



Integrating Social-Emotional Learning in Composition Teaching for Middle Elementary Grades

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Abstract. This study investigates the integration of Social-Emotional Learning into composition teaching for middle elementary students, specifically focusing on its impact on students' core Chinese language literacy. It examines how Social-Emotional Learning can enhance students' critical thinking and emotional understanding capabilities by incorporating Social-Emotional Learning strategies into traditional Chinese language instruction. The research employs qualitative and quantitative methods to assess the effectiveness of Social-Emotional Learning in promoting students' emotional and social skills alongside academic proficiency in Chinese. Results indicate that Social-Emotional Learning improves students' composition skills and facilitates a deeper understanding of emotional and social issues within literary contexts. Furthermore, the study reveals that individual differences significantly affect the outcomes of Social-Emotional Learning-integrated teaching, necessitating personalized instructional approaches. The findings advocate including Social-Emotional Learning in language curricula to better prepare students for academic and social challenges.

Keywords: Social Emotional Learning; Elementary Education; Chinese Language Teaching; Composition Skills; Student Engagement

1 Introduction

1.1 Social-Emotional Learning as a Key Tool for Student Development

Core competencies in academic subjects reflect the essential values of education, characterized by healthy values, fundamental qualities, and critical skills that students develop throughout their learning process. For the Chinese language subject, core competencies primarily include "construction and application of language," "development and enhancement of thinking," "appreciation of aesthetics and creativity," and "inheritance and understanding of culture." From the perspective of core competencies, language education is not merely a means of communication but also a crucial factor and tool for promoting students' intellectual development and character shaping [1]. Current traditional practices in Chinese language teaching, often characterized by formalized classroom activities needing more substantive content, play a limited role in fostering

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students' critical thinking and quality cultivation. Social Emotional Learning overlaps with the core competencies of the Chinese language subject, aiming to nurture "well-rounded individuals." Thus, integrating Social-Emotional Learning into elementary Chinese language teaching can enhance students' core competencies, providing a solid foundation for their social adaptability and continuous growth.

Teaching social-emotional abilities in Chinese language courses not only enhances students' cultural literacy and self-growth capabilities but also aids in learning self-awareness and management, others' awareness and management, and social cognition and management, gradually fostering appropriate values, character, and social interaction skills, thus enabling them to become well-rounded individuals.

1.2 Effective Integration of Social-Emotional Learning with Chinese Language Subject

Social-Emotional Learning aims to be integrated into all educational fields, with the Chinese language subject particularly suitable due to its unique nature and content. Despite many teachers' attempts to enhance student interaction and engagement through Social-Emotional Learning concepts, there is still significant room for improvement in integrating these concepts with curricular content and strategic implementation [2]. Deep-seated educational and literary theory ideas emphasize the intrinsic connection between emotions, cognition, and literature. For instance, researchers highlighted integrating knowledge with emotions and values as crucial for the fusion of character [3]. They thought, recognizing the significant role of literature and writing in promoting moral education and assisting children in exploring and interpreting life experiences.

2 Literature Review

2.1 Current International Research

Strategies for Integrating Social-Emotional Learning into Academic Content.

Integrating Social-Emotional Learning into the curriculum is an educational practice beyond mere academic learning, combining emotional development with academic content. There are specific courses aimed at social-emotional skills that often do not emphasize integration with standard curriculum content but serve as supplements to achieve Social-Emotional Learning objectives, requiring specific timeslots within the school schedule [4]. This instructional approach introduces emotionally focused materials through predetermined courses and targeted learning outcomes rather than naturally integrating social-emotional skills learning into regular classroom activities [5]. Although these standalone projects have achieved positive outcomes, a significant gap exists between Social-Emotional Learning and its practical classroom application.

Researchers adopt various methods to integrate Social-Emotional Learning into curriculum teaching. Cohen emphasized the importance of integrating Social-Emotional Learning into teaching practices, using different situational settings and problem-solving to help students develop social-emotional skills and blend them with cognitive, social, and emotional processes to enrich their academic and emotional experiences. He

believes that health education, language arts, and social studies are the subjects most suitable for fostering students' social-emotional abilities [6].

Strategies for Integrating Social-Emotional Learning into Subject Teaching.

