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Multilingual Students and Social and Emotional Learning Interventions: A Systematic Review

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Social and emotional learning (SEL) is increasingly regarded as vital to public education systems, with outsized benefits for students. However, questions remain around how effective or accessible SEL interventions are for linguistically minoritized students, particularly in the United States. We conducted a secondary data analysis on a preregistered systematic review dataset (https://osf.io/6pqx2/) to examine the following: 1) Are multilingual students represented in the global evidence for SEL interventions, and if so, how and in what way? 2) How and in what way are multilingual students represented in the evidence for SEL interventions within the United States specifically? The PRISMA (preferred reporting items for systematic reviews and meta-analyses) criteria guided the original systematic review and identified 424 relevant studies published between 2008 *and* 2020*; 13.4% of included studies (*n = *57) reported data on student language status, and of those studies, 56.1% (*n = *32) were conducted in the United States. Language status representation was categorized into nine different groups (i.e., language learner services or non-native first language) and coded at the sample (*n = *50) and population (*n = *21) level. Results highlight the significant lack of multilingual student representation across SEL and the need to center equity at the intersection of language and SEL. Implications for researchers to advance reporting standards of student language status and (re)consider design, implementation, and evaluation of SEL interventions toward supporting linguistically minoritized populations are discussed.*

Keywords: bilingual/bicultural, child development, school psychology, secondary data analysis, social and emotional learning (SEL) intervention, multilingual learners, English learners, systematic review

Multilingual students are one of the fastest-growing populations in the United States (DeCuir-Gunby & Schutz, 2014; Guzman-Orth et al., 2017), with over 20% of children 5–17 years old speaking a language other than English (U.S. Census Bureau, n.d.). Although social, emotional, and behavioral outcomes are increasingly regarded as an integral part of education and human development—so much so that social and emotional learning (SEL) interventions have been substantially integrated into educational practices and policy across the United States (Dusenbury et al., 2020), there is limited research exploring the extent to which students from linguistically minoritized backgrounds are accessing and benefitting from universal school-based SEL (Cipriano et al., 2023a). SEL refers to an interrelated set of cognitive, affective, and behavioral skills and strategies that underscore learning and drive development (Cipriano et al., 2023a). At the same time that interests and investments in SEL have increased (Dusenbury et al., 2020; Yoder & Dang, 2023), there has been considerable advancement in reconceptualizing SEL explicitly in the service of educational equity, and particularly in the service of racially and ethnically marginalized students (Barnes & McCallops, 2019; Cipriano & Strambler, 2024; Jagers et al., 2019; Kennedy, 2019). Advancement efforts have the potential to advantageously position universal SEL interventions to address systemic barriers existing at the intersection of minoritized linguistic identities. Furthermore, contemporary developmental science suggests an important nexus between language and SEL, with variable associations depending on students' age and proficiency (Cuocci & Arndt, 2020; Lindquist & Gendron, 2013). However, most educational research studies of multilingual students focus on deficits in their academic outcomes and trajectories, with limited attention given to their social and emotional development (Erling et al., 2022; T. Halle et al., 2011). Given the current gaps in the research on SEL for multilingual learners, the increase of multilingualism in U.S. schools (U.S. Department of Education, 2022a), and the promise of SEL to advance educational equity, the present paper examines the current evidence available for how multilingual students are represented and impacted by SEL interventions across kindergarten through 12th grade and investigates if SEL interventions significantly improve multilingual students' academic, social, emotional, and behavioral outcomes across their academic lifespan.

Defining Multilingualism

In this review, multilingual students are used as an umbrella term for all students who use or are learning (whether formally or informally) multiple languages. This language learning or use may be "active (through speaking and writing) or passive (through listening and reading)" (Wei & Moyer, 2008, p. 4). This categorization includes students who are classified (potentially for several years) as English Learners (ELs), those who were former ELs (i.e., students who have reached standards for English proficiency), those who speak another language or languages at home but are classified as proficient in English when entering school, those who are fluent in English but also learning an ancestral or cultural language they did not grow up using, and those who are learning a world language via direct instruction in school. About 1 in 10 students in U.S. public schools is classified as an EL (U.S. Department of Education, 2022b)—one

subgroup of multilingual students who have not yet demonstrated proficiency in English. Those ELs who score below the cut-off of state-mandated English proficiency tests remain classified as ELs, regardless of the amount of time they have served in English language support programs. Students who have been in English as a second language (ESL) programs or support services for 5 years or more are termed as long-term ELs (LTELs) and have been found to frequently experience academic difficulties and linguistic isolation due to their exclusion from mainstream classes and access to the full curriculum (Callahan, 2005; Uysal, 2022). There have been various terms and definitions used to describe student's language proficiency and status in the U.S. education system, such as English language learner (ELL), dual language learner (DLL), limited English speaking/proficiency (LEP), English learner, English as a foreign/first language (EFL), English as an additional language (EAL), and more recently emergent bilinguals/multilinguals (García & Kleifgan, 2018). The evolution of the changing terminology reflects the increasing recognition of the deficit connotations inherent in the previous terminology, and an endeavor to transition labels and definitions, and in turn stigmas or perceptions, away from highlighting what multilingual students lack or need help doing, toward acknowledging the strengths and assets they bring to school.

Conceptual Framework

Understanding the SEL strengths and needs of multilingual students must begin by interrogating the language and terminology used to describe the students themselves. Terms such as "English language learner" or "dual language learner" often frame multilingualism as a deficit, reinforcing narratives that privilege monolingual norms (García & Kleifgen, 2018; Martinez, 2018). Such framings risk positioning multilingual children as problems to be "fixed," undermining their linguistic and cultural assets and the resources their language diversity brings to their learning potential (Soto-Boykin et al., 2023). Furthermore, a deficit-focused framing can affect students' emotional well-being and ability to form connections with peers and teachers in the school. Studies show that children who feel that their home languages and cultures are valued in educational environments demonstrate higher self-esteem and stronger social bonds in school than students who do not feel their linguistic and cultural assets are valued in school (Song et al., 2022). As such, a critical first step in supporting the SEL of multilingual learners must be the willingness to create supportive and equitable learning spaces where students feel safe to learn. Adopting asset-based language and critically analyzing and shifting how students are categorized in the school environment is an evidence-based pathway through which educators can demonstrate valuing multilingual student identities in the learning context (García & Kleifgen, 2018; Lau & Shea, 2024).

The historical and systemic ways schools have "protected" or "treated" multilingual students further demand critique. Protectionist approaches often aim to shield students from linguistic challenges but may inadvertently isolate them from broader learning opportunities (Cosentino de Cohen et al., 2005; I. M. Umansky, 2016). Similarly, interventions framed as "support" can perpetuate inequities when they focus on assimilation rather than inclusivity. For example,

a common approach is ESL pull-out programs that separate students from peers. Removing students from the classroom can reinforce feelings of marginalization for multilingual students. A critical SEL lens would challenge these practices and emphasize learning integration, relationship-building between multilingual and monolingual peers, and culturally responsive teaching in the classroom (Jagers et al., 2019). This approach ensures that multilingual children are actively included in classroom settings and their diverse linguistic and cultural perspectives are affirmed.

