

Using Social Stories and Coping Skills to Teach Vocabulary of Emotions in the EFL Setting with Primary Learners

by
Grace Westfall Talamo

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Signature of Author _____

Certified by _____

Dr Isabel Oltra-Massuet
Master's Thesis Supervisor

Accepted by _____

Dr Mar Gutiérrez-Colon
Master's Coordinator



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ORIGINAL WORK FORM**

STUDENT

Last Name(s) Westfall Talamo

First Name Grace

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Abstract

Vocabulary instruction is at the center of language teaching. This study aims to explore methods for teaching vocabulary terms on emotions and coping skills in the primary TEFL classroom. This is done using social stories, a practice that has not yet been applied to the TEFL field. By combining elements of developmentally appropriate materials, mindfulness, and vocabulary teaching strategies, this study takes an interdisciplinary approach. It addresses a diverse group of learners, both neurotypical and neuro-divergent, from various linguistic backgrounds in two first-grade classrooms. This research employs a quasi-experimental design, with two groups organized as control and experimental groups. Both groups participated in six sessions over the course of five weeks. Students completed pre and posttests to attain data regarding vocabulary comprehension. This data was used to run a paired samples t-test which found support for the use of social stories in teaching coping skills, contrasting the use of storytelling. The habitual teacher of the groups participated in pre- and post-intervention interviews to provide information on the students' exposure to coping skills. Both groups were interviewed following the intervention, to identify their perceptions on using mindfulness strategies. This qualitative data exemplifies the benefits of mindful teaching strategies. This study advocates for the use of social emotional learning in the TEFL field.

Key words: EFL, TEFL, vocabulary acquisition, coping skills, social stories, mindfulness, self-regulation, social emotional learning, emotional literacy

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Index of Abbreviations

Abbreviation	Explanation
ADHD	Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder
ASD	Autism Spectrum Disorder
CASEL	Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning
CICO	Check-In Check-Out
SEL	Social Emotional Learning
TEFL	Teaching English as a Foreign Language
TESL	Teaching English as a Second Language
TESOL	Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages

1 Introduction

Vocabulary is a fundamental aspect when it comes to building language skills. To communicate effectively, speakers must have access to vocabulary terms that can be applied within various contexts. When examining the area of teaching English as a foreign language, the topic of vocabulary is sure to arise, as “talking about language means talking about vocabulary” (Farizawati, 2016, p. 246). An area of vocabulary teaching that has been under-represented in many classrooms is the use of terms for emotions and regulation. As the world of education continues to uncover methods which will improve emotional regulation skills in the classroom setting, teachers must be prepared with resources that will aid them in teaching students the necessary skills to cope with their surroundings. There are many stressors that children encounter, justifying a need for mindfulness strategies. Numerous students struggle to confront anxious thoughts that can occur from assessments, social conflicts, or a global pandemic. This research study was conducted in order to determine evidence-based practices that will assist teachers and students in finding ways to teach and learn vocabulary terms as they relate to coping skills.

The motivation in designing this experiment was to find evidence that would support the use of mindfulness in classrooms that are teaching English as a foreign language. The areas of mindfulness, self-regulation skills, and social emotional learning continue to receive attention as the benefits of these skills in classrooms become clearer. This study seeks to answer research questions that investigate the use of coping skills in the target language, English, with young learners. The implementation of coping skills instruction in the target language highlights the novelty of this study. As teachers ready students for an ever-changing world which requires processing and coping skills, this study aims to provide strategies that will assist in this preparation.

1.1 Justification

This research aims to investigate practices that will aid in the instruction of vocabulary terms for coping skills. In this study, this is done with the use of social stories. Social stories are “individualized short stories used to assist children and adolescents” (Saad, 2016, p. 52). Social stories have most often been implemented as a tool for students with Autism spectrum disorders, however this research was conducted with students who are neurodivergent as well as neurotypical students, for the first time in a TEFL classroom. This experiment could be applied to TEFL/TESOL classrooms with students who struggle to regulate their emotions, thus improving the overall classroom environment. This study also applies to learners’ development of vocabulary skills in a target language, as well as their ability to apply social skills within the target language. Improving students’ language skills is of course a priority in language classrooms. This study places a focus on improving students’ vocabulary skills in the target language, while also preparing the students for social contexts. Extending the principle of improved vocabulary, to improve their social skills in the target language, will better prepare the learners for communicative situations beyond the context of the TEFL classroom.

