

The Construction of Social and Emotional Competence Based on College English Reading under Growth Mindset: Theory, Practice, and Challenges

Yue Zeng

School of Foreign Studies, Zhaoqing University, Guangdong, 526060, China

Email: 215023309@qq.com

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Abstract

Based on the identified deficiency in social emotional competence within English reading classrooms as the starting point, this paper explores the divergence between this phenomenon and the cultivation objectives of global competence in the context of globalization. Consequently, drawing on growth mindset theory and textual resources, the author discusses practical approaches for enhancing social emotional competence in college English reading classrooms, while also presenting the implementation challenges encountered in real-world settings.

Keywords

Social Emotional Competence; English Reading; Growth Mindset

1. Introduction

English Reading, as a core foundational course for English majors, plays a vital role in enhancing students' linguistic proficiency, cultural awareness, cognitive abilities, and learning capacity. It not only advances students' language cognition but also enriches personal cultivation, shapes emotional intelligence, fosters social consciousness, and cultivates attitudes toward lifelong learning. With deepening globalization and China's rising international presence, English has transcended its traditional role as a linguistic tool. Its value now extends beyond functional communication to encompass disseminating native cultures, facilitating international collaboration, and enabling meaningful global engagement. Consequently, English reading instruction should start from cultivating students' global competence and improving their social and emotional competence.

However, a comprehensive review of current English reading classrooms reveals significant gaps: students focus on accumulating linguistic knowledge yet lack structured cognitive frameworks; self-awareness and self-management skills remain underdeveloped; emotional awareness and observational acuity are insufficiently honed; critical thinking abilities and exploratory motivation remain unactivated; deficiencies persist in verbal expression, classroom participation, and collaborative awareness. This deficiency stems primarily from students' emphasis on academic achievement over communicative processes and textual values, coupled with inadequate learning strategies and limited understanding of sustainable development principles. To holistically enhance students' comprehensive literacy and prepare them for global responsibilities, this study adopts a growth mindset framework to reinterpret the value of English reading. It further examines the development of social emotional competence through theoretical, practical, and challenge-oriented dimensions.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1 Growth Mindset

In her book *Mindset: The New Psychology of Success*, Dweck (2006) examines the determinants of success across diverse fields, attributing outcomes to individuals' psychological frameworks. She distinguishes between fixed mindset and growth mindset. Individuals with a fixed mindset adopt negative attitudes toward difficulties, failures, and challenges, believing personal abilities are largely unchangeable. Conversely, those with a growth mindset maintain that capabilities can be developed through sustained effort. Consequently, they persistently acquire strategies and seek constructive feedback when confronting obstacles, demonstrating resilience in overcoming challenges. This mindset aligns with the principles of quality-oriented education and resonates with lifelong learning paradigms. It emphasizes the value of process-driven learning and leverages outcomes for iterative improvement, thereby enabling students to derive fulfillment and joy from learning. This implies educators should focus on students' learning processes, encourage self-driven improvement through effort, prioritize mastery of learning strategies, guide students to extract lessons from errors and difficulties, and provide structured constructive feedback.

2.2 The Value of Reading Texts

English reading texts, serving as the information carrier in reading classes, hold diverse learning value. Firstly, they act as a medium for language input. By reading texts, students can grasp the main ideas and details, analyze the structure and rhetorical devices of the articles, thereby increasing their language exposure. Secondly, reading texts are carriers of cultural information, possessing value for cultural

learning and exchange. Through text reading, students can understand different cultural connotations and enhance their cross-cultural communication skills. Moreover, English reading texts also serve as a bridge for developing thinking and emotional abilities. Students can engage in comprehension, judgment, analysis, and evaluation through texts, elevating their higher-order thinking skills. Guided by the teacher, they can engage in critical thinking regarding the phenomena, facts, and data presented in the text. Simultaneously, through reflection, classroom activities, and connecting with social realities, they can uncover the social emotions conveyed behind the text, fostering emotional resonance, stimulating classroom interactivity and participation, and facilitating interpersonal communication and cooperation. Therefore, the value of reading texts aligns with the framework of core competencies for English learning and further enhances social emotional skills on this basis.

2.3 Social and Emotional Competence

According to the SEAL (Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning) program introduced by the UK Department for Education and Skills, social and emotional learning primarily encompasses self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills (Lendrum, Humphrey & Wigelsworth, 2013). The Chinese Ministry of Education and United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) have also proposed the concept of social and emotional learning, defining this competence as including both cognitive and management aspects. They have further established a "three domains, six dimensions" framework for social emotional objectives, with the main content being: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship management, group awareness, and group management (Mao, 2021).

