. Most students showed less “risk indicators” in the first and third marking periods of each school year. On the contrary, at the end of semester 1 (MP2) and at the end of the school year (MP4) there were larger numbers of students that displayed. However, this still may lead one to question why this may be the case?

Table 4.3: *EWI Risk Indicators of Refugee ELs*



Another possible answer is struggling student attendance. As one can see looking at **Table 4.4** and **Table 4.5**, this was an indicator that many of the refugee ELs displayed; with some students having over 70 days of absences by the end of the school year.

Table 4.4: *Absences of Refugee ELs*

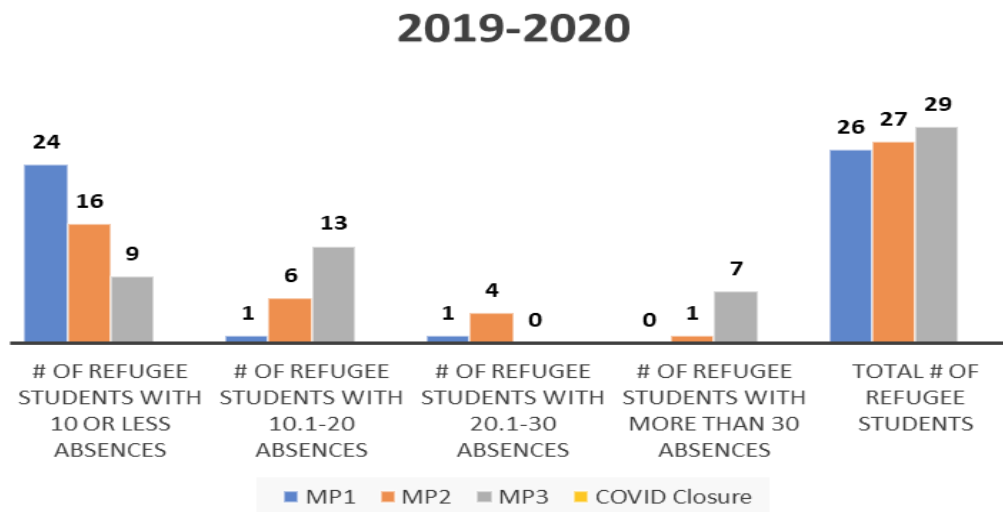
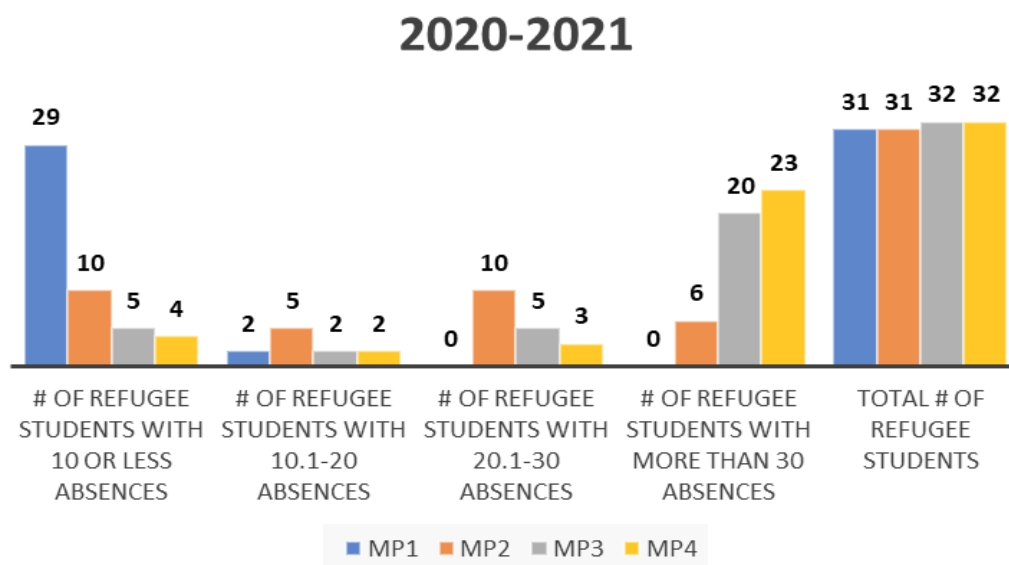


Table 4.5: *Absences of Refugee ELs*



While staff tried hard to provide meaningful interventions for students, it can be difficult to do so when students are not attending classes. In addition, some of the refugee ELL population in School A had unstable access to housing and even had to work jobs and help watch younger siblings to support their families. This meant that it was often difficult for staff to get into contact with guardians or students themselves. In some cases, especially during the COVID-19

pandemic, students would go months without being in contact with staff or school personnel. This reality even further shows the need for meaningful interventions to create support systems for these young learners.

