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Dae-Seok Kim

Kongju National University, South Korea, daesok-kim@hanmail.net

Carrie Eunyoung Hong

William Paterson University of New Jersey, hong1@wpunj.edu

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# Social and Emotional Learning in a Classroom: Language Arts and Literacy Teachers' Perceptions and Practices in South Korea and the United States

Dae-Seok Kim

*Kongju National University, Gongju, South Korea*

Carrie Eunyoung Hong

*William Paterson University, Wayne, New Jersey*

## Introduction

The significance of social and emotional learning (SEL) continues to grow in today's schools around the world. More teachers agree that students' social and emotional needs must be addressed in the learning process. This is because how students feel about themselves and think about one another affects the ways they learn in school. Learning essential social and emotional skills are critical for students to navigate through life's challenges from childhood to adulthood.

A body of educational research has documented the effects of students' social and emotional development on educational attainment and achievement (i.e., Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor, & Schellinger, 2011; Elias, 2014; Sklad, Diekstra, De Ritter, Ben, & Gravestijn, 2012; Taylor, Oberle, Durlak, & Weissberg, 2017; Weissberg & Cascarino, 2013). These studies indicate that students' social and emotional skills affect their ability to engage in academic learning. Recent advances in neuroscience research also support the interrelated nature of cognitive skills and social-emotional skills (Immordino-Yang & Gotlieb, 2017). The benefits of adopting SEL strategies and integrating SEL into a curriculum are extensive, ranging from improved attitudes and behaviors to academic growth (January, Casey, & Paulson, 2011; Mahoney, Durlak, & Weissberg, 2018; Sklad et al., 2012). For example, Durlak et al.'s (2011)

meta-analysis revealed that the students who receive SEL scored higher in academic performance than the students who do not.

Similarly, schoolwide SEL programs are gaining popularity and are being integrated into learning standards (Dunsenbury, et al., 2015; Weissberg & Cascarino, 2013). According to a national survey on the teacher perceptions of SEL, many American teachers agree that the development of social and emotional skills must be specified in their state's learning standards (Bridgeland, Bruce, & Hariharan, 2013). However, there is still a gap in teachers' understanding of what SEL entails and how it can be integrated into content curriculum and instruction (Aidman & Price, 2018).

The purpose of this study is to understand how language arts and literacy teachers of South Korea and the United States perceive the importance of social and emotional learning, and in what ways these teachers promote the development of students' social and emotional skills. More specifically, this comparative inquiry examines teachers' use of academic and nonacademic strategies to support students in a classroom in which language arts or literacy is taught. We are interested in examining SEL-related practices of language arts and literacy because curricula of these subjects are more likely to be associated with learning about one's and others' emotions, thoughts, and behaviors. In addition, teachers utilize a range of instructional strategies to promote social and emotional learning more often in language arts and literacy lessons than in other content lessons.

In South Korea and the United States, language arts as a subject is taught mainly in middle and high schools, while the process of reading and writing is taught in elementary schools. In this paper, we will use both terms—language arts and literacy—interchangeably to indicate content knowledge and literacy process. Research questions of the study are:

- How do language arts and literacy teachers of South Korea and the United States perceive the importance of social and emotional learning?
- In what ways do these teachers promote opportunities for students to develop and practice social and emotional skills in their classroom?

## **Review of Literature**

### **Social and Emotional Learning: Competencies and Skills**

In an increasingly fast-changing and globalized world, there have been international interests in the development of students' social and emotional skills among policymakers and researchers around the world. For example, member countries of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) have launched a cross-national multiyear study on the characteristics of students' social emotional skills involving 10–12 cities or countries (OECD, n.d.). Using an international, comparative assessment tool, the study examines the level of school-aged children's social and emotional skills as well as about their family, school and community learning conditions. The OECD study defines social and emotional skills as the “abilities to regulate one's thoughts, emotions, and behavior” (OECD, n.d, p. 4) and suggests the five

categories of social and emotional skills drawn from the Big Five model (Chernyshenko, Kankaraš, & Drasgow, 2018). The categories include (a) openness to experience (open-mindedness), (b) conscientiousness (task performance), (c) emotional stability (emotional regulation), (d) extraversion (engaging with others), and (e) agreeableness (collaboration) (OECD, n.d.). The Big Five model was initially established for research on adults, but the study claims that this model is suitable to assess social and emotional skills across childhood and adolescence (Kankaraš, 2017). When completed, the study will provide an improved understanding of the development of social and emotional skills among children and youth across countries.