This conceptual understanding of social emotional competency provides the theoretical framework for addressing current issues in English reading classrooms, such as students' lack of self-awareness, emotional perception, critical thinking, and communication and collaboration skills. However, due to prolonged immersion in an exam-oriented education system, where the emphasis on knowledge and academic performance leads students to prioritize learning outcomes, students often neglect the development of learning processes, such as learning strategies and feedback mechanisms. The long-term persistence of this learning ecology has resulted in singular assessment approaches, rigid thinking patterns, and deficiencies in social emotional competence. Therefore, within the context of English reading texts, enhancing social emotional competence through the lens of a growth mindset is key to improving students' holistic literacy and competitiveness.

3. Practical Approaches

3.1 Lesson Design

Based on the “three domains, six dimensions” objective framework, the cultivation of social emotional competence hinges on enhancing students’ capacity for social engagement and effectively navigating their relationships with themselves, others, and the collective (Huang, Yin & He, 2025). Consequently, classroom teaching objectives should extend beyond linguistic and cultural proficiency alone. Instead, while building knowledge and cultural systems, emphasis must be placed on elevating students’ cognitive and management abilities. Thus, the goals of the course should center on fostering students’ relational skills within the reading classroom.

To achieve these objectives, teachers should design targeted instructional activities that create opportunities for students to apply language in socialized tasks—such as problem-based scenarios, role-playing, drama performances, speeches, and debates. These tasks not only enable students to apply learning in concrete contexts but also hone their ability to engage in collective social experiences. Through these activities, students learn to recognize diverse emotional experiences, express respect, empathy, and understanding in interactions, and build positive interpersonal relationships.

The design of such activities should adhere to core principles: establishing connections between classroom tasks and real-world social contexts; creating learning themes centered on communication, negotiation, collaboration, and mutual support; and fostering a growth-oriented classroom environment (Zhang & Jin, 2025). Throughout this process, teachers should embody tolerance and encouragement, using growth-oriented language and constructive feedback to boost student engagement. Feedback should empower students to learn from mistakes and challenges.

However, a key feature of interactive, participatory classrooms—content extension—often proves time-intensive. To address time constraints, blended learning and flipped classroom models can help teachers shift substantial background knowledge and foundational content to pre-class online modules. During class, instructors need only highlight key concepts, dedicating in-person time to rich discussion. This approach can further extend learning beyond the classroom through online tasks—such as group reading reports, extracurricular reading poster projects, literature circles, and reading promotion videos—allowing students to engage in activities outside traditional class hours.

3.2 Uncovering the Value of Reading Texts

College English reading texts encompass diverse content spanning socio-economic issues, literature and culture, science and technology, education, psychology, and beyond. Their rich underlying value can be excavated from multiple perspectives.

Firstly, the core themes of texts can be distilled into relevant topics for integration into teaching activities. Secondly, key details within the text can form the substance of learning tasks and discussion points. More importantly, the extension of textual

content can be connected to current social topics, creating thematic explorations that spark intellectual exchange, cultural dialogue, and cognitive growth through the sharing of diverse viewpoints.

Simultaneously, attention must be paid to guiding values within the reading material. Using a growth mindset as inspiration, positive themes should be elevated, while negative ideologies should be constructively guided through reverse thinking.

For instance, consider Unit 6 “Fool’s Paradise” from Extensive Reading Course 1 (Higher Education Press), in which the protagonist avoids life responsibilities, passively accepts fate, and longs for a “paradise” where all needs are met without effort. Teachers can critically engage with this negative example by connecting it to present “lying flat” culture, which facilitates discussions on life values, guiding students to recognize the universality of hardship in the human experience. Thus, students can learn to face setbacks with positive psychology, embrace failure with a growth mindset, manage emotions in uncertainty, and value the support of others.

3.3 Teaching Methods

Traditional teaching methods prioritize knowledge transmission while neglecting students’ central role and the cultivation of comprehensive competencies. In today’s context of advocating global competence, teacher-dominated approaches no longer adequately enhance students’ holistic literacy, particularly in fostering social and emotional competence. Therefore, teaching methodologies should be student-centered, oriented toward strengthening social emotional skills, and guided by the principle of enhancing capabilities for global engagement.

Teachers can adopt various participatory approaches such as: task-based language teaching, inquiry-based learning, problem-solving instruction, scenario-based teaching, and project-based learning. These methods transfer classroom agency to students, fully activating their initiative and engagement.

When selecting student-centered teaching methods, teachers should transform their instructional role: shifting from being an explainer of content to becoming an enabler of classroom activities. They should define participation structures through task rules, offer guidance through observation and scaffolding, and establish constructive assessment as an information feedback platform.

Throughout this process, teachers must emphasize guided facilitation. Drawing on Bloom’s Taxonomy—specifically comprehension, application, evaluation, and synthesis (Liu, 2014)—they provide students with positive feedback. This input-output exchange allows learners to experience the transformative power of growth-oriented learning.