Researchers have highlighted the importance of Social-Emotional Learning in modern education, emphasizing student development through evidence-supported multidimensional teaching practices. These practices cover innovative teaching methods and their implementation and emphasize the necessity for reflection within the teaching process [7]. Teachers can better support classroom instruction while promoting comprehensive student development by integrating teaching resources such as storybooks, vocabulary collections, and Social-Emotional Learning activity manuals into the educational resource library.

Zins and other researchers emphasize that Social-Emotional Learning can be effectively integrated into subject teaching through peer tutoring, suggesting that cooperative learning and student-led discussions are essential for promoting skills development [8]. Additionally, teaching strategies provided by Social-Emotional Learning organizations, such as open-ended questions and cooperative learning structures, aim to help teachers integrate Social-Emotional Learning objectives with subject curricula, considering students' cultural backgrounds to achieve more inclusive and effective teaching [9]. The comprehensive application of these practices and strategies facilitates communication among students. It equips them with the necessary skills to live and learn in a multicultural environment, enhancing the comprehensiveness and inclusiveness of education.

2.2 Current Domestic Research

Attempts to Integrate Social-Emotional Learning into Elementary Chinese Language Composition Teaching.

Within the current research framework in China, Social-Emotional Learning is viewed not only as part of the instructional content but also as a comprehensive teaching philosophy integrated into the elementary Chinese language curriculum. Through carefully designed writing and reading activities, students learn to express their emotions and understand others' perspectives while comprehending the text content and how to effectively interact socially. The core of this teaching method is to use practical examples, such as the text "One Minute," to demonstrate the value of time to students, thereby inspiring their insights into life and developing their social-emotional skills [10].

By integrating Social-Emotional Learning strategies into teaching objectives and processes, educators can further guide students to recognize that composition is not just an academic activity but an essential tool for self-expression and social interaction [11]. This includes multiple dimensions, from selecting materials and stimulating interest in writing to fostering interaction among students, aimed at developing core social-emotional skills such as self-management, social awareness, self-awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making [12].

While emphasizing moral education, this teaching method recognizes the critical role of elementary education in children's life development, especially in nurturing students to become individuals with social responsibility and rich emotions [13]. This educational philosophy not only pursues academic achievements but also focuses on nurturing students' comprehensive qualities as future builders and successors of socialism, including profound knowledge, rich emotions, and strong moral principles [14].

Challenges in Elementary Social-Emotional Learning.

In the current educational environment, children's social-emotional abilities face multiple challenges. First, in the realm of family education, many parents still need to fully recognize the importance of social-emotional skills for the comprehensive development of their children. Under the influence of traditional educational views, material conditions and academic performance have become the focus of parents' attention, often marginalizing children's emotional needs and moral education [15]. This educational approach neglects the richness and complexity of children's inner worlds and overlooks the critical capabilities needed to cope with societal challenges.

Secondly, as important venues for nurturing social-emotional capabilities, schools must invest more attention and resources. Despite growing awareness among educators of the importance of social-emotional education, challenges such as a shortage of professional researchers, insufficient funding, and a lack of understanding within the educational system hinder the implementation of social-emotional education in schools. Moreover, developing the school environment, especially the psychological environment, is crucial for fostering students' social-emotional capabilities [16]. However, many schools currently need more resources and conditions.

Lastly, students need to gain a higher awareness and appreciation of enhancing social-emotional capabilities [17]. Influenced by long-term exam-oriented education, students often view academic performance as the sole standard for measuring self-worth. This education pattern leads to a lack of independent thinking skills, increased exam anxiety, and neglect of social-emotional skills training [18]. Negative feedback in education, excessive goal setting, inappropriate emotional venting, and overprotection further weaken students' self-confidence and self-esteem, impacting their healthy growth and social adaptability [19].

2.3 Research Review

Domestic research on Chinese language teaching strategies has established a relatively rich foundation, covering everything from teaching methods for individual texts to integrated teaching methods for subjects. However, research on integrating composition teaching with social-emotional learning and its penetration still lacks in-depth studies and a set framework, which leads to insufficient solid and reasonable analytical support for such empirical research. The field of social-emotional learning has developed deeply internationally, forming a complete theoretical framework and implementing several mature social-emotional learning programs, which have successfully integrated social-emotional learning with subject curricula. In contrast, domestic research in

social-emotional learning is more focused on introducing theories and analyzing foreign social-emotional learning programs, with fewer empirical studies and specific practice projects. Domestic research on integrating social-emotional learning with subject curricula is still in its early stages, with only a few scholars conducting preliminary integration studies in specific subjects. Therefore, domestic research in this field needs further strengthening and deepening.