Likewise, a U.S.-based educational organization, the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) defines SEL as the process by which students learn to understand and manage emotions, maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions. CASEL suggests five competencies as teachable skills in school, including self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making (CASEL, n.d.-a). Self-awareness refers to the ability to accurately recognize one's own emotions and thoughts. Self-management refers to the ability to regulate one's emotions, thoughts, and behaviors. Social awareness refers to the ability to recognize others' emotions and empathize with others. This includes the ability to take the perspective of others. Relationship skills refer to the ability to establish and maintain healthy and rewarding relationships with other individuals. Responsible decision-making is the ability to make constructive and respectful choices about a person's behavior and social interactions (CASEL, n.d.-b).

Other theoretical and conceptual frameworks in literature support the need for students' noncognitive competencies, such as emotional intelligence, emotional literacy, and character education (Hoffman, 2009). However, limited research informs how teachers understand definitions of social emotional learning, relevant competencies, and skills. Moreover, cultures may vary in how the SEL competencies are expressed and how SEL skills are taught. As Hoffman (2009) points out, "norms regarding emotional expression, emotional experience, and emotional regulation are highly conditioned by culture" (p. 540). Therefore, it is important to scrutinize implicit ideologies of selfhood and their links to cultural norms for one's social and emotional development.

For example, Korean society has been influenced by the Confucian tradition that emphasizes hierarchical human relationships and collective cultural values. Koreans adopt a perception of the self that is influenced by their relationship with others (Kim & Park, 2013). Conversely, individuality and equality are highly valued in the United States. Americans are more likely to perceive the self as an independent entity distinguished from others. This implies that each culture has a preferred or culturally influenced model in ways to understand one's and other's emotions and thoughts. This requires teachers and researchers to be aware of the different indicators of social and emotional skills from a cross-cultural perspective (Miyamoto, Huerta, & Kubacka, 2015).

**A cross-cultural perspective.** The concept of social and emotional learning is relatively new to most teachers in South Korea, where current student learning standards in each school are derived from the 2015 Revised National Curriculum that focuses on key competencies for

creative and integrative learners. Those competencies include self-management competency, knowledge-information processing skills, creative thinking skills, aesthetic-emotional competency, communication skills, and civic competency (Korean Ministry of Education, 2019). The country's curriculum has emphasized moral education and character-building education for the past several years. The purpose of character education is to develop virtues of human character and corresponding competencies. Key virtues include, but are not limited to, courtesy, filial piety, honesty, responsibility, respect, consideration, communication, and cooperation (Park, 2017). These competencies and skills have been taught in various content subjects, such as ethics, language arts, social studies, arts, or home economics. Along with the continued revisions and initiatives on the country's character education, SEL is an emerging theme with growing scholarly and pedagogical interests for research and practice in South Korea (Kim & Seong, 2017; Shin, 2011).

SEL is perceived as increasingly important in American schools. SEL programs are known as school-wide intervention or prevention efforts. Researchers and teachers alike agree on a strong link between emotion and cognition that affects academic performance as well as social and emotional competencies of students (Oberle, Domitrovich, Meyers, & Weissberg, 2016). Some states or districts adopted the comprehensive SEL student learning standards and have attempted to develop SEL assessment tools to measure students' social and emotional competencies (Kress, Norris, Schoenholz, Elias, & Seigle, 2004). A current review of the U.S.-based research suggests that more research is needed to focus on "the implementation, wide-scale dissemination, continual monitoring, improvement, and sustainability of SEL programs" (Mahoney, Durlak, & Weissberg, 2018, p. 23).