Linking SEL with equity-oriented goals highlights the power dynamics inherent in both language and SEL interventions (Jagers et al., 2019). SEL frameworks must move beyond generic strategies to address how power operates within classroom and school settings. Multilingual children often navigate complex linguistic hierarchies that influence their social interactions and emotional well-being. These hierarchies arise from societal and institutional biases that assign higher status to certain languages—typically dominant or colonially linked languages like English—while devaluing others, such as Indigenous or minority languages. This dynamic can shape how multilingual children perceive their own linguistic identities, often leading them to feel pressure to prioritize the dominant language to gain social acceptance or academic recognition (Aguayo, 2020; Dawson & Williams, 2008). Consequently, this tension can create internal conflicts, marginalize their home languages, and erode their sense of self-esteem, such as their feelings about their academic and social identity, in the classroom (Aguayo, 2020). When SEL is implemented using a "one-size-fits-all approach," typically prioritizing mainstream or dominant cultures, it fails to acknowledge the sociopolitical reality that students experience, thus perpetuating more harm than good (Meland & Brion-Meisels, 2024; Simmons, 2019). However, SEL, when applied critically, can be a tool for redistributing power, giving students agency to express themselves authentically and fostering environments that challenge dominant narratives. This reimagining positions SEL as a transformative practice that aligns with social justice and equity goals (Attaya & Hilliard, 2023; Simmons, 2019).

SEL interventions must be viewed not only as developmental tools but as mechanisms for systemic change. By leveraging SEL to challenge inequities, schools can reframe multilingualism as a powerful asset that enriches educational communities (Cipriano & Strambler, 2024; Jagers et al., 2019). Incorporating students' home languages and cultural practices into SEL programs disrupts monolingual biases present in classrooms and creates spaces where all students can thrive (Jagers et al., 2019). This approach ensures that schools become environments where all children, regardless of linguistic background, feel valued and capable of thriving. When combined with critical reflection of the power dynamics between language and SEL, these interventions become essential for advancing educational equity and fostering inclusivity in increasingly diverse learning environments.

The current paper critically examines the aforementioned gaps by systematically reviewing how multilingual students have been represented in school-based SEL interventions, with attention to the framing of language, identity, and equity. To contextualize this inquiry, we begin with a brief history of multilingual education in the United States, tracing how language policy has historically reflected

and reinforced sociopolitical power structures. We then examine how multilingual students have been positioned within the broader field of education, with particular attention to how their linguistic identities have been shaped by discourses of assimilation and deficit. Next, we review the current landscape of universal, school-based SEL interventions and assess how multilingual students have been included—or excluded—in extant systematic reviews. Finally, we draw from the Registered K–12 Contemporary SEL Dataset (Cipriano et al., 2023a) to analyze the degree to which multilingual learners are represented in SEL research and consider what this reveals about the field's capacity to support linguistically diverse students through equitable and inclusive SEL practices.

Brief History of Multilingual Education in the United States

Language services within the U.S. education systems have evolved over time. The first standards around multilingual students in the 1920s were defined as "sink-or-swim," and these students were provided little to no support for the better part of four decades. The Bilingual Act of 1968 commenced nationwide and created a formal bilingual education statute (as part of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1968) to address this gaping lack of support for multilingual students. However, the evidence of these intervention programs' effectiveness was scant; as intervention programs were often of poor quality, under-resourced, and failed to benefit all multilingual students, framing ELs as "culturally deprived and in need of remediation" (Flores & Schissel, 2014, p. 458; Souto-Manning, 2010). Thirty-three years later, No Child Left Behind called for further support and funding for bilingual education (No Child Left Behind, 2001), including mandating that public schools gather data on student subgroups, aiming to provide all students access to education to meet grade-level expectations by 2014 and holding schools accountable for achieving grade-level expectations through standardized testing. Despite these investments, as we prepare this manuscript in 2024, multilingual students in the United States remain underserved (U.S. Department of Education, 2019). Furthermore, the historical policies and structures for multilingual students have been aligned to an English-only approach with the purpose of teaching and elevating English so that students can pass state standardized testing, resulting in punitive consequences for ELs (Uysal, 2022; Valdés et al., 2010). Instead of taking a "Whole Child" approach to multilingual education that emphasizes and supports all strengths, capabilities, and languages of students (Whole Child Approach to Education, n.d.), this English-only instruction limits student's multilingual development and neglects their unique language strengths and needs (García & Kleifgen, 2018).

Although the U.S. ranks among the top five countries in terms of language diversity, with over 300 different languages spoken in households across the nation (Ang, 2021), there is little to no emphasis on multilingual education in public schools (U.S. Department of Education, n.d. a; Devlin, 2018). This is reflected in how states, locales, and public/private schools have divergent standards and policies for multilingual education (Frede & Figueras-Daniel, 2014). For example, only 28 out of 50 states provide language education training for general classroom teachers (Wilkins, 2020) and each state has its own classification and definition of "English learner." Although state and federal regulations

require school districts to identify students entitled to supplemental support and services, there is variation in the instruments utilized, such as the Home Language Survey (HLS) and English Language Proficiency assessments, prompting concerns about the validity and consistency of EL classification across states and school districts (Bailey & Kelly, 2013; Lopez et al., 2016; Solórzano, 2008).

At the same time, the broader use and definition of "multilingual students," despite emphasizing a more asset-oriented approach and providing an opportunity to recognize the diverse array of multilingualism and the numerous students incorporating languages other than English into their daily lives and educational experiences, leaves us with some challenges. This broader term can introduce confusion and hinder communication regarding the specific subset of English learners who are classified and legally entitled to tailored support and services and whose progress must be monitored and reported for federal compliance. Thus, a more focused approach when using labels offers clarity and prompts us to direct our attention more precisely toward a defined group within the broader multilingual population. Nevertheless, this narrower approach leaves us without the means to acknowledge and celebrate the numerous multilingual students who are not classified as ELs or do not receive language services.

Multilingual Students in Education

Government and school districts employ various terminology and definitions to identify multilingual students and offer specialized educational services within schools. These labels have faced criticism for promoting English monolingual and assimilationist ideologies, policies, and practices, perpetuating a deficit-focused model and increasing stigma and discrimination against multilingual students (García & Kleifgen, 2018; Kibler et al., 2014). While labels help to facilitate intentional treatments such as specialized services, they also influence unintentional treatments such as stereotyping, social stigma, and low expectations of students (I. M. Umansky, 2016). According to the modified labeling theory, stigma and labeling go hand in hand (Link et al., 1989). For example, the limited English proficiency (LEP) label reinforces the notion that multilingual students are deficient as opposed to recognizing and leveraging their existing strengths and linguistic capital. This prevailing deficit-focused approach prioritizes the question, "How can we get everyone speaking English?" over a strengths-based approach that asks, "How can we value and develop all languages students bring to the classroom?" In 2015, the U.S. Department of Education adopted the English language learner (ELL) term. While more favorable, this language continues to promote a one-dimensional perception of multilingual students. Despite bilingualism being the norm worldwide (Mathews, 2019), the ELL label, sometimes shortened to English learner (EL), normalizes monolingualism and treats those learning English as deviant from the norm (Martinez, 2018), thus impacting students academically and emotionally.

In a 2016 study, Umansky found that, on average, classifying kindergarten students on the cusp of EL–initially fluent English proficient (IFEP) identification as an EL had a negative effect on academic achievement. There was minimal difference in English proficiency between students who scored just below the threshold for IFEP classification versus students who scored just above, indicating that

language classification may be responsible for the variance in student performance. This study, among others, underscores the ramifications of a label that frames multilingual students, specifically ELs, as struggling and inadequate as well as the negative impact that this label may have on teachers' perceptions and expectations of students' academic capabilities (I. Umansky & Dumont, 2019). Given that academic achievement, social and emotional skills, and identity construction are interrelated, it's important to acknowledge how labels may cause multilingual students to internalize stigma as negative emotions about not only their academic identity but also their social identity and self-concept (Aguayo, 2020).