Before children can process or regulate their emotions to calm down, they must be able to recognize and label their affective state (Joseph & Strain, 2003, p. 20). By providing strategies on how to teach vocabulary regarding emotions, classrooms will be better equipped for children, especially in the primary setting. This will help students in labeling how they are feeling. Previous research has been conducted by Skelly & Estrada-Chichon (2021), Wang & Liu (2016), and Moghadam et al. (2022), regarding the use of mindfulness strategies in EFL teaching. These studies suggest that the instruction of vocabulary terms for social emotional learning can benefit students. The students in this experiment had previously received brief instruction on basic

vocabulary terms for emotions but had not yet received instruction on how to apply these terms toward coping skills. To conduct this study, there was a need for further instruction on the basic vocabulary terms for emotions, for both groups, with the inclusion of elaboration on certain topics.

1.2 Background

Instructional time is often interrupted due to various needs that arise in the classroom. This is especially evident in classrooms with young learners. Some students struggle with managing their emotions in the classroom, which can cause interruptions during class sessions. This issue is displayed in an action-research study conducted by Doris de Almeida Soares, noting that TEFL classes might struggle with “recurrent episodes of disruptive talking” (2007, p. 53). When students are able to identify and express their emotions, they can seek ways to regulate them. This study employs the use of social stories, which target coping skills as vocabulary terms. Using social stories can aid teachers in providing students with replacement behaviors, as well as modeling use of language surrounding emotions.

1.3 Objectives

O1 - An objective of this study is to identify the difference in vocabulary acquisition, after students in the experimental group have participated in lessons using social stories, on vocabulary for emotions and regulation, in the target language.

O2 - An objective of this study is to determine the impact that the use of social stories and mindfulness strategies in the primary TEFL classroom can have on student perceptions.

O3 - An objective of this study is to determine the impact that the use of social stories and mindfulness strategies in the primary TEFL classroom can have on teacher perceptions.

2 Literature Review

2.1 Developmental Theories

In the realm of education, developmental theories provide insight on how teachers can adapt instruction to meet learners' needs. Erik Erikson's theory of psychosocial development can be applied here. Erikson's theory asserts that in development, an individual will go through eight stages, "in each of which [that individual] must face and cope with a central psychosocial problem or crisis" (Munley, 1975, p. 314). According to Erikson, when the individual resolves each of the crises, this impacts their development and shapes their psychosocial effectiveness and development of their personality (Munley, 1975, p. 314). In Erikson's third stage, Initiative vs. Guilt, occurring between ages three and five, children are learning that they can "exert power over themselves and the world" (Cherry, 2019, para. 3). Therefore, it is important to provide these learners with a space where they can "try things on their own and explore their own abilities" (Cherry, 2019, para. 3). Doing so will assist learners in developing "ambition and direction" (Cherry, 2019, para. 3). In Erickson's fourth stage, indicated to occur between ages six and eleven, Industry vs. Inferiority, the child's "social worlds expand considerably" as they are thrust into more social environments (Cherry, 2020, para. 6). Prior to this stage, the child experiences most of their social interactions with their caregivers and family members. Once the child enters the school years, "the realm of social influence increases dramatically" (Cherry, 2020, para. 7). In this stage "children are able to develop a sense of competence and pride in their abilities", by interacting with their classmates and teachers (Cherry, 2020, para. 7). Knowledge of emotions and coping skills can assist students in their social interactions, thus improving their chances of successfully completing this stage.

Another developmental theory that can assist in adjusting instructional tools for young learners comes from Jean Piaget. Piaget's Concrete Operational Stage, from "around seven to eleven years of age", is "characterized by the development of organized and rational thinking" (McLeod, 2021, para. 1). This refers to "concrete operations", as children in this stage "operate on objects and not yet verbally expressed hypotheses" (Piaget, 1964, p. 177). This means the instructional materials created for children in this stage should go beyond the traditional spoken approach, and should invite the use of images, physical manipulatives, and movement. Students who are in this stage learn best when given the ability to "manipulate materials" and "label what they have observed" (Kuhn, 1979, p. 343). Providing opportunities for students to do so can assist their vocabulary acquisition.