### **Integrating SEL into Curriculum and Instruction**

A line of research examined the effectiveness of school-based SEL programs (Durlak et al., 2011; Skald et al., 2012). The findings of these studies suggest that the effects of SEL are maximized when SEL is taught by classroom teachers and integrated into daily classroom activities (O'Conner, De Feyter, Carr, Luo, & Romm, 2017). More studies begin to focus on a curricular integrated approach of SEL, in which social and emotional competencies are achieved while students learn academic subjects with the support of a systemic integration of SEL and curricula (Kress et al., 2004). More specifically, an integrated approach of SEL into literacy instruction has been proposed and researched in South Korea and the United States (Daunic et al., 2013; Dresser, 2013; Kim et al., 2015). Using this approach, teachers can infuse formal and informal instruction of social-emotional skills while teaching literacy lessons. For example, Mills and Unsworth's study (2017) reports that teaching the language of emotions helped students' ability to express their own emotions. In their study, students engaged in multimodal literacy practices and learned how to use emotional vocabulary in authentic ways. Yet, there is a gap in research to examine how teachers implement SEL as academic and nonacademic strategies.

### **Methods**

This inquiry used a survey to examine teachers' perceptions and practices in South Korea and the United States. We, a teacher educator in each country, collaborated to develop a questionnaire through a series of online meetings. Multiple-choice and open-ended questions in Korean and

English were created to examine teachers' perceptions and classroom practices about social-emotional learning.

To provide a common ground for respondents, we decided to add a brief overview of SEL that includes its definition and the five competencies with examples. Survey respondents were encouraged to review the overview page before they answered the questions. Having proficiency in Korean and English, we ensured that both versions of the survey were comparable while each version was sensitive to cultural contexts and language nuances (see Appendix A for the survey questions).

## Data Collection

Elementary, middle, and high school teachers who teach language arts and/or literacy were recruited via professional associations and partner schools. Participants in South Korea were recruited across the country whereas participants in the United States were recruited from the state of New Jersey, one of the densely populated northeastern states in the country. Although SEL is not adapted into the state's Student Learning Standards, New Jersey has been promoting the importance of SEL and the development of students' SEL competencies among administrators, teachers, and parents (State of New Jersey Department of Education, n.d.).

Participation in the survey was voluntary and anonymous. The survey format (either paper or online) was determined to maximize participant responses in each country. A total of 70 survey results (44 in South Korea and 26 in the United States) were collected and compiled, excluding incomplete responses in which respondents tried to answer some items, but did not complete all. Participants teach at a wide range of schools in urban and suburban areas with diverse socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds. Table 1 shows the demographic information of the survey participants.

**Table 1.** Demographic Information of the Survey Participants

		S. Korea	U.S.
Gender	Female	32 (72.7%)	22 (84.6%)
	Male	12 (27.3%)	4 (15.4%)
Age	21–30	12 (27.2%)	7 (26.9%)
	31–40	22 (50.0%)	7 (26.9%)
	41–50	9 (20.5%)	6 (23.1%)
	51–60+	1 (2.3%)	6 (23.1%)
Years of teaching	less than 5	19 (43.2%)	4 (15.4%)
	5–10	10 (22.7%)	7 (26.9%)
	11–20	12 (27.3%)	10 (38.5%)

	21–30+	3 (6.8%)	5 (19.2%)
Grade Level	Elementary	19 (43.2%)	10 (38.5%)
	Middle	13 (29.5%)	10 (38.5%)
	High	12 (27.3%)	6 (23.0%)
			number (%)

### Data Analysis

Quantitative data were compiled for statistical analysis and the mean scores and percentages were calculated. Open-ended responses were analyzed for emerging themes. More specifically, open-ended responses were reviewed for open coding, then relating categories were determined and sorted out. For example, responses to Questions 1 and 2 in the survey indicate that teachers are using academic and nonacademic activities to help students practice for specific SEL competencies. Most responses were associated with the five competencies defined by CASEL. Some responses that do not address any of the five competencies were categorized as “others,” the purpose of which is not directly related to SEL. The Others category represents traditional methods of literacy instruction in which students engage in text-based discussions to have a better understanding of the texts or characters in the story. Table 2 shows an example response associated with each SEL competency and the Others category in each country. The frequency counts of the responses associated with each category were measured in percentages.

Inter-rater reliability was ensured by constant comparison of the data and continuous refinement of the coding methods (Merriam, 1998). For example, country-specific terms and educational contexts were discussed and clarified during the coding procedures. Recurring themes were generated to address the research questions.