Many have referred to language status as not only a source of stigma and discrimination but also an acculturative stressor for multilingual students, prompting concerns about the manifestation of internalizing and externalizing symptoms (Dawson & Williams, 2008; Pappamihiel, 2001). Extant research has found that ethnic minority youth tend to face more complex challenges as they grow up and interact with mainstream culture (Albeg & Castro-Olivo, 2014). For instance, Dawson and Williams (2008) investigated the relationship between LEP status, as an acculturative stressor, and behavioral outcomes among Latinx students and found that LEP students exhibited higher levels of externalizing symptoms than non-LEP peers. As more than 75% of multilingual students in the United States are Hispanic or Latine (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.), the authors draw attention to the need for school interventions that support Latine students and address the stress and problem behaviors that stem from linguistic assimilation (Dawson & Williams, 2008). This presents an opportunity for schools to leverage universal school-based SEL to support academic and linguistic learning and foster supportive environments in which multilingual students feel engaged and emotionally safe as they adapt to the norms and expectations of mainstream culture.

Additionally, according to the integrative conceptual model of child development, to accurately measure minority outcomes, one must consider students' social positioning (e.g., race, social class) and the set of environmental practices (such as racism, prejudice, and discrimination) associated with each identity (Coll et al., 1996). The educational experiences of multilingual students are multifaceted in that factors such as race, ethnicity, disability, native language, socioeconomic status, and immigration status interact to create overlapping and interdependent systems of advantage and disadvantage. Schools, as well as other community settings, have the power to either protect against or further perpetuate the effects of the "larger societal stereotypes and oppressive policies" on minority students and families (Marks & Coll, 2018, p. 91). Therefore, researchers and practitioners alike should avoid viewing students as a monolith and consider their diverse experiences, strengths, and outcomes.

Students with disabilities represent one of several intersecting identities to consider, given the frequent overlap with multilingual status. While it is challenging to get an accurate picture of the landscape of students due to a lack of systematic and comprehensive reporting, 8.9% of the total population of students with disabilities in the United States are categorized as having limited English proficiency (Data Accountability Center, 2013). More specifically, 50% of multilingual students are classified as having a specific learning disability compared to 38% of native-English students with disabilities (U.S. Department

of Education, n.d.). Although research on the social and emotional needs of students with such intersecting identities is limited, the need for SEL programming that benefits and supports multilingual students with disabilities is evident. For example, students with disabilities may feel rejected by peers or struggle with intra- and interpersonal skills, which may in turn impact their sense of belonging at school. As communication plays a significant role in relationship-building and is a potential barrier for students with intersecting identities, it is essential to consider the societal stigma that this population may face and evaluate how universal school-based SEL can be utilized to strengthen and meet their social and emotional needs.

Niehaus and Adelson (2013) analyzed self-concept among English-proficient students, Spanish-speaking ELLs, and ELLs from Asian backgrounds. For social-emotional self-concept, they found a significant difference between Spanish-speaking ELLs and Asian ELLs. Spanish-speaking ELLs reported higher externalizing (e.g., inattention) and internalizing (e.g., anxiety) behaviors than their counterparts. Conversely, Asian ELLs reported lower levels of peer acceptance (e.g., I make friends easily) than both groups. Given that Spanish is the home language of 75.5% of students attending public school in the United States and Asians constitute the second-largest group of multilingual students (National Center for Education Statistics, 2023), this cross-group comparison underscores the nuanced experiences of multilingual students. Findings also amplify the need for culturally responsive SEL interventions, which can play a pivotal role in prioritizing the emotional well-being of multilingual students and fostering their sense of belonging in school.

In the Niehaus and Adelson (2013) study, variables such as poverty and school's racial-ethnic composition may have influenced differences in perceived social-emotional well-being, highlighting the complexity and intersectionality of identity. Immigration and refugee status are additional characteristics to consider when evaluating factors influencing multilingual students' social-emotional needs. Kao (2017) stresses the importance of schools understanding the difference between immigrant and refugee students, and how their academic, social, and emotional needs may differ based on their respective linguistic, academic, and cultural backgrounds. Immigrants often come to the United States in search of economic and educational opportunities, while refugees are often forced out of their homes or fleeing from danger (Kao, 2017). Depending on their immigration status (i.e., newcomer, immigrant, refugee), these multilingual students may endure stress related to acculturation, family separation, or trauma, as well as other environmental obstacles influenced by their social positioning. Research shows that the skills needed to recognize, understand, and regulate emotions are highly dependent on context, culture, and language proficiency (Bamberg, 1997; Van Hemert et al., 2007). Therefore, these realities call for culturally and linguistically responsive supports, such as intervention adaptations, that equip multilingual students with skills to manage emotions tied to their sociocultural experiences, as well as take into account the role that language proficiency and culture may play in the interpretation of SEL competencies (Blanco-Vega et al., 2008; Castro-Olivo, 2014; Kao, 2017).

Overall, multilingual students have faced various challenges and barriers while navigating the sociolinguistic and sociopolitical contexts of their education system's policies, practices, and interventions. With achievement standards continuing to perpetuate and emphasize English-only policies and academic outcomes, schools and classrooms are framed as English-dominant spaces that typically neglect the development of students' multilingual repertoires, fail to adequately measure/capture students' full breadth of knowledge, and limit educational opportunities for promoting cultural and linguistic expressions that reflect students' specific needs. For example, in the United States, state standardized assessments are typically administered in English, raising concerns about fully capturing the extent to which students may understand academic concepts. When assessing knowledge of subjects, such as mathematics or science, multilingual students are placed at a linguistic disadvantage as their scores may be influenced by their level of English proficiency (Farah, 2017). Similarly, there is a gap in culturally and linguistically relevant tools for assessing multilingual students' social and emotional skills (Elias, 2019; Russo-Ponsaran et al., 2023). Restricting SEL assessments to one language limits the ability of schools to understand the degree to which multilingual students can explicitly identify, understand, and perform SEL skills. As language abilities change over time, so do emotional elements and processes that impact learners' behaviors, such as their interactions in the classroom or feelings toward learning. At the same time, multilingual learners may also face the additional barrier of not being able to rely on a common language to build trust and understanding with their peers or teachers. In fact, research has found that the use of students' home language in the classroom can serve as a positive moderating factor on dual language learners' social and emotional development (T. G. Halle et al., 2014). As such, there is a need to better understand if and how SEL efforts mitigate the factors that hinder multilingual students' socio-emotional and educational outcomes and support multilingual students' positive adjustments in school and beyond. SEL has the opportunity to operate as a solution to these challenges. Although the current literature is not expansive enough to draw firm conclusions, the existing research on SEL and multilingual students emphasizes the benefits that these interventions have for this population (Heineke et al., 2023; Niehaus & Adelson, 2013, 2014). As such, in the current article, we present a systematic review of K–12 SEL interventions for multilingual students in education research and practice.

Extant Reviews of Universal School-Based SEL and ELs/Multilingual Students

There are few existing systematic reviews and meta-analyses that consider multilingual students in the SEL empirical evidence base. Although the current review is inclusive of all multilingual students, regardless of their classification or receipt of language services, most existing research focuses specifically on those students receiving EL services and/or their classification status. As such, most, if not all, of the current literature surrounding SEL in the service of multilingual students is limited to those classified as English learners. One review of the literature examined the impact of SEL in U.S. elementary classrooms, focusing specifically on benefits for English language learners (Adams & Richie, 2017). They

found a lack of evidence for this population, with few studies being included in the review, all of which were conducted by the same authors. In this review, the authors emphasize the high levels of internalizing symptoms, externalizing behaviors, and disconnection from peers that ELLs report; note the impact that these factors have on students' academic achievement; and highlight the ways in which integrating SEL into mainstream classrooms can address these problems and benefit ELLs.

To the best of our knowledge, this is the only review that has explicitly examined the importance and possible benefits of SEL for multilingual students. However, there are related reviews that provide further evidence for the importance of social and emotional learning for multilingual students. For example, a systematic review of 10 published studies within the United States examined peer interaction for English language learners, finding that healthy peer relationships are crucial to effective language acquisition among preschool students (Washington-Nortey et al., 2022). Though the review did not examine SEL as a whole, peer relationships are an important component of SEL, given SEL's focus on social skills. As such, the review's emphasis on the importance of peer relationships for ELLs and their impact on improved academic outcomes provides evidence for the potential benefits of social skills–focused SEL programming for multilingual students.