Based on the reasons above, the author has chosen elementary second-stage Chinese language composition teaching as the research object, constructed an empirical analysis framework based on social-emotional learning and integrated teaching theories, and based on further research results, conclusions, and suggestions for nurturing elementary students' social-emotional capabilities have been proposed, hoping to provide a reference for subsequent related research.

3 Exploring Social-Emotional Abilities in Middle Elementary Students

3.1 Research Hypothesis

Previous experiments and teaching explorations have successfully validated that students' social-emotional abilities can be enhanced through educational practices. Since the measurement tools and subject conditions used in this study differ from previous research, retesting is necessary. This research hypothesizes that teaching elementary Chinese language composition can significantly enhance students' social and emotional abilities.

3.2 Selection of Measurement Tools

This study selected a mature questionnaire widely used as a measurement tool.

Social Emotional Abilities Scale.

The Social Emotional Abilities Scale (Chinese version) is used for measurement. This scale was translated by the Social Emotional Ability Training Research Group of Sichuan Normal University from the 2018 revised edition of the Social Skills Improvement System-Social Emotional Learning Edition (SSIS-SEL) [20]. It maintains good reliability and validity, containing 46 items. This questionnaire can accurately assess various aspects of students' social-emotional abilities and includes collecting basic information about the students, aiding in subsequent analyses. In the official tests, the Cronbach's alpha coefficient of this questionnaire was 0.9771, indicating good consistency, stability, and reliability of the test results.

Selection of Subjects

The author obtained the administration's consent of Elementary School A to enter the school to distribute paper questionnaires, implement composition teaching, and

arrange the specific timing and execution process for pre-and post-tests. Elementary School A is a private school with a high level of teaching. The school's principal cooperated and agreed to distribute the questionnaires to students in grades three and four for related testing. Then, the teaching team was arranged to participate and assist in the execution and completion of the teaching project.

Data Collection

The study collected survey data through pre-and post-tests and the onsite distribution and collection of paper questionnaires, completed between September and December 2023, with 763 questionnaires collected, of which 724 were valid. When collecting data at Elementary School A, the author coordinated with the Chinese language teachers of grades three and four to schedule the class times for each unit's composition lessons. Combining the "Social Emotional Teaching Book - Grade 3/4," the compiled version of the language textbook, and the "Compulsory Education Language Curriculum Standards," the required teaching plans and materials were prepared. The teaching was conducted under the observation of the corresponding language teachers, and the pre-and post-test questionnaires were distributed and collected after introducing the filling requirements to the students. In the research process, grades 1, 2, and 3 in the fourth grade were set as the control group, implementing the regular teaching plan; grades 4, 5, and 6 were set as the experimental group, implementing the modified composition teaching plan. Grades 1 and 2 in the third grade were set as the control group, implementing the regular teaching plan; grades 4 and 5 were set as the experimental group, implementing the modified teaching plan.

Data Analysis

After collecting data from the paper questionnaires, quantitative analysis was performed using SPSS 26.0.

Before formally conducting data analysis, the study took several data preprocessing steps to improve data quality and the accuracy of the analysis. These steps included excluding invalid questionnaires, calculating the scores for questionnaire items, and testing the reliability and validity of the questionnaire. Questionnaires where all items were marked with the same response were considered invalid and were excluded; likewise, questionnaires with incomplete items were also deemed invalid.

In the design of this study's scale, a five-point Likert scale was used for scoring, with options including "strongly agree," "agree," "uncertain," "disagree," and "strongly disagree," corresponding to scores from 1 to 5. It should be noted that no items in this questionnaire were scored in reverse. The total score for the subjects was calculated by summing the scores corresponding to all chosen answers, thus reflecting their social-emotional ability performance in the research measurement.

Given that the social-emotional ability scale adopted in this study is a verified mature scale with well-demonstrated dimensional construction, exploratory factor analysis was conducted to assess the structural validity of this Chinese questionnaire. Additionally, Cronbach's alpha coefficient was used to measure the reliability of the questionnaire's internal consistency.

4 Presentation of Research Results

4.1 Scale Selection and Pilot Testing

The social-emotional abilities scale used in this study is a mature scale, adapted from Zhao Meng's research, utilizing a 5-point Likert scale where scores from 1 to 5 represent "strongly disagree" and "strongly agree," respectively. The total value of all items was calculated. A pilot test was conducted at Elementary School A, where 108 valid scales were distributed and collected, all of which were used to test the reliability and validity of the scale in this study.