**Table 2.** Teacher Responses Related to SEL Competencies

	Example of the Korean Responses	Example of the U.S. Responses
Self-awareness	Students discussed emotional vocabulary and used various words to express themselves.	Students were presented with sentences that are either fixed mindset or growth mindset and they had to identify which category each belonged to.
Self-management	Students wrote a letter to the “future self” (self in many years later) and made a list of self-management skills needed to become that person.	Students were asked to create short- and long-term goals and reflect on their goals throughout the school year.
Social awareness	After watching a movie, students created a mini-book that compares the movie character’s life to their own, then shared their mini-book with peers.	Students engaged in social justice projects where they must choose a social issue, research it and come up with an action plan on how they might address it.

Relationship skills	The class engaged in the “compliment box” activity, in which students wrote complimentary notes for one another and the notes were shared in a whole class meeting.	Through the “bucket fillers” activity, students wrote positive comments or messages to each other within the classroom.
Responsible decision-making	During class meetings, students discussed and decided on how to plan and proceed a class event, incorporating opinions of the entire class.	The whole class discussed behavior issues and talked about good and bad decision making.
Others	Students read the same book and shared author’s purpose with peers.	Students completed an all-about-me book.

## Findings

### Teacher Perceptions on SEL

Korean and American teachers think that it is either extremely important (56.8% and 80.8% respectively) or important (36.4% and 15.4% respectively) to integrate emotions and feelings into the teaching and learning of language arts and literacy. The participants rated the importance of SEL on a 5-point scale (extremely important = 4, important = 3, neutral = 2, unimportant = 1, extremely unimportant = 0). The mean scores are 3.5 with a standard deviation of 0.6 for South Korea and 3.77 with a standard deviation of 0.5 for the United States (see Table 3). A *t*-test did not find any statistically significant difference between the two countries ( $t = 1.94, p > .5$ ), suggesting that Korean teachers value the importance of SEL as highly as American teachers do. A similar pattern found across countries is that the mean scores at elementary school are higher than the mean scores at middle and high schools.

**Table 3.** Teacher Perceptions on the Importance of SEL

	school level	extremely important = 4	important = 3	neutral = 2	unimportant = 1	extremely unimportant = 0	<b>Total</b>	Mean (SD)
S. Korea	ES	15(78.9)	4(21.1)	0	0	0	19(100)	3.79(0.4)
	MS	4(30.8)	7(53.8)	2(15.4)	0	0	13(100)	3.15(0.7)
	HS	6(50.0)	5(41.7)	1(8.3)	0	0	12(100)	3.41(0.7)
	<b>Total</b>	<b>25(56.8)</b>	<b>16(36.4)</b>	<b>3(6.8)</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>44(100)</b>	<b>3.50(0.6)</b>
U.S.	ES	9(90.0)	1(10.0)	0	0	0	10(100)	3.90(0.3)
	MS	8(80.0)	1(10.0)	1(10.0)	0	0	10(100)	3.70(0.7)
	HS	4(66.7)	2(33.3)	0	0	0	6(100)	3.67(0.5)
	<b>Total</b>	<b>21(80.8)</b>	<b>4(15.4)</b>	<b>1(3.8)</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>26(100)</b>	<b>3.77(0.5)</b>



number (%), SD: standard deviation

ES: Elementary School, MS: Middle School, HS: High School

There are similarities and differences in open-ended responses by Korean and American teachers when they responded to the question of why it is important to integrate SEL in their classroom. Korean teachers reported that SEL is important as students must know how to collaborate with others and become caring, responsible, and well-versed members of society. Some responses underscored that technological advances in a future society may be able to cover basic human needs, but needs for emotions, social awareness, or collaboration cannot be replaced by technology. Therefore, it is important to teach students about emotions and prepare them for the future.

American teachers reported their reasoning in a similar way. They think that student emotions must be recognized and practiced in school as it is important to nurture one's own emotions, to be aware of others' feelings, and to learn self-management skills to become productive members of society. Some responses emphasized the emotional balance being critical for students to succeed in school, work, and life.

Both Korean and American teachers highlight that the role of schools is to meet the emotional needs of the students and teach the whole child, so they become emotionally-balanced, responsible, and contributing members of society. Teachers also point out that language arts and literacy lessons have the potential to meet these goals by providing students with multiple opportunities to practice social and emotional skills.