Additionally, a report on SEL for students aged 3–8 noted some of the ways that language learner status may impact students' experience with SEL, ranging from difficulties naming emotions in their second language to external environmental factors that often correlate with language learner status, adding additional stressors (O'Conner et al., 2017). Though the review highlights the lack of research on SEL for multilingual students in the early years, the authors describe strategies that can be beneficial in SEL programming for multilingual students. Such strategies include translating lessons into students' home language, incorporating visuals and checks for understanding, and utilizing approaches that strengthen interpersonal skills like roleplaying and peer tutoring.

Finally, a global meta-analysis of SEL interventions in preschools (Murano et al., 2020) coded English language learner status as a program moderator. The authors identified 48 articles for inclusion and found that only four studies considered ELLs. While the sample of ELLs was too small to conduct analyses, the authors analyzed studies of at-risk students, which encompassed ELLs. Findings revealed that studies on at-risk students had significantly smaller effect sizes than those with no at-risk populations. This highlights the lack of representation and consideration for multilingual students within the evidence base for SEL. In summary, the state of the literature is such that the majority of research on multilingual students has been done on preschool populations, and there is a stark lack of any research on SEL for this population.

To date, there is no systematic review or meta-analysis that considers multilingual students within SEL, inclusive of all K–12 students and with the U.S. context, a demographic that is vital to consider, given the vast potential benefits that multilingual learners can gain from SEL interventions. Based on initial findings from our review, we hypothesize that the evidence for the impact of universal SEL interventions on multilingual students will be scarce. As such, we will use the

Registered K–12 Contemporary SEL Data Set (Cipriano et al., 2023a) to examine the representation of multilingual students within the evidence for K–12 SEL interventions.

What We Know From the Registered K–12 Contemporary SEL Data Set

Long overdue and inspired by the seminal meta-analysis by Durlak et al. (2011) examining the state of the evidence for universal school-based SEL interventions that were available through December 31, 2007, Cipriano et al. (2023a) sought to update and evolve the analysis of evidence concerning K–12 universal school-based SEL interventions spanning from January 1, 2008, to December 31, 2020. Seeking to elucidate significant advancements in SEL content and implementation and their impact on various outcomes, including who benefits from these interventions, the Registered K–12 Contemporary SEL Data Set emerged. By adopting a broad definition of SEL and incorporating key features of implementation identified in recent literature, this data allows the field of SEL to clarify the evidence associated with SEL interventions and their outcomes. As such, new information is emerging concerning the current evidence for SEL interventions among K–12 students.

Cipriano et al. (2023a) registered a systematic review and meta-analysis of 424 studies of SEL, which found limited representation of student demographic characteristics. Specifically, 50.9% of studies reported the race/ethnicity of students, 40.8% reported on student socioeconomic status, 16.5% mentioned students with disabilities, and no studies reported on student sexual identity. Only 13% of studies reported on student native language status, with 1.9% actively excluding participation in the study based on the student's or guardian's language status. Furthermore, a systematic review (Cipriano et al., 2023b) of 269 studies of elementary school SEL in the United States looked specifically into two categories of marginalized students, students with disabilities and students with minoritized racial identities, finding that insufficient numbers of studies considered how each identity may impact intervention efficacy and only one examined students at the intersection of both identities (Osher et al., 2014).

A similar lack of demographic analysis is found within the U.S. context; a secondary meta-analytic review examining 90 studies—which were conducted in the United States and had reported effect sizes—found that student demographic data were reported similarly inconsistently (Cipriano et al., 2024). While 89.9% of studies reported on student gender and 74.7% reported on student race or ethnicity, only 33.3 reported on disability status and 14.4% on native language status. Furthermore, only 3.3% of studies explored disability status as a covariate, and no studies examined language status as a covariate (Cipriano et al., 2024).

The Current Systematic Review

To build an empirical foundation for the study of multilingual learners in the SEL empirical evidence base, the present paper examines two main research questions: (1) Are multilingual students represented in the global evidence for SEL interventions? If so, how and in what way? (2) How and in what way are multilingual students represented in the evidence for SEL interventions within the United States? Based on our findings to date, we hypothesize that the number of

studies that report the relationship between SEL interventions and multilingual students will be small; our study intends to examine the representation of multilingual students in SEL intervention programs to the best available extent.

Method

This systematic review conducts secondary data analysis of the Registered K–12 Contemporary SEL Data Set (Cipriano et al., 2023a), following the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) guidelines (Page et al., 2021). This secondary analysis employed a critical, equity-informed lens to examine the representation of multilingual learners in existing systematic reviews of school-based social and emotional learning (SEL) interventions. While the scope of the original review (Cipriano et al., 2023a) did not allow for a comprehensive assessment of culturally and linguistically sustaining practices, this reanalysis focused on how multilingual students were included, described, or omitted across studies. Methodological decisions were guided by a recognition of the power dynamics embedded in both language and SEL discourse, particularly how interventions may reinforce or challenge dominant monolingual and assimilationist norms. We reviewed the extent to which multilingual learners were named, how their linguistic identities (i.e., labels used) were framed (e.g., as deficits, assets, or neutralized), and whether language was acknowledged as a factor in SEL outcomes. This approach aims to surface patterns of invisibility or deficit framing, while offering a critique of how SEL has been operationalized in ways that may obscure or marginalize multilingual learners. Findings are discussed in relation to broader conversations around equity, linguistic justice, and the transformative potential of SEL as a tool for reimagining inclusive and affirming school environments (Jagers et al., 2019; Paris & Alim, 2017). This section briefly outlines the existing dataset used for analysis, data screening, and extraction.

Inclusion Criteria

Studies were included in this sample if they were an experimental evaluation of an SEL intervention that targeted one or more intrapersonal skills and interpersonal skills and (a) implemented a randomized or quasi-experimental design testing the effects of an intervention; (b) contained a control group (wait list or attention placebo); (c) involved at least six sessions if it is a classroom-based intervention or lasts for at least four months if a whole school approach is undertaken; (d) allowed for the calculation of effect sizes through data available in print or provided by authors; and (e) appeared in English in any country between January 1, 2008, and December 31, 2020. Complete search strategy and inclusion criteria and methodology can be found at https://osf.io/6pqx2/.

This dataset includes 424 studies of SEL interventions, comprising 252 SEL interventions. To ensure reliability, all articles were independently reviewed by two of the authors, and conflicts were resolved through discussion. In the parent dataset, authors reported strong interrater reliability for both stages of screening (0.93%–1% for title and abstract, and .81%–.98% agreement for full text; Cipriano et al., 2023a). In our analytic sample, authors were in perfect agreement (1%) for full-text screening of included studies ($n = 57$). Two authors reviewed studies ($n = 59$) that were coded as having reported language learner status, if language

TABLE 1

Characteristics of included studies (n = 424)

	n	(%)
Reported on participant language status	57	(13.4)
Excluded participants on the basis of language	11	(2.6)
Reported at sample level	50	(11.8)
Reported at population level	21	(5.0)
Analyzed intervention outcomes by language status	17	(4.0)
As a mediator or covariate	15	(3.5)
As a moderator	2	(0.5)
Analyzed intervention outcomes within a language status sample	3	(0.7)

learner status was analyzed as a moderating/mediating variable on intervention outcomes, or if studies indicated that language learner participants were excluded based on their or their guardian's language levels. Specifically, our inclusion criteria for identifying studies as "including multilingual representation" were fairly broad, including all studies that, whether at the sample or population level, mentioned language diversity. We limited our analysis to those studies that include multilingual representation ($n = 57$). The two studies that were dropped (Kozina, 2018; Lam & Seiden, 2020) mentioned the use of translated study measures (e.g., the Chinese version of the measure) to be used in the study, rather than mentioning participants' language diversity explicitly. The 57 remaining studies were further reviewed to refine the data respective to the level of data reported (e.g., population level, sample level), the type of representation data reported (e.g., language spoken at home, language learner services), if language status was analyzed as a moderating/mediating variable on intervention outcomes, and if language learners were excluded based on their or their guardian's language level (Table 1). General information about the studies was also provided in the dataset, including author(s), study title, year of publication, publication type, journal name, name of SEL intervention, developmental level of youth, and the country in which the study was conducted (Table 2).