Limitations of Study

Despite these findings, the original intention of this study hypothesized that SEL strategies had a positive impact on refugee students. While at times the data did suggest this to be true, it was difficult to establish a concrete correlation. The data set focused on about 25-35 students each school year. This small sample size was a direct result of my association with the school and student population. However, this research does have the potential to continue in future studies where additional data can be supplemented and collected.

It is also important to address the impact that the COVID-19 pandemic had on schools and communities during the time of this study. Many of the students at School A were faced with struggles prior to the pandemic, and the outbreak only amplified these problems. Many students were displaced because their families were unable to pay rent and as a result; even with SEL interventions, many had extreme difficulty attending school. Also, throughout the process, refugee families had to continue navigating a world in a language that was not their first. These realities certainly influenced the capacity of staff to implement (and students to receive) consistent interventions throughout the monitoring process.

Yet, it is important to remember that this population still has distinctive social emotional demands. Refugee students often come from backgrounds that have been impacted by trauma and as a result they need interventions that are implemented to address these realities (Mancini, 2019). Although this study was not able to establish an explicit correlation, the literature

surrounding SEL integration in schools seems to suggest that future research on this topic is worth exploring. In addition, the existing gap in research connecting SEL interventions to refugee learners is a need that certainly needs to be addressed. In many cases, stakeholders need to revisit how they are addressing refugee student populations in their entirety.

This midwestern urban school district is not unique in the fact that it does not explicitly identify its refugee students. In fact, there currently is no universal data indicator used to identify these students in the United States. As a result, appropriate interventions are often not given to assist in supporting this population of learners. Hopefully, this study can help to establish and continue the discussion that needs to exist pertaining to the potential SEL strategies that can be used to help ensure the academic growth and achievement of refugee ELL students.

Chapter 5: Conclusions

Although the study only looks at data from a small sample of students in a large, public, urban high school in the Midwest; the hope is that researchers, teachers, and other stakeholders in the field of education will see a need to devote more time to exploring this topic.

The study shines a light on the importance of leveraging SEL strategies to effectively build positive learning environments for students that may be struggling to thrive in their current settings. Research shows that attitude can have a profound impact on the success of students, especially if they are working to learn a new language; and that attitude can have a direct correlation with positive school and classroom environments (Tabassum, 2020).

It is the hope that through examining the data set for this study, one will be able to provide further documentation of the potential benefits of the integration of SEL strategies into classroom and school communities. These strategies can help to build positive learning environments in which students are more aware of how to effectively manage their emotions, relationships, and decision-making abilities. In doing so, it will help to catalyze their success in their academic endeavors and assist them as they work to reach their goals. If one is able to acknowledge this reality, then it can begin to be examined as a way to provide additional support for student populations that have unique needs; such as refugee ELLs.

Discussions and Suggestions

A possible discussion that may arise from this study is that there is a lack of appropriate teacher preparation programs contributing to the problem of L2 fluency for refugee ELLs. As globalization continues to impact the world, classrooms are becoming increasingly diverse. This diversification should be celebrated; however, it also creates challenges for adapting modern

teaching strategies to reach all students. Many teachers are not aware of the relationship between L1 and L2 acquisition and this hinders their ability to engage ELs in their instructional activities (Derwing, 2013). To remedy this situation, school districts need to provide professional development programs to utilize the research-based strategies (Lee, 2016) that support instructional and assessment differentiations for ELs while also establishing systems to help them adapt and manage the social emotional components of being successful in a modern school system. Lastly, all teachers need to be aware of how to provide accommodations for refugee ELLs, even if they are not designated as an “ELL Teacher”. As students are consistently integrated into general education classes, all teachers need to work on collaborative strategies to ensure that ELLs are being supported in all classrooms (Lee, 2016).

The results of this project may not lead to explicit conclusions; however they do create an opportunity to explore suggestions when it comes to creating better experiences for refugee ELLs in modern classrooms. One such suggestion is providing support teams to track and monitor the progress of such learners. Because many refugees have experienced instability, they often have factors that are causing additional stress outside of the classroom. Confusion and discomfort caused by the language acquisition process further complicates these scenarios and may make it difficult for refugee students to reach out and ask for help, even if it is needed. As was documented through the EWI Dashboard, providing a support system that explicitly tracks the progress of refugee ELLs could ensure that they are given appropriate support before they become more at risk of dropping out of school.