### **Teachers' Use of Academic and Nonacademic Strategies for SEL**

Teachers in South Korea and the United States reported that they implement various academic and nonacademic activities in class for students to develop and practice social and emotional skills. Although the types and the nature of the activities vary by country, there are similarities in teachers' use of these activities as strategies to promote social and emotional learning in a classroom. Table 4 provides the frequency counts and percentages of the SEL competencies associated with teachers' use of academic and nonacademic strategies.

Korean teachers use academic and nonacademic strategies to foster social awareness (33.3%) and relationship skills (24%) among students. Teachers emphasize developing social awareness across grade levels: 33.3% at elementary school, 29.2% at middle school, and 37.5% at high school. Relationship skills are also cultivated across grade levels: 25% at elementary school, 25% at middle school, and 20.8% at high school. Self-awareness was practiced primarily at the elementary school (18.8%) and high school (12.5%) levels. Responsible decision-making was practiced primarily at middle school (16.7%). Interestingly, self-management was not addressed in the responses made by middle school teachers, whereas some elementary teachers reported they use strategies to help students develop self-management skills (6.3%).

American teachers use academic and nonacademic strategies to foster self-management (24.2%) and social awareness (22.7%). Self-management skills were practiced more often in elementary classrooms (33.3%) than in middle and high school classrooms (19.2% and 10% respectively). Developing social awareness was practiced more at middle school (38.5%) than at elementary and high school levels (13.3% and 10% respectively). Building relationship skills was addressed mostly at high school (40%) followed by the middle school level (19.2%) and the elementary school level (13.3%). Developing self-awareness was practiced across grade levels: 20% at the elementary and high school levels, and 15.4% at the middle school level. Interestingly, strategy use to promote responsible decision-making among students was minimally mentioned across grade levels in the U.S. results: 6.7% at elementary school, 3.8% at middle school, and 0% at high school.

**Table 4.** SEL Competencies Associated with Strategies

	school level	self-awareness	self-management	social awareness	relationship skills	responsible decision making	others	total
S. Korea	ES	9(18.8)	3(6.3)	16(33.3)	12(25.0)	3(6.3)	5(10.4)	48
	MS	2(8.3)	0	7(29.2)	6(25.0)	4(16.7)	5(20.8)	24
	HS	3(12.5)	1(4.2)	9(37.5)	5(20.8)	2(8.3)	4(16.7)	24
	<b>Total</b>	<b>14(14.6)</b>	<b>4(4.2)</b>	<b>32(33.3)</b>	<b>23(24.0)</b>	<b>9(9.4)</b>	<b>14(14.6)</b>	<b>96</b>
U.S.	ES	6(20.0)	10(33.3)	4(13.3)	4(13.3)	2(6.7)	4(13.3)	30
	MS	4(15.4)	5(19.2)	10(38.5)	5(19.2)	1(3.8)	1(3.8)	26
	HS	2(20.0)	1(10.0)	1(10.0)	4(40.0)	0	2(20.0)	10
	<b>Total</b>	<b>12(18.2)</b>	<b>16(24.2)</b>	<b>15(22.7)</b>	<b>13(19.7)</b>	<b>3(4.5)</b>	<b>7(10.6)</b>	<b>66</b>

number of responses (%)

ES: Elementary School, MS: Middle School, HS: High School

**Academic and nonacademic activities in South Korea.** Elementary teachers in South Korea reported that they use a variety of academic and nonacademic activities to address students' emotions, thoughts, and behaviors. For example, some teachers reported that their students share feelings and thoughts with peers after reading the same text. They responded that literature-based activities help students be aware of others' feelings, build empathy, and recognize each other's strengths. They also reported that students were encouraged to develop social awareness by responding to specific texts and media (i.e., film, documentary) or by engaging in experiential learning. Furthermore, teachers reported that they teach students how to communicate effectively with peers and assist them to build positive relationships in school.

Middle and high school teachers in South Korea reported that they use various academic and nonacademic activities in a classroom. Teachers reported that their students share feelings and thoughts in reading and writing practices. It was noted that students build relationship skills

with peers by participating in group activities, class discussions, or book clubs. While engaging in these activities, students practice effective communication by exchanging verbal conversations or written notes and letters with peers, recognize each other's strengths, nurture friendships, and engage in the decision-making process as a community. In addition, many teachers reported that their students learn and practice responsible decision-making and social awareness skills through class meetings in which students discuss and adopt class rules, resolve conflicts, and make responsible decisions that would benefit the class as a community.