Next, we restricted the data to studies conducted in the United States ($n = 32$). Figure 1 shows the levels of inclusion and exclusion for studies across the review.

Language Diversity Characteristics

Representation of multilingualism was coded if the language diversity of students was reported, and if so, how (coded as non-English-speaking background, non-native first language, primary language, language spoken at home, dual language learner, language fluency [either of the students or their parents/guardians], language learner services, immigration status, language classroom, or a combination of multiple categories; Table 2). Although many of these codes preexisted in the dataset, we returned to the source texts to extract additional information to support the most comprehensive representation of student language representation and variability within the data available to date.

TABLE 2

Characteristics of studies reporting on language status (n = 57)

	n	(%)
Language Status Representation		
Non-English-speaking background*	1	(1.8)
Non-native first language	2	(3.5)
Primary language	4	(7.0)
Language spoken at home	5	(8.8)
Dual language learner	1	(1.8)
Language fluency (parents included)	6	(10.5)
Language learner services (LL, LEP, ESL, EAL)	26	(45.6)
Immigration status	2	(3.5)
Language classroom**	1	(1.8)
Combination of the above categories+	9	(15.8)
Developmental Level of Youth		
Childhood	41	(71.9)
Early adolescence	11	(19.3)
Adolescence	5	(8.8)
Country Study Conducted		
USA	32	(56.1)
England	3	(5.3)
Ireland	1	(1.8)
China	1	(1.8)
Australia	4	(7.0)
Finland	3	(5.3)
Norway	3	(5.3)
Canada	8	(14.0)
Iran	1	(1.8)
Democratic Republic of Congo	1	(1.8)

Note. LL = language learner; LEP = limited English proficiency, ESL = English as a second language, EAL = English as an additional language.

*Also denoted as "speak language other than English."

**Includes bilingual classroom, language immersion classroom, or "language of classroom instruction."

+Includes the parent's primary language. Childhood (5–10 years old; kindergarten), early adolescence (11–13, 6th–8th grade), adolescence (14–18, 9th–12th grade).

Level of Language Status Representation

We coded student representation at two levels: population and sample. Population-level student language representation includes the presentation of descriptive data at the regional, state, county, district, or school level (unless the level of analysis was at the school level itself). For example, language status (e.g., approximately 25% of students in the district speak a first language other than

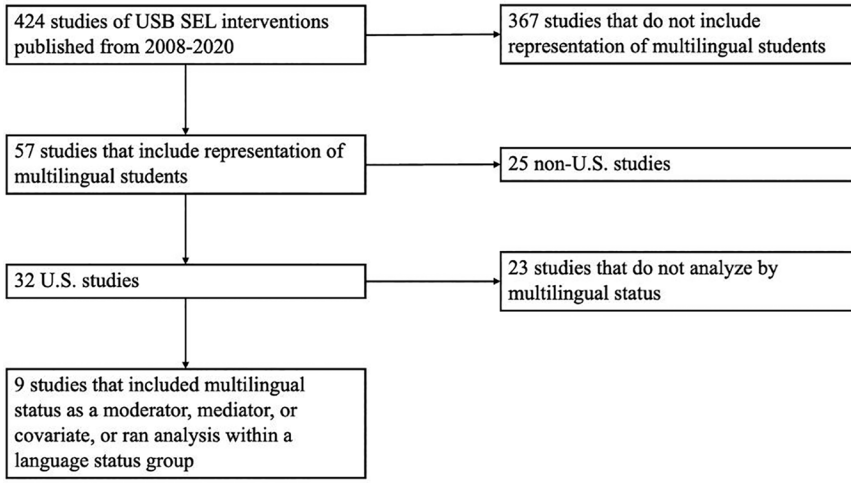

FIGURE 1. *Stages of inclusion and exclusion of studies.*

English at home) is presented as a proportion of students within the school district. This differs from the sample-level student language representation, which includes the presentation of descriptive data of the sample of study: those participating in the SEL intervention and/or the control group (including when schools themselves were the level of intervention).

Analytic Representation of Language Diversity

We coded the representation of students in study results into three categories: as a mediator or covariate (on intervention outcomes), as a moderator (on intervention outcomes), or as the sample (e.g., sample was homogeneous, and results were presented only for multilingual status students). Studies reporting only results for students with multilingual representation status, such as those receiving EL services, were coded as "analyzed intervention outcomes within a language status sample" (Table 1). Moderating variables influence the magnitude, direction, or existence of a connection between independent and dependent variables. In contrast, covariates are moderating/mediating variables controlled for or kept constant in a study to prevent them from affecting statistical outcomes (Baron & Kenny, 1986; Cohen et al., 2014). Language diversity status is a common moderator often included or controlled for as a covariate in developmental science statistical models, used to inform for whom and under what conditions a relationship will hold.

Results

Language Representation in All Studies

Of the 424 studies of SEL interventions that were made available from 2008 to 2020 and published in English, 57 studies, or 13.4%, had representation from

multilingual students. This was inclusive of 41 different SEL intervention programs, reflecting 76,163 students. Fifty studies (11.8%) reported language learner status at the sample level, while 21 studies (5%) reported at the population level. Seventeen studies analyzed whether the intervention outcomes differed by language status (4.0%), with 15 studies using language status as a mediator or covariate in the analysis and two studies analyzing outcome differences by language status representation. Three studies analyzed intervention outcomes within a language status sample (.7%), such as studying a sample of all EL students and analyzing outcomes within this population. Eleven studies excluded students from participating based on language learner status, four of which were also based on the parent/guardian's language fluency, and one due to students being in a language immersion classroom. The ways in which studies included language learner status are detailed in Table 1.

Included Studies: Studies That Report on Language Status

The 57 studies that reported on language status represented a variety of types of studies. The characteristics of included studies that examine K–12 student language status are detailed later and listed in Table 2.

Language Status Representation

Out of the 57 studies that examined language status, the most common classification was the use of language learner services such as "Limited English Proficiency," "English as a Second Language," and "Language Learner," with 26 studies (45.6%) using this representation. Of the remaining studies, six reported language fluency (10.5%), five reported language spoken at home (8.8%), four reported primary language (7.0%), two each reported nonnative first language and immigration status (3.5%), and one study each reported non-English-speaking background, dual language learner status, and language classroom (1.8%). Nine studies reported a combination of categories (15.8%).

Report Type

Most of the included studies were peer-reviewed published articles ($n = 43$, 75.4%), with 10 dissertations (17.5%), two unpublished technical reports/program evaluations (3.5%), one unpublished master's thesis (1.8%), and one published book chapter (1.8%; Table S1, online only).

Study Design

Over half of the studies ($n = 37$, 64.9%) were randomized controlled trials, while 20 studies (35%) utilized quasi-experimental research designs.

Study Country

Studies were conducted in 10 different countries. In order of frequency, these countries are the United States ($n = 32$; 56.1%); Canada ($n = 8$, 14.0%); Australia ($n = 4$, 7.0%); Finland, Norway, and England ($n = 3$, 5.3%); and Ireland, China, Iran, and Democratic Republic of Congo ($n = 1$, 1.8%). Most studies ($n = 39$, 79.6%) were conducted in the same country in which the intervention was

developed, and 10 studies (20.4%) were conducted in countries different than where the intervention was developed.