2.2 Vocabulary Teaching to Primary Age Children

Vocabulary teaching comprises a large amount of instructional time in the area of English language teaching. Nation (1995) goes as far to say that "language-focused vocabulary instruction" is essential when it comes to language courses designed for second language learners. The development of students' vocabulary skills is "one of the most important responsibilities for an ESL[/EFL] teacher" (Farizawati, 2016, p. 247). As previously stated, vocabulary permeates social interaction, thus emphasizing a need for quality, thorough vocabulary instruction. There are various recommended teaching strategies that relate to this area, in teaching primary ages. The following strategies will be implemented, in combination with storytelling and social stories, to provide effective vocabulary instruction to both groups participating in this research. The use of "repeated opportunities" will support students in acquiring terms, through "cumulative" instructional opportunities (Nation, 1995, p. 8). This means directing student attention to specific terms and providing opportunity for repetition. Class discussions have also been proven to be an

effective strategy in vocabulary teaching. Studies conducted by Elley (1987) on “vocabulary learning through listening to stories” produced findings in support of this (Nation, 1995, p. 9). Elley’s findings suggest that “if the teacher briefly interrupts the story to comment on the meaning of a word” or to take note of it on the classroom board, “the learning of those items increases significantly” (Nation, 1995, p. 9). The practice of directing students to specific use of the vocabulary terms can improve vocabulary acquisition. The use of discussions to direct student attention will be used in this experiment, as it should enhance the learning experience and likelihood of vocabulary acquisition for the participants. This practice is supported by Nation, who writes that “deliberately drawing attention to language items as a part of the language system (language-focused instruction) makes learning more certain” (1995, p. 9). Another effective strategy for teaching vocabulary is through “spoken production of vocabulary items” (Nation, 1995, p. 9). The implementation of spoken vocabulary items can assist students in acquiring the terms they are exposed to. These strategies, repeated opportunities, discussions with directing student attention, and spoken production of terms, are used in the implementation of this experiment, in combination with storytelling/social stories. The aim is that these strategies will support students in their acquisition of vocabulary terms that relate to emotions, mindfulness, and coping skills.

2.3 Teaching Vocabulary of Emotions

In school settings, young children often encounter situations that require social skills and emotional regulation in order to be successful. When a child is unable to label their “legitimate feeling”, it becomes likely that they may act out as their needs have not been met (Joseph & Strain, 2003, p. 19). Joseph and Strain use the term, *emotional literacy*, to refer to the child’s ability to “communicate [their] need,” “access strategic help,” and “get that need met” (Joseph & Strain,

2003, p. 19). Emotional literacy is the ability to “recognize, label, and understand feelings in oneself and others”; it is a “prerequisite skill” for teaching emotional regulation (Joseph & Strain, 2003, p. 21). *Emotional regulation* refers to the “efforts on the part of the individual to manage, modulate, inhibit and enhance emotions” (Calkins et al., 2001, p. 3). Classrooms should benefit greatly when learners are provided with information on how to manage their emotions, especially young students.

The first aspect in teaching emotional literacy in the classroom requires a relationship where students feel supported and cared for by teachers. Once this has been established, the teacher can guide students to “read the affective cues of others and themselves” (Joseph & Strain, 2003, p. 20). Doing so will support them in having successful interactions with peers and themselves. Successful interactions at this age are pivotal when examining Erikson’s third stage, Initiative vs. Guilt. As previously iterated, children in this stage learn by “interacting with others,” through “social interactions” (Amidon, n.d., para. 6). Providing students with emotional literacy will support them in successfully completing this stage of development. When students want to discriminate “among affective states such as anger, sadness, frustration, and happiness” they must be equipped with “a vocabulary of feeling words” (Joseph & Strain, 2003, p. 20). To do so, quality vocabulary instruction must be provided, as to equip students with “a large and complex feeling vocabulary” (Joseph & Strain, 2003, p. 21). Doing so will allow children to “make finer discriminations between feelings, better communicate with others about their internal affective states, and engage in discussions about their personal experiences” (Joseph & Strain, 2003, p. 21). This instruction should not be on just the terms for feelings, but also on how to manage these feelings. With any form of literacy, “the richer the vocabulary the more rewarding the experience” (Joseph & Strain, 2003, p. 20). Incorporating the use of terms that relate to mindfulness and coping

skills will enrich the learning experience, not only in terms of fostering deeper fluency in the target language, but also in helping teach students how to express their feelings.