**Academic and nonacademic activities in the United States.** Elementary teachers in the United States reported that they use a range of academic and nonacademic strategies to address students' emotions, thoughts, and behaviors. For example, many teachers reported that their students practice self-management or self-control skills. They responded that they use various mindfulness activities such as yoga, meditation, breathing or concentration exercise, or listening to calm music. They also reported that literature-based activities help students recognize one's own feelings and thoughts, and be aware of others' feelings to build empathy. Students were encouraged to build social awareness and relationship skills with teacher guidance.

Middle and high school teachers in the United States reported that they use various academic and nonacademic activities in a classroom. Teachers reported that their students engage in group work or group projects in which they participate in text-based discussions, understand others' emotions and thoughts to build compassion, carry out group projects, or experience multicultural activities. Teachers also reported that they teach students how to build social awareness and relationship skills through teacher modeling and guidance.

**Comparison of the SEL strategies used in South Korea and the United States.** Teachers in both countries reported that they use literature, texts, or picture books to foster students' self-awareness and social awareness skills. They valued the benefits of text-based literacy activities as strategies for students (a) to reflect on their own emotions, (b) to build empathy for others, (c) to practice self-expression, (d) to enhance relationship skills through literature discussions with peers, (e) to build positive relationships with teacher and peers, and (f) to make their decisions accountable for the well-being of oneself and others.

Most teachers use nonacademic strategies in their classroom, but some examples of the nonacademic strategies are unique to each country. For example, it is common in American responses that teachers use yoga, meditation, and other mindfulness activities. However, these activities were not reported in the Korean teachers' responses. Similarly, Korean teachers across grade levels responded that they utilize whole class meetings for students to practice social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. None of the American teachers mentioned they utilize whole class meetings to foster social awareness or relationship skills among students.

When asked to describe academic strategies for SEL, some teachers mentioned strategies that are not embedded in academic tasks or ones that target students' social and emotional skills exclusively. Overall, teachers' open-ended responses indicate that teachers incorporate SEL through various nonacademic activities.

**Frequency of SEL strategy use.** The frequency of strategy use was rated on a 6-point scale: daily = 6, 2–3 times per week = 5, weekly = 4, monthly = 3, occasionally = 2, rarely = 1, never = 0. Three (15.8%) elementary teachers in South Korea reported they use SEL strategies daily, whereas six (60%) elementary teachers in the United States reported they use SEL strategies daily. Overall, 14 (31.8%) teachers in South Korea reported that they use SEL strategies weekly. Twelve (46.2%) teachers in the United States reported that they use SEL strategies daily. There is a similar pattern in both countries; that is, elementary teachers use SEL strategies more often than middle and high school teachers do. The mean score of the South Korean data is 3.8 with a standard deviation of 1.3. The mean score of the U.S. data is 4.6 with a standard deviation of 1.7. A *t*-test showed a statistically meaningful difference ( $t = 2.27$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ), indicating that American teachers utilize the SEL strategies in a classroom more often than Korean teachers do. Table 5 shows a statistical analysis of the compiled data.

**Table 5.** Frequency of the Strategies Used in Class

	school level	daily = 6	2–3 times per week = 5	weekly = 4	monthly = 3	occasionally = 2	rarely = 1	never = 0	<b>Total</b>	Mean (SD)
S. Korea	ES	3(15.8)	5(26.3)	7(36.8)	3(15.8)	1(5.3)	0	0	19(100)	4.3(1.1)
	MS	2(15.4)	1(7.7)	2(15.4)	4(30.8)	4(30.8)	0	0	13(100)	3.5(1.5)
	HS	1(8.3)	0	5(41.7)	2(16.7)	4(33.3)	0	0	12(100)	3.3(1.3)
	<b>Total</b>	<b>6(13.6)</b>	<b>6(13.6)</b>	<b>14(31.8)</b>	<b>9(20.5)</b>	<b>9(20.5)</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>44(100)</b>	<b>3.8(1.3)</b>
U.S.	ES	6(60.0)	2(20.0)	1(10.0)	1(10.0)	0	0	0	10(100)	5.3(1.1)
	MS	5(50.0)	1(10.0)	2(20.0)	0	1(10.0)	0	1(10.0)	10(100)	4.5(2.1)
	HS	1(16.7)	1(16.7)	1(16.7)	1(16.7)	2(33.3)	0	0	6(100)	3.7(1.6)
	<b>Total</b>	<b>12(46.2)</b>	<b>4(15.4)</b>	<b>4(15.4)</b>	<b>2(7.7)</b>	<b>3(11.5)</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1(3.8)</b>	<b>26(100)</b>	<b>4.6(1.7)</b>