Developmental Level

Studies were primarily conducted with children ($n = 41$, 71.9%) while the remaining studies were conducted with early adolescents ($n = 11$, 19.3%), with only five studies listing adolescents as the intervention target population (8.8%; Table S2, online only).

Adaptation

Three studies indicated that the intervention was adapted for the study by the researchers before the study began (5.3%). Seven studies indicated that the intervention was adapted for the local context, with two (3.5%) indicating a priori adaptation by the program developers and five (8.8%) indicating local adaptation (Table S2, online only).

Year

To be included, studies had to be published between 2008 and 2020. There was one study from 2008 and 2009, respectively (1.8%), six from 2010 (10.5%), seven from 2011 (12.3%), five from 2012 (8.8%), four each from 2013 and 2014 (7%), five from 2015 (8.8%), three from 2016 (5.3%), four from 2017 (7%), six from 2018 (10.5%), seven from 2019 (12.3%), and four from 2020 (7%; Table S1, online only).

Primary Change Agent

In most studies ($n = 43$, 75.4%), the primary change agent was teachers or aides. Seven studies (12.3%) utilized researchers as primary change agents, five studies (8.8%) used school staff other than teachers, and one study (1.8%) used parents or caregivers. Only one study had primary change agents that did not fall into the above categories (Table S2, online only).

U.S.-Only Context

There were 22 unique SEL interventions represented within the 32 included studies conducted in the United States, reflecting 38,333 students. The most frequently studied intervention was *positive action* ($n = 5$, 15.6%), followed by *responsive classroom* with three studies (9.38%). *INSIGHTS, second step, student success skills*, and the *4Rs program* all had two studies (6.25%). In addition, three of the unique interventions (9.38%) were unnamed. Table 3 displays characteristics of the SEL intervention implemented in the United States (Table 3), and we further provide descriptive characteristics of each study ($n = 9$) that included multilingual status as a moderator, mediator, or covariate, or ran analysis within a language status group (Table 4).

Within the 32 studies conducted in the United States, the most commonly endorsed skill was interpersonal at 29 studies (90.6%), followed by responsible decision-making, cognitive regulation, and intrapersonal skills at 28 studies each (87.5%). Over half of the studies included efforts to improve school climate ($n = 20$, 62.5%), but less than half included efforts to focus on adult SEL ($n = 10$, 31.3%).

TABLE 3

Characteristics of the intervention in the U.S. context (n = 32)

	n	(%)
Different interventions represented	22	
Intervention adapted for the study	1	(3.1)
Skills Endorsed (Yes)		
CASEL-self awareness	23	(71.9)
CASEL-self management	24	(75)
CASEL-social awareness	24	(75)
CASEL-relationship skills	27	(84.4)
CASEL-responsible decision-making	28	(87.5)
EASEL-cognitive regulation	28	(87.5)
EASEL-emotional process	26	(81.3)
EASEL-interpersonal	29	(90.6)
EASEL-values	22	(68.8)
EASEL-perspective	13	(40.6)
EASEL-identity	13	(40.6)
Intrapersonal skills	28	(87.5)
Efforts to improve school climate (Yes)	20	(62.5)
Efforts to focus on adult SEL (Yes)	10	(31.3)
Primary Change Agent		
Teachers/aides	21	(36.8)
School staff other than teachers/aides	4	(12.5)
Researchers and/or their staff	5	(8.8)
Parents or caregivers	1	(3.1)
Other	1	(3.1)
Family Engagement		
No FE component mentioned	12	(37.5)
Letters/emails/phone calls to guardians to inform them about the intervention	15	(46.9)
Student given homework assignments and guardians specifically asked to supervise or help with homework completion	1	(3.1)
Family is sent videos/CDs, booklets, or manuals and asked to extend the intervention into the home	4	(12.5)
Community Engagement		
No CE component is mentioned	31	(96.9)
Community volunteers helped with school-based program	1	(3.1)

The majority of studies either had no family engagement ($n = 12$, 37.5%) or only sent home letters/phone calls to guardians ($n = 15$, 46.9%), while only four studies had guardians send booklets or other materials home (12.5%). Only one study (3.1%) included any community engagement components. In 21 studies (36.8%),

TABLE 4

U.S. studies that included multilingual status as a moderator, mediator, covariate, or ran analysis within a language status group (n = 9)

Study author	Intervention	Intervention duration (min/session)	School level	# of participants at baseline (intervention/control)	Outcome construct (Hedges' g): measures
*Baroody et al. (2014)	Responsive classroom	Up to one year	Elementary	387	Student-teacher closeness: Student-teacher relationship scale Student-teacher conflict: Student-teacher relationship scale
Bos et al. (2019)	Building assets, reducing risks (BARR)	Up to one year (60)	High school	4168 (1251 / 1463)	Failed at least one core course (.110) Suspensions Sense of belonging Expectations and rigor Supportive relationships NWEA mathematics growth met NWEA mathematics score NWEA reading growth met NWEA reading scores Grade point average Persistence to grade 10 Student engagement Social and emotional learning Chronic absence Teachers' perception of student behaviors Teachers' view of student accountability Teachers' view of students' observed behaviors Grit

(continued)

TABLE 4 (continued)

Study author	Intervention	Intervention duration (min/session)	School level	# of participants at baseline (intervention/control)	Outcome construct (Hedges' g): measures
Castro-Olivo (2014)	Strong teens	Up to half a year	High school	102 (49 / 53)	SE resiliency (.351): BSERS-2 SEL knowledge (1.577): Strong teens Knowledge test
*Hanson et al. (2012)	Lessons in character	More than one year (20)	Elementary school	4683 (507 / 507)	Academic achievement: ELA test scores, teacher report Social competence: SSRS, student report Externalizing behaviors: teacher report Aggression: student report Delinquent behavior: student report School expectations: Character*plus* student and teacher report Students' feelings of belonging: Character*plus* student and teacher report
Hetrick (2018)	Strong kids	60	Middle school	891 (399 / 492)	Internalizing (−.125): SRSSIE12 Externalizing (.045): SRSSIE12
*McCormick et al. (2020)	INSIGHTS	More than one year (120)	Elementary school	353	Academic achievement: ELA and math test scores
McCormick et al. (2019)	INSIGHTS	Up to one year (45)	Elementary school	1643 (800 / 843)	Grade retention (−.144) Receipt of SPED services (−.103)
*Ottmar et al. (2015)	Responsive classroom	Up to one year	Elementary school	1533	Math achievement: Stanford Achievement Test–10th Edition Math achievement: State standardized assessment
*Rimm-Kaufman et al. (2014)	Responsive classroom	More than one year	Elementary school	2904	Student achievement: Standard of Learning (SOL) test

Note. *Studies that were only included in the systematic review dataset and did not meet the criteria for inclusion in the meta-analytic dataset.

the primary change agents were teachers or aides. The primary change agents were other school staff in four studies (12.5%), researchers in five studies (8.8%), and parents or caregivers in one study (3.1%). One study (3.1%) had a different primary change agent than the categories listed. The majority of studies conducted in the United States did so at the childhood level ($n = 24$, 75%), with four studies each looking at early adolescence and adolescence (12.5%). Only one study (3.1%) indicated that the intervention was adapted for the study.

Language Diversity in SEL Evidence

Though there were 32 studies conducted in the United States that represented language status in some way, only nine of these studies (28.1%) analyzed intervention outcomes using language status as a mediator or moderator, or analyzed outcomes within a language status sample. Of the nine U.S. studies that denoted multilingual student representation in the analysis, three studies examined outcomes for multilingual students (Bos et al., 2019; Castro-Olivo, 2014; Hetrick, 2018). Two of these studies used language status to examine changes in the strength or direction of the relationship between intervention/predictors and outcomes (i.e., as a moderator; Bos et al., 2019; Hetrick, 2018), and one study analyzed intervention outcomes among a sample of linguistically diverse students (i.e., taking a within-group approach among multilingual students; Castro-Olivo, 2014).