4.2 Validity Testing of the Scale

The original scale, being a revised and mature scale, was directly subjected to exploratory factor analysis (EFA) using SPSS 26.0 for validity testing. The testing process consisted of the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure, Bartlett's test of sphericity, commonalities, and total variance explained.

The collected scale data were initially assessed for suitability for exploratory factor analysis, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Social Emotional Abilities Scale KMO and Bartlett's Test Parameters

KMO MEASURE		0.850
BARTLETT'S TEST OF SPHERICITY	Approximate Chi-Square	4192.319
	Degrees of Freedom	1035
	Significance	.000

The analysis results indicate that the KMO measure is 0.850, which is above the acceptable standard of 0.60, and Bartlett's test of sphericity yielded an approximate Chi-Square of 6030.166 ($df=1035$, significance $< .001$), suggesting that the data from the scale are suitable for factor analysis.

Five factors were identified in the scale through factor analysis, as shown in Table 2. These five factors together explained 60.688% of the total variance, which is greater than the acceptable value of 60%, indicating that the scale can explain the vast majority of the information captured by the scale.

Table 2. Explained Total Variance

COMPONENT	INITIAL EIGENVALUES	EXTRACTION SUMS OF SQUARED LOADINGS	ROTATION SUMS OF SQUARED LOADINGS
1	20.921	45.48%	45.480%
2	2.000	4.348%	49.828%
3	1.840	3.999%	53.827%
4	1.673	3.673%	57.464%
5	1.483	3.224%	60.688%

4.3 Reliability Testing of the Scale

After confirming that the structural validity of the scale meets the general acceptance standards, the study proceeded with the reliability testing of the scale. The results are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Reliability Testing of the Social-Emotional Scale

CRONBACH'S ALPHA	STANDARDIZED CRONBACH'S ALPHA
0.972	0.971

As shown in the table, Cronbach's Alpha for this scale is 0.972, significantly greater than the commonly accepted threshold of 0.7, indicating that the scale has excellent internal consistency and can be formally used for subsequent testing in this study.

4.4 Analysis of Variance in Experimental Results

Normality Test.

This study utilized independent sample t-tests to analyze whether there were significant differences between the pre-and post-test data of third and fourth graders at Elementary School A. To conduct the independent sample t-tests, it was necessary first to verify the normality and homogeneity of variance of the collected data, which was done using SPSS.

As shown in Tables 4 and 5, the results of the normality tests for third and fourth-grade data are presented:

Table 4. Normality Test for Social-Emotional Abilities Data of Third-Grade Students

		Kolmogorov-Smirnov (V)		Shapiro-Wilk	
		Statistic	Significance	Statistic	Significance
Pre-test	Control Group	0.084	0.200	0.981	0.399
	Experimental Group	0.082	0.200	0.979	0.365
Post-test	Control Group	0.093	0.200	0.982	0.456
	Experimental Group	0.069	0.200	0.981	0.437

Table 5. . Normality Test for Social-Emotional Abilities Data of fourth-Grade Students

		Kolmogorov-Smirnov (V)		Shapiro-Wilk	
		Statistic	Significance	Statistic	Significance
Pre-test	Control Group	0.077	0.085	0.980	0.073

	Experimental Group	0.052	0.200	0.988	0.411
	Control Group	0.076	0.093	0.980	0.070
Post-test	Experimental Group	0.053	0.200	0.986	0.238

It can be seen that the Shapiro-Wilk test's significance values for both the control and experimental groups' pre-and post-test data of third-grade and fourth-grade are above the standard value of 0.05, thus confirming that the test data for third-grade students conform to a normal distribution and are suitable for further testing.

Homogeneity of Variance Test.

After verifying that the research data conforms to a normal distribution, it is necessary to further test for homogeneity of variances. If the variances are homogeneous, then the t-value can be calculated. As shown in Tables 6 and 7, the results of the homogeneity of variance tests for third and fourth-grade data are presented respectively.