Based on the conclusions drawn from the data analysis process, it is hoped that readers are able to advocate for the further exploration of the benefits of SEL strategies and other practices to better serve refugee ELLs in local districts across the world.

Questions and Implications

The implications of this research suggest the need for intentional interventions for refugee ELLs that are founded in SEL strategies. Refugee ELLs have often faced instability and trauma that has led them to flee their homes and relocate to a new country. Even if these students were not English Language Learners, they would still benefit from interventions that address this trauma (Dutt, 2022). Therefore, it is in the best interest of educators, districts, and communities to work to provide the necessary support systems to help refugee ELs grow and thrive inside and outside of the classroom.

Conclusion

Overall, it is the hope that this study can begin a discussion surrounding how to provide more equitable experiences for refugee students. While it may not have been able to establish a correlation between SEL interventions and increased achievement of refugee ELs; it did shine a light on the inadequate levels of support being given to this population of students. Many states and districts, including those in this study, do not have uniform indicators to identify their students who identify as refugees. This means that they are often grouped under the same category as immigrants or English Language Learners, and therefore, often do not receive interventions tailored to their unique needs. As a result, this study can serve as a catalyst for future discussion and research pertaining to how to better serve refugee students in modern classrooms. Ultimately, all students deserve to be in an educational environment that serves their emotional and academic needs; so they are able to grow, thrive, and reach their full potential inside and outside of the classroom.

Appendix A

Committee Membership Endorsement Form for Thesis or Dissertation


Select one: (X) Thesis () Dissertation

Student Name: Peter Walblay	Date: 03/15/2023
Email: walblayp@mail.gvsu.edu	G Number: G00529708
Graduate Degree Program: Master's of Literacy Studies with a Concentration of TESOL	
Thesis Title: The need for Social Emotional Learning (SEL) in the education of refugee ELLs	

	Committee Members:	Graduate Faculty Status:	Department/Program:
Chairperson:	Rui Niu-Cooper	Valid	LEFT/ESOL
Member:	Monica Harris	Valid	Teaching and Learning/SPED
Member:	Robert Rozema	Valid	Department of English

Graduate Program Director (Please Print Name): Rui Niu-Cooper

X I approve this committee.

Signature:  Date: 3/15/2023

Unit Head (Please Print Name): _____

Committee Chairperson has:

- ☐ Appropriate disciplinary expertise to chair this committee.
- ☐ Sufficient workload availability to work with this student.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Associate Vice-Provost for the Graduate School:

- ☐ This committee meets the requirements of the current Thesis and Dissertation Policy.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Appendix B



March 16, 2023

Dear Peter Walblay,

This letter is to notify you that The Graduate School has granted approval of your Thesis Committee Membership. This committee will oversee your master's thesis, "Th need for Social Emotional Learning (SEL) in the education of refugee ELLs," in partial fulfillment of your Master of English in Literacy Studies degree program in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences. You will find the university policies and procedures for completion of your thesis on our website: www.gvsu.edu/gs/thesis. All of the required forms can be downloaded from that website.

When your thesis defense is complete and all final revisions have been approved by your committee members and chair, please collect the signatures of all members of your thesis committee and academic college dean on the Thesis Approval Form and submit the form with an electronic copy of your thesis to The Graduate School for final review and approval by the Associate Vice-Provost for The Graduate School. Please adhere to all deadlines to ensure that your degree is awarded in the semester in which you intend to graduate.

If you have any further questions or concerns regarding thesis policies and/or procedures, please contact our office at gradschool@gvsu.edu or 616-331-7105. We wish you the best in your work and look forward to receiving your completed thesis.

Sincerely,



Jeffrey A. Potteiger, PhD, FACSM
Associate Vice Provost of The Graduate School

cc: Rui Niu-Cooper, Thesis Committee Chair
Rui Niu-Cooper, Graduate Program Director
Mary Bair, Unit Head
Jennifer Drake, Dean, College of Liberal Arts and Sciences

Appendix C

Thesis Defense Announcement

Peter Walblay

Student's Name

Friday July 14th, 2023 at 10:00am

Date and Time

488C Devos (GVSU PEW Campus)

Location

Literacy Studies and TESOL

Graduate Program

The Role Social Emotional Learning (SEL) Plays in the Education of Refugee ELs

Committee:

Dr. Rui Niu-Cooper (Chair)

Dr. Robert Rozema

Dr. Monica Harris

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