Castro-Olivo's (2014) study, published in *School Psychology Quarterly*, examined the implementation of the culturally adapted *Jóvenes Fuertes* (*Strong Teens*) SEL program and its effect on the socio-emotional outcomes (specifically knowledge of SEL and socio-emotional resiliency) of Latino ELLs in Southern California, finding a large effect on SEL knowledge ($g = 1.577$) and a moderate effect on socio-emotional resiliency ($g = .351$). This is the only U.S. study that adapted the SEL intervention. Specifically, this intervention was adapted for Latino adolescents, all of whom reported Spanish as their dominant language and were enrolled in beginning to intermediate English language development classes.

Hetrick's (2018) study, an unpublished dissertation, examined the second edition of the *Strong Kids* SEL curriculum and its effect on K–6 students' socio-emotional competency development. Overall, the study found statistically significant reductions in internalizing behaviors for all students and statistically significant reductions in externalizing behaviors of primary school students. Alongside these main effects, the researcher reported a statistically significant ($p < .05$) effect of the intervention on SEL content knowledge gains for students receiving English language support; English learners in the intervention curriculum had a change in score of 1.41 compared to 1.05 for non-English learners and 0.41 for English learners in the control group. Additionally, students in grades K–2 receiving English language support experienced a negative but statistically significant ($p < .001$) interaction effect compared to the control group in internalizing behaviors (e.g., anxiety, loneliness), with students in the control group experiencing a greater decrease in these behaviors.

The 2019 study, an unpublished program evaluation technical report, analyzed the effects of the *building assets, reducing risks* (BARR) intervention on over 4,000 ninth graders and their teachers in 11 high schools across five states.

Overall, the BARR intervention had a positive impact on the percentage of students failing a course, as well as student-reported experiences of supportive relationships, expectations and rigor, and student engagement. The intervention had a statistically significant reduction in the percentage of English Learners failing one or more courses (ES = .29, $p < .001$), though there was no statistically significant difference in effect size between English learners and non-English learners. Students in the intervention group also demonstrated statistically significant increases in supportive relationships, expectations and rigor, and student engagement, regardless of English learning status, though English learners showed greater effect sizes. The intervention did not significantly impact English learners' GPA, reading growth, or math growth, though there were statistically significant positive impacts in these domains for non-EL-classified students compared to their control group counterparts.

Discussion

Through secondary analyses of a recent systematic review and meta-analysis of universal school-based SEL intervention studies worldwide (Cipriano et al., 2023a), this review examined how multilingual K–12 students are represented in and benefit from SEL interventions. Emphasis is placed on SEL interventions conducted in the United States, where more than one-fifth of K–12 students are multilingual. We discuss the lack of multilingual student representation in the SEL empirical evidence base, as well as the insufficient extant evidence of the effectiveness of SEL for multilingual students.

Under-representation of Multilingual Students in SEL Empirical Evidence

Despite multilingual students making up over 20% of the K–12 student population (U.S. Census Bureau, n.d.), this review illuminates a lack of representation of multilingual students in the evidence base for SEL interventions. Results indicate modest attempts to reflect the linguistic heterogeneity of the school-age population, which is congruent with Murano et al.'s (2020) findings. Only 32 (18%) of the SEL intervention studies in the United States reported the linguistic distribution of the student sample. Merely two SEL interventions (i.e., *positive action, responsive classroom*) had three or more intervention studies in the United States with multilingual student representation. Globally, only 57 (13%) of the SEL intervention studies worldwide reported the linguistic distribution of the student sample. Merely three SEL interventions (i.e., *positive action, incredible years, responsive classroom*) had three or more intervention studies worldwide with multilingual student representation. Eleven studies (2.6%) had explicitly stated that the language status of students or their parents/guardians was used as part of the exclusion criteria.

The underrepresentation of multilingual students in the empirical evidence of SEL intervention gives us pause. In the absence of empirical data from which to understand how multilingual students are benefiting from SEL, it is unclear if and how the positive effects of SEL interventions (Cipriano et al., 2023b) generalize to multilingual students. Findings from SEL intervention studies cannot be generalized to multilingual students when student samples are primarily English monolinguals (Heineke et al., 2023). Interpretations drawn about the

effectiveness of such SEL interventions for multilingual students can be dangerously misleading and perpetuate inequity. Moreover, most SEL intervention studies in this review did not report the linguistic distribution of students in their samples. It is unknown whether the studies excluded multilingual students or failed to provide an option to indicate linguistic representation or proficiency. Nonreporting is a concern as linguistic information about the sample is key to determining the appropriateness of a program's use with multilingual students. Ensuring adequate representation of multilingual students in empirical studies is a critical area of need towards this end. As such, there is an immense need for a large-scale and comprehensive investigation of the benefits of SEL interventions explicitly for multilingual students.

Notably, the linguistic representation in studies that did include multilingual students was neither adequate nor fully inclusive. Most studies focused on one specific subgroup of multilingual students—those who are legally entitled to tailored educational support and services. Common labels included "Limited English Proficiency," "English as a Second Language," and "Language Learner," which frame multilingualism as a deficit (Martinez, 2018). This not only reinforces narratives that privilege English-dominant norms and assimilationist ideologies but also undermines the value and assets of linguistic diversity (García & Kleifgen, 2018; Soto-Boykin et al., 2023). Few studies, if any, included multilingual students who are proficient/fluent in English but use other languages at home or multilingual students who are native English users but are learning another language at school. Despite the emergent use of "multilingualism" to promote an asset-based approach (García & Kleifgan, 2018) and recognize the numerous and diverse students who engage with more than one language in their day-to-day lives, multilingual students who are not classified as ELs or do not receive English language services are often not acknowledged in education research (Kibler et al., 2014). Unfortunately, the deficit connotations associated with multilingual students remain prevalent in education literature.

Furthermore, the majority of SEL intervention studies in this review that had multilingual student representation were conducted with primary (elementary) school students in grades K–5. Similar findings were reported by Adams and Richie (2017). The effects of SEL interventions for multilingual adolescents remain underexplored, given the few studies conducted with secondary (middle and high) school students in grades 6–12. Additionally, none of the SEL intervention studies in this review explored intersectionality. It is vital to examine how multiple identities may interact and overlap (e.g., Hispanic/Latine and multilingual, Asian and multilingual, immigrant and multilingual, refugee and multilingual, low economic standing and multilingual) to create unique SEL intervention experiences for multilingual students (Linan-Thompson et al., 2018), given the differential socio-emotional needs and schooling experiences of multilingual students with intersecting identities.

Insufficient SEL Empirical Evidence for Multilingual Students

Critical consideration of group differences between multilingual and monolingual students, as well as subgroup differences within multilingual students (e.g., English learners vs. non-English learners), is needed to better understand how

SEL interventions support and serve linguistically diverse student populations (Niehaus & Adelson, 2013). SEL interventions have the potential to help all students thrive and succeed in school, but only if linguistic representation and appropriateness are considered. Results show limited attempts to delve into the effectiveness of SEL interventions explicitly for multilingual students, despite studies consisting of randomized controlled trials (65%) or quasi-experiments (35%). Only five (1%) of the SEL intervention studies worldwide examined efficacy for multilingual students. Merely three (2%) of the SEL intervention studies in the United States examined efficacy for multilingual students, of which two were not published in peer-reviewed journals. Preliminary findings indicate statistically significant improvements in student achievement, engagement, behavior, and SEL content knowledge for multilingual students. This holds promise for the potential of universal school-based SEL interventions to promote the academic and psychosocial functioning of multilingual students.