Use of emotional literacy in the primary classroom can be linked to “cognitive behavior modification” (Joseph & Strain, 2003, p. 20). The use of behavior modification can benefit both teachers and students. Teachers can use this methodology to model and define target behaviors and classroom expectations. This can positively impact the overall classroom environment. This can also solve issues created from social disputes in the classroom. Often when children are struggling to “interpret” a behavior being exhibited by a peer, it is due to the “absence of feeling words” (Joseph & Strain, 2003, p. 20). To teach students how to label feelings, educators can provide “definitions directly, incidentally in the context of conversation and play, or through special activities” (Joseph & Strain, p. 21). To teach these labels directly, the adult can pair a “picture” with the “appropriate affective label” (Joseph & Strain, p. 21). Doing so provides students with explicit and authentic examples, coming from beyond the classroom environment. This method is used in the stories provided to both groups in this research, in order to effectively teach the vocabulary terms.

Once students have learned how to label their emotions, through explicit vocabulary instruction, they can seek solutions. A possible solution, that will be emphasized in this study with the experimental group, is the use of “self-regulation” strategies, such as the child stating “I need to calm down” (Joseph & Strain, 2003, p. 20). An effective method for teaching these strategies is via direct instruction. Adults can “model emotional regulation skills for children by verbalizing the course of action they will take in order to calm down or cope with certain feelings” (Joseph & Strain, 2003, p. 25). The experimental group in this study participates in this method of learning as this is modeled through the text provided in the social stories.

As discussed earlier, child development must be considered when it comes to the use of any instruction. Baron-Cohen et al. advocate for instruction with children regarding emotions. Children develop the ability to label their emotional expressions “as early as 2 years of age” (Baron-Cohen et al., 2010, p.1). Baron-Cohen et al.’s study conducted in 2010 aimed to determine word comprehension of children, ages 4 to 16. The objectives were investigated with the use of a developmental survey on terms for emotions. It was found that “of the list of 336 emotion words, 41 words were understood by at least 75% of 4-6 year olds, 88 by 7-8 year olds” (Baron-Cohen et al., 2010, p. 2). When testing 4 to 8 year olds, “the number of emotion terms understood doubles” (Baron-Cohen et al., 2010, p. 2). Their study is relevant in designing vocabulary instruction for young learners, especially in terms of teaching vocabulary words of emotions. Baron-Cohen et al. reference teaching children these terms in their native language, whereas this paper will highlight the use of teaching these terms in a foreign language.

2.4 Teaching Vocabulary of Emotions in a Target Language

In a study conducted in 2020, researcher Pentón Herrera advocates for the use of social emotional learning, *SEL*, in the context of TESOL in the United States. This necessity can also be extended into English learning beyond this context, into the world of TEFL. SEL is defined as “the process through which children and adults understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions” (CASEL, 2020a, para. 1, as cited in Pentón Herrera, 2020, p. 3). According to Swartz (2017), the term *social and emotional learning* has been around for over 20 years, “but there is now a renewed interest among parents, [educators], health care providers, and policymakers as to how schools can better integrate SEL into classrooms in addition to traditional academic subjects” (p. 521). Studies have proven that SEL instruction is imperative in shaping

outcomes, both “in school and career success,” as it “fosters the ability of children to integrate thinking about their emotions and behaviors in ways that lead to positive academic and social outcomes” (Jones & Doolittle, 2017, as cited in Swartz, 2017, p. 521). Pentón Herrera makes the clarification that SEL “is a practice that can be implemented at all levels: PreK-12, adult education, and higher education settings” (2020, p. 3).