Table 6. Homogeneity of Variance Tests for Social-Emotional Abilities Data of Third-Grade Students

	LEVENE'S STATISTIC	SIGNIFICANCE
PRE-TEST	0.000	0.988
POST-TEST	0.093	0.761

Table 7. Homogeneity of Variance Tests for Social-Emotional Abilities Data of fourth-Grade Students

	LEVENE'S STATISTIC	SIGNIFICANCE
PRE-TEST	2.630	0.106
POST-TEST	1.208	0.273

The significance values for the homogeneity of variance test for both pre-and post-test data of the third-grade and fourth-grade control and experimental groups are above the standard value of 0.05, providing a solid foundation for subsequent statistical analysis.

Independent Sample T-Test

The differences in social-emotional abilities between pre-and post-tests for third and fourth-grade students are shown in Tables 8 and 9.

Table 8. Independent Sample Test for Social-Emotional Abilities Data of Third-Grade Students

	LEVENE'S TEST FOR EQUALITY OF VARIANCES	MEAN DIFFERENCE
	Sig. (two-tailed)	

PRE-TEST	0.867	0.705
POST-TEST	0.047	8.269

Table 9. Independent Sample Test for Social-Emotional Abilities Data of FOURTH-Grade Students

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances	Mean Difference
	Sig. (two-tailed)	
PRE-TEST	0.681	1.435
POST-TEST	0.000	13.772

The results show no statistically significant differences between the control and experimental groups in the baseline measurements of third-grade and fourth-grade ($p > 0.05$). However, the post-test results showed significant differences between third-grade and fourth-grade ($p < 0.05$). These results suggest that the intervention applied to the experimental group may have effectively enhanced the social-emotional skills of elementary students, thereby providing an evidence base for educational strategies to improve the social-emotional abilities of elementary students.

5 Conclusions and Recommendations

5.1 Conclusions

This study aimed to explore the application of Social Emotional Learning theory in elementary Chinese language composition teaching and to analyze its impact on students' core linguistic competencies. The research demonstrated that integrating Social-Emotional Learning significantly enhanced students' composition skills, particularly in critical thinking and emotional understanding. Additionally, the study found that students exhibited higher emotional cognition and social interaction skills by integrating Social-Emotional Learning strategies into their Chinese language learning.

Through qualitative and quantitative research methods, we thoroughly analyzed Social-Emotional Learning strategies' specific applications and effects on teaching. It was found that these strategies not only facilitated students' mastery of Chinese language subject knowledge but also improved their social-emotional abilities. After participating in Social-Emotional Learning -based educational activities, students could more deeply understand and empathize with literary works' emotions and social conflicts, particularly evident in their composition performances.

Moreover, the study revealed the impact of individual differences on the effectiveness of Social-Emotional Learning instruction, highlighting the need for teachers to consider students' personalized needs and background differences when implementing Social-Emotional Learning strategies. This variability requires teachers to have the flexibility to adjust teaching strategies to accommodate different students' learning characteristics and needs.

5.2 Recommendations

Professional Development for Teacher

Given the importance of Social-Emotional Learning in Chinese language composition teaching, it is recommended that educational authorities and schools enhance support for teachers' professional development. Specialized training courses should help teachers deeply understand the core concepts and teaching strategies of Social-Emotional Learning and improve their ability to integrate Social-Emotional Learning into Chinese language teaching effectively. Additionally, establishing a teachers' learning community through workshops, teaching observations, and case analyses can promote sharing experiences and mutual learning among teachers.

Development of Teaching Resource

To support the implementation of Social-Emotional Learning in Chinese language teaching, it is recommended that educational research institutions collaborate with curriculum developers to create teaching resources that incorporate elements of social-emotional learning. These resources should include specialized composition guidance materials, emotional and social skills training tools, and scenario-based activities integrated with Chinese language teaching content.

Assessment and Feedback Mechanism

Establish a systematic assessment and feedback mechanism to regularly collect and analyze data on students' social-emotional abilities and Chinese language performance. This data can enable teachers to adjust their teaching strategies promptly to meet the learning needs of students better. Furthermore, this assessment should also include feedback on the effectiveness of teachers' teaching methods, helping teachers continually optimize their teaching practices.

Case Studies and Dissemination

Encourage teachers and scholars to conduct empirical research on integrating Social-Emotional Learning and Chinese language teaching, collect and summarize successful teaching cases, and disseminate these through educational conferences, academic journals, and online platforms. It cannot only enhance the quality of teaching but also provide practical evidence for formulating educational policies.

Implementing these recommendations can effectively promote the deep application of Social Emotional Learning theory in elementary Chinese language composition teaching, thereby comprehensively enhancing students' core linguistic competencies and social-emotional abilities.

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