It is important to point out that only one SEL intervention study within the United States adapted the program for multilingual students. Considering the linguistic heterogeneity among students in the United States, more instances of adaptation were expected; however, this was not the case. This raises concerns about the extent to which (1) supportive and equitable learning spaces are created for multilingual students, (2) the cultural and linguistic strengths of multilingual students are harnessed and celebrated, and (3) the socio-emotional needs of multilingual students are identified and met. A culturally and linguistically responsive lens is key to effective SEL interventions (Blanco-Vega et al., 2008; Castro-Olivo, 2014; Kao, 2017). For instance, researchers and educators could utilize translanguaging, which is described as leveraging all linguistic resources and assets to make sense of academic content and the social world, as an asset-based approach to adapt SEL for multilingual students (Song et al., 2022). Note that an educator does not have to be bilingual to encourage translanguaging (Linan-Thompson et al., 2018). For example, a teacher may speak only in English but be open to the students' use of their home language to make sense of their instruction in English. More work is needed to provide evidence-based recommendations and limitations for SEL interventions with K–12 multilingual students, particularly for the United States, where multilingual learners are one of the fastest-growing populations.

Few studies of SEL intervention with multilingual students integrated family engagement. In the United States, the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) requires schools to engage families in ways that support student learning. A common example is using home languages in all oral and written communication with multilingual families (Coady, 2019). Efforts to increase family engagement in SEL interventions is crucial to enhancing a sense of belonging with multilingual students and promoting a sense of community with multilingual families (Heineke et al., 2023). Purposeful integration of multilingual students and families in an English-dominant classroom/school via SEL interventions (such as opportunities to share and celebrate different home languages) nurtures awareness and acceptance of linguistic and cultural diversity. Moreover, few SEL intervention studies with multilingual students focused on building teachers' SEL knowledge and skills, despite teachers and aides being the primary change agents for most SEL interventions with multilingual students in the United States and worldwide. In

the United States, teachers are the best implementers of SEL (Cipriano et al., 2024). This is no surprise given the integral role teachers play in fostering positive and supportive spaces for learning as well as building trust and understanding with multilingual students (Heineke et al., 2023). As Schonert-Reichl (2017) asserts, "Teachers are the engine that drives SEL programs and practices in schools and classrooms, and their own social-emotional competence and wellbeing strongly influence their students" (p. 173). Yet SEL training is a neglected area in teacher education.

Limitations

Although this review is based on a registered data set, it only includes SEL intervention studies from 2008 through 2020 that were available in English (Cipriano et al., 2023a). Future reviews may wish to consider the inclusion of studies prior to 2008 (e.g., Durlak et al., 2011), studies available in non-English languages, and single case designs (e.g., Steed et al. 2021; Sutherland et al., 2019) to inform differential findings relative to multilingual students and SEL. Second, this review focused on SEL intervention studies with multilingual students in the United States. Caution is needed in the interpretation of findings on SEL intervention studies with multilingual students worldwide given divergent international contexts. More studies should delve into SEL interventions with multilingual students in other countries (e.g., Kim et al., 2022; Song et al., 2022). Third, this review solely examined the linguistic identity of students. Future research should look at students' intersectional, overlapping, and interconnected identities in SEL interventions—specifically race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status, disability, and their axes with language—in the context of SEL.

A Call for the Inclusion of Multilingual Students in SEL Evidence

Multilingualism is necessary for education research in the United States given the heterogenous linguistic landscape of the country (Ang, 2021). This review urges immediate action to explicitly include the representation of multilingual students in SEL interventions within the U.S. context. Despite advances in multilingual education across the United States, there remains a crucial need for educational studies to address inclusion, support, and impact of multilingualism on learning outcomes, particularly social and emotional development (Murano et al., 2020). We highlight two main efforts researchers and educators can take: (1) enhance multilingual representation in SEL research and (2) expand culturally and linguistically responsive SEL practices. We further elaborate on specific actions that may support these efforts.

Enhance Representation in SEL Research

Future research must prioritize exploring how linguistic identities are being represented within the field of SEL and evaluating the effectiveness of SEL programming for linguistically minoritized populations (Murano et al., 2020; O'Conner et al., 2017). Establishing minimum research reporting standards is crucial to ensuring adequate representation of multilingual students (Cipriano et al., 2023b). This promotes understanding and addresses potential biases or gaps in educational practices related to language diversity. To change the narrative of

multilingualism from a deficit-focused stance that questions, "How can we get everyone to speak English in the classroom?" to a strengths-based approach that asks, "How can we value and develop all languages in the classroom?" linguistic representation should include *all* multilingual students and not solely those classified as English learners. By acknowledging and leveraging linguistic diversity in SEL, researchers and educators can develop more inclusive and effective strategies to support the social and emotional development of all students, regardless of their language background.

Researchers should adopt proactive recruitment and retention practices to ensure the participation and input of multilingual learners. Efforts must encourage multilingual students' involvement in SEL research to not only make their voices heard and count but also develop and implement culturally and linguistically responsive SEL curricula, such as incorporating examples and activities that resonate with different languages and cultures (Linan-Thompson et al., 2018). Furthermore, translation of assessments, instructional materials, and other deliverables into multiple languages is essential to ensure that students and their families who speak languages other than the dominant English language have equitable access to SEL resources and can fully understand and apply SEL concepts and skills taught in SEL programming and measured with SEL assessments (Nunez, 2013). Given the limited family engagement in SEL interventions with multilingual students, researchers should offer linguistically accessible workshops or information sessions for families to educate them about what SEL is, why SEL is important, and how participation in SEL research can contribute to the well-being of their children and the broader school community. Engaging with families through partnerships with trusted cultural brokers in community organizations may facilitate SEL research opportunities with multilingual students and their families by bridging language and cultural barriers, building trust, and encouraging participation.

Expand Culturally and Linguistically Responsive SEL Practices

Given the rapid growth of multilingual learners in the United States' K–12 student population, there is an urgent need for intentional culturally and linguistically responsive SEL interventions (Jagers et al., 2019). For multilingual students to feel safe, supported, valued, and confident in the classroom, teachers as well as noninstructional school staff must receive adequate training and sufficient support to develop their own SEL knowledge and skills (along with cultural and linguistic awareness and responsiveness) and to model and promote SEL knowledge and skills with their students (Hoffmann et al., 2020; Jennings & Greenberg, 2009; Neugebauer et al., 2023). At the same time, SEL researchers must cultivate and leverage partnerships with cultural brokers in community organizations and experts in multilingual education to develop best practices and approaches to effectively serve and support the linguistically minoritized student populations with which they work. Practices may entail incorporating visuals, vocabulary repetition, and attention checks for student understanding and learning, and utilizing approaches that strengthen interpersonal skills (e.g., peer relationships) like roleplaying and peer tutoring (O'Conner et al., 2017; Washington-Nortey et al., 2022). Simultaneously developing SEL skills alongside literacy skills enables multilingual students to

express themselves more confidently and interact more meaningfully with others while also helping them build closer connections and feel more included in their school communities, promoting a sense of belonging and well-being. Other approaches could involve home-based activities that leverage cultural and/or linguistic assets to enhance SEL skill development, such as fostering opportunities for mutual encouragement, sharing experiences, and collective problem-solving within the family.

In conclusion, the empirical evidence for universal school-based SEL interventions is limited in its representation of and efficacy for multilingual students, highlighting prevailing gaps in the literature on multilingual students' SEL experiences and development. To ensure that multilingual students will *no longer be missing* in future SEL research, we urge researchers and educators to acknowledge, represent, sustain, leverage, and reflect the breadth of linguistic heterogeneity among learners in schools nationwide, ensuring that SEL recommendations and practices are truly equitable and inclusive.

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