3.4 Evaluation System

Assessment of social and emotional behaviors focuses on students’ performance in authentic social contexts, prioritizing performance-based evaluation. It aims to

monitor, enhance, and develop students' social competence, deepen their understanding of social and emotional learning, and ultimately improve interpersonal skills (Zhang & Jin, 2025).

Therefore, with performance-based evaluation as the ultimate goal, the English reading curriculum assessment framework should incorporate metrics for measuring social emotional competence. Supported by these metrics, corresponding evaluative activities and criteria should be designed and integrated into classroom planning, leveraging goal-oriented approaches to encourage students' investment in developing these skills. For example, in cross-cultural role-playing activities based on reading texts, teachers may observe students' motivation, engagement enthusiasm, observational skills, collaborative abilities, communication competence, problem-solving capabilities.

Since the purpose of such assessment is to advance students' social interaction skills and promote sustainable development, evaluation content should center on process-oriented performance quality, developmental feedback mechanisms, and growth mindset cultivation. During assessment, teachers should guide students to recognize progress through persistent effort and reflection, achieving breakthroughs amid challenges. Through classroom observations, instructors are supposed to provide timely feedback on process-based performance to foster continuous self-improvement awareness. Beyond curriculum-embedded assessment, teachers may utilize additional tools—such as questionnaires and interviews—to gauge students' social and emotional learning status, offering suggestions through oral or written feedback. Moreover, extracurricular English reading activities could serve as valuable platforms for evaluating these competencies.

4. Challenges

Enhancing social emotional competence in English reading classrooms requires multifaceted support and is not an overnight process. In today's increasingly globalized world, developing students' socially interactive abilities through English reading has become critically important because it constitutes essential literacy for future engagement with global issues. Nevertheless, cultivating these competencies faces significant challenges.

4.1 Shifting Language Learning Mindsets

Traditional language learning primarily focuses on accumulating linguistic knowledge to improve exam scores and obtain certificates. Influenced by basic education, most students approach English reading merely as a requirement for college entrance exams, lacking awareness of how language learning connects to world perspectives, life values, and ethical principles. Consequently, many students enter university with diminished motivation for English learning, viewing it as irrelevant to their majors or career prospects. However, with the advancement of the Belt and

Road Initiative and China's growing global influence, the nation's role in global governance continues to expand, and its culture gains worldwide recognition. Opportunities to participate in international organizations and cultural exchanges will multiply. Thus, leveraging reading to communicate China's stories effectively, disseminate Chinese culture, and engage in international collaboration becomes imperative. Language learning must therefore evolve. It is no longer confined to textbooks, exams, and certificates but requires developing comprehensive competence and global competitiveness through foreign language acquisition. Teaching in English reading should extend beyond linguistic knowledge to cultivate language-based critical thinking, cultural awareness, and lifelong learning skills. Achieving this paradigm shift represents a critical factor in determining students' proactive engagement in enhancing their social emotional competence.

4.2. Enhancing Teacher Competencies

The transition from being a transmitter of knowledge to becoming a facilitator of skills necessitates both role transformation and competency upgrading among educators. Shifting from teacher-led to student-centered classrooms demands improved pedagogical approaches and instructional efficiency. Additionally, English reading instructors must develop the ability to design social and emotional learning activities grounded in textual content.

Given that English reading materials span interdisciplinary domains—including politics, economics, history, culture, education, psychology, and environmental science—effective classroom design requires cross-disciplinary integration. Thus, strengthening teachers' interdisciplinary knowledge base and application capabilities, while mastering innovative pedagogical tools and methodologies, is crucial for implementing social and emotional learning.

4.3. Integrating Educational Technology and Resources

Cultivating social emotional competence involves enhancing students' real-world social interaction abilities, demanding high-quality in instructional contexts, assessment systems, teaching tools and resource allocation. Creating authentic scenarios and providing meaningful assessments can help students establish growth materials based on social emotions and provide corresponding feedback. This requires efficient utilization of educational technologies and strategic resource distribution. For example, deploying AI-powered analytics to capture students' emotional responses and interpersonal motivations during problem-solving—and delivering personalized feedback—entails significant investment in new educational technologies and resources.

5. Conclusion

This paper examines the renewed value of English reading courses from the per-

spective of global competence and analyzes prevailing problems in contemporary English reading classrooms, which emphasizes the critical importance of cultivating students' social and emotional competence through intentional pedagogical design. Building on theoretical frameworks of growth mindset, textual value exploration, and social emotional learning, the author proposes practical approaches across four dimensions: lesson design, text value, teaching methodologies, and evaluation systems. Corresponding implementation challenges are systematically discussed within this integrated framework.

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