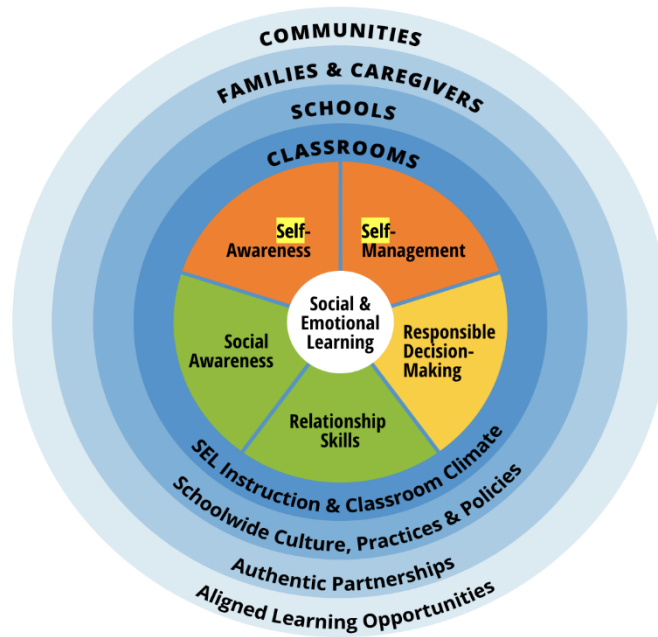
The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) highlights five types of competences, seen below in Figure 1. These competences “support the message that educating children in social, behavioral, and emotional skills is important” in order for children “to achieve and be successful in school, their societies, and in life” (Pentón Herrera, p. 3).

CASEL’s Five Types of Competences (2021)

1. Self-awareness: the ability to accurately recognize one’s own emotions, thoughts, and values and how they influence behavior;
2. Self-management: the ability to successfully regulate one’s emotions, thoughts, and behaviors in different situations – effectively management stress, controlling impulses, and motivating oneself;
3. Social-awareness: the ability to take the perspective of and empathize with others, including those from diverse backgrounds and cultures;
4. Relationship skills: the ability to establish and maintain healthy and rewarding relationships with diverse individuals and groups;

5. Responsible decision-making: the ability to make constructive choices about personal behavior and social interactions based on ethical standards, safety concerns, and social norms.

Figure 1: CASEL’s Wheel of SEL Competences.
Taken from CASEL (2021).



Addressing topics that “fall within the SEL umbrella such as emotions, values, and ethics” can be difficult for teachers to tackle (Brackett, 2019, as cited in Pentón Herrera, 2020, p. 4). This is not to say that these topics should be avoided, as discussion of them could provide support for students who are struggling to cope. Teachers should, however, handle these areas with sensitivity, to avoid triggering students. Teachers begin to see the need for SEL instruction when students face “personal challenges, struggles, and situations” (Pentón Herrera, 2020, p. 4). Students will inevitably face situations, in the classroom and beyond, that will require an emotional response. This seems to be evident, now more than ever, in a post-pandemic world. This is just one of many roles of an educator: to help prepare and guide students for processing difficulties.

While SEL instruction goes beyond the traditional pedagogical approach to teaching vocabulary, it is highly necessary, nonetheless. Students experiencing trauma and anxiety as a result of the 2019 coronavirus pandemic is just one example. Pentón Herrera highlights other factors faced by students in TESOL classrooms in the United States, like “deportation raids, school shootings, and increased anti-immigrant sentiments in [the] school, community, and society” (Pentón Herrera, 2020, p. 5). Teachers hold a “social duty”, to foster an environment where students “feel safe, welcome, physically and mentally nourished, and learn all the necessary skills they need to participate in...a global society” (Pentón Herrera, 2020, p. 5). Teaching students how to label their emotions, and then how to regulate them, will guide them in navigating these situations. Teaching of SEL is not only relevant, but it is a matter of “social justice and equity” and a “teacher obligation” (Pentón Herrera, 2020, p. 5). There is currently a gap in English language instruction when it comes to the teaching of coping skills. While some students receive instruction on the terms for emotions, they are rarely taught the vocabulary for how to handle those emotions. Teachers must be provided with resources to fill this gap. When teachers are provided with instructional materials that can assist in this, students can receive the benefits of improved vocabulary intake. This will contribute to learners’ social development, as these vocabulary terms can be applied within social settings. Equipping students with these specific vocabulary terms for emotions and coping skills, in a setting that highlights their personal and individual emotions, can increase the learning experience and support memory of the terms.

The first method implemented in Pentón Herrera’s study is bibliotherapy. Bibliotherapy is “the use of literature to promote mental health” (Hynes & Hynes-Berry, 1986, as cited in Pentón Herrera, 2020, p. 6). *Literature*, in this definition, is being used “in the broadest possible sense to include diverse forms of reading and writing” (Pentón Herrera, 2020, p. 6). The practice of using

literature to promote mental health can be applied to the design of this study; the literature in this case is the use of social stories, used to teach coping skills. It is important to note that bibliotherapy can be flexible, as it can incorporate the use of