number (%), SD: standard deviation

ES: Elementary School, MS: Middle School, HS: High School

### Effects of the SEL Strategies

Korean teachers reported that they observed the effects of the SEL strategies and activities on various aspects of teaching and learning. Elementary teachers responded that most effects were observed in student-student relationships, student behaviors, and discipline issues. Middle school teachers responded that most effects were observed in student-student relationships and the classroom environment. High school teachers responded that the effects were observed mostly in student-student relationships, student participation/engagement. Overall, Korean teachers see the effects of the SEL strategies mainly on student-student relationships followed by the effects on student behaviors and the classroom environment.

American teachers reported that they observed the effects of the SEL strategies and activities on various aspects of teaching and learning. Elementary teachers responded the effects were observed mostly in classroom management, and student participation/engagement. Middle and high school teachers responded that most effects were observed in student behaviors. Overall, American teachers see the effects of the SEL strategies equally on several areas, such as student behaviors, classroom management, and student participation/engagement.

The results from South Korea and the United States show both common and unique patterns. Most teachers reported that they observed the effects of the SEL strategies in multiple aspects of teaching and learning. American teachers reported that they observed the effects mostly on student behaviors, followed by classroom management and student participation/engagement. On the other hand, Korean teachers reported that the effects were observed predominantly on student-student relationships, followed by the effects on student behaviors. American teachers reported the effects on classroom management to be relatively high, whereas Korean teachers barely mentioned the effects on classroom management. Interestingly, the impacts on academic growth are reported as relatively insignificant in both countries.

## **Discussion**

The study reveals similarities and differences in teacher perceptions and practices in South Korea and the United States. Although teachers in both countries highly valued the importance of SEL practiced in a classroom and during instruction, the findings indicate that country-specific patterns are found in instructional practices associated with SEL. It is important to take into consideration the educational and cultural contexts that might have influenced classroom instruction.

In South Korea, SEL is a relatively new concept to teachers. Learning standards have not been established to address SEL, although character education has been carried out through the national curriculum guidelines for years. Yet, SEL integration is important to Korean teachers as students must learn how to collaborate with others and become contributing members in a community by building social awareness and relationship skills. Korean teachers support the importance of SEL, but they were not sure of how to integrate it into their instruction. Some teachers understood SEL as part of the character education established in their national curriculum. Teacher responses in the study indicate that Korean teachers have not been exposed to relevant lesson plans or model curricula. Considering that schoolwide initiatives to improve students' social and emotional skills are limited in Korean schools, professional development on social and emotional learning in a classroom will be beneficial for interested teachers.

In the United States, many teachers have been acquainted with SEL and the accompanying competencies. Some schools have adopted SEL standards into their curriculum, while other schools have implemented schoolwide SEL programs. American teachers use nonacademic strategies in their classroom for students to develop self-management and relationship skills. Text-based literacy lessons to assist students' self- and social awareness are commonly used by teachers. Other academic strategies include that students learn emotional words and use them for self-expression, or students engage in reading and writing activities to build social awareness.

While a wide range of nonacademic activities were mentioned by American teachers, academic strategies were not varied.

Cultural differences may have an impact on ways social and emotional competencies are perceived and practiced (Collie et al., 2015; Miyamoto, Huerta, & Kubacka, 2015). For instance, Korean teachers in the study responded that students learn about themselves while they learn to recognize and accept others' emotions and perspectives. In other words, the ability to regulate one's emotions, thoughts, and behaviors is meaningful when students understand themselves in relation to others and build relationships in a social context. Furthermore, Korean teachers perceive the primary effects of social and emotional learning as strategies to enhance students' social awareness and relationship skills. When student-student relationships are improved, it affects the classroom environment and student behaviors positively.

On the other hand, American teachers perceive that abilities to regulate ones' emotions, thoughts, and behaviors are significant to improve social awareness skills. American teachers responded that self-awareness enhances one's ability to recognize others' emotions and empathize with others. To American teachers, social and emotional learning helps improve student behaviors and the classroom environment. When individual students engage in learning with positive attitudes, it affects the overall classroom environment and relieves classroom management issues. These varying patterns may imply the influence of social and cultural contexts on teachers' implicit ideas, values, and beliefs (Miyamoto, Huerta, & Kubacka, 2015).

### **Limitations**

The study has some limitations. The sample size was modest. The familiarity with the concept of SEL might have influenced teacher responses. In this sense, American teachers are more familiar with SEL and its relevance to their content instruction. Some teachers in the United States might have worked in schools that have schoolwide SEL or equivalent programs, so their prior experiences guide their instructional strategies. On the other hand, SEL is a new or foreign concept to Korean teachers, although some of them might have practiced similar activities within the curriculum of character education. Korean schools are highly test-oriented to achieve college readiness as early as in upper elementary and middle grades. As a result, Korean teachers may not have time for SEL during their lessons even though they realize the importance of teaching emotional and social skills in school.

### **Implications**

As a comparative study, it offers an opportunity to uncover the hidden assumptions about pedagogy and provides new insights into what has influenced teacher perceptions and practices. The current inquiry revealed some differences in pedagogical practices between South Korea and the United States. This inquiry is meaningful to inform future research efforts. It is necessary to review cultural contexts and educational systems that play a role in each country's SEL pedagogy. More classroom-based case studies are needed to inform how teachers implement SEL strategies and how students react to these strategies. Furthermore, it is important to explore impacts of the explicit instruction of SEL skills as nonacademic strategies versus the intentional pedagogical integration of SEL as academic strategies.

## **Conclusion**

The study examined language arts and literacy teachers' perceptions and practices of social and emotional learning from a comparative perspective. Findings highlight some common and culturally unique patterns of instructional practices associated with SEL. Teachers' open-ended responses provided valuable insights into their reasoning behind practices, their perceptions and beliefs of why they do what they do. Language arts and literacy teachers in South Korea and the United States implement academic and nonacademic strategies on a regular basis because they have observed the benefits of SEL. Teachers utilize text-based literacy activities as academic strategies for students to practice social-emotional skills. Using various nonacademic strategies in a classroom, teachers promote a positive learning environment for students to build SEL competencies. Although specific examples of the SEL-integrated practices vary, teachers in two countries see the need for social and emotional learning for their students and appraise the positive impacts of SEL strategies on student emotions and behaviors, social awareness, and relationship skills.

*Dae-Seok Kim, PhD, is an associate professor in the department of education at Kongju National University, South Korea. His research interests include school curriculum and instruction, social and emotional learning, and an instructional model for emotional development.*

*Carrie Eunyong Hong, PhD, is a professor of literacy in the department of educational leadership and professional studies at William Paterson University of New Jersey. Her research interests include literacy education and teacher preparation to work with diverse learners.*

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## APPENDIX A

### *Survey questions in English*

1. In your classroom, have you utilized any instructional or curricular strategies or activities to support students to develop or practice their social, emotional skills (for example, 5 competencies of SEL)? Please describe details of your instructional or curricular strategies and/or activities.
  2. In your classroom, have you utilized any nonacademic strategies or activities to support students to develop or practice their social, emotional skills (for example, 5 competencies of SEL)? Please describe details of your nonacademic strategies and/or activities.
  3. How often do you utilize these strategies and/or relevant activities that you described in Questions 1–2?
  4. Have you observed that these strategies and/or relevant activities that you mentioned in Questions 1–2 help improve your students' social and emotional development? Please choose areas of positive changes that you have observed in your classroom after you utilized these strategies and/or relevant activities.
  5. Do you think that it is important to integrate emotions, feelings, and affects in the teaching and learning of literacy/language arts or English?
- 5.1 Please describe why you think it is important to integrate SEL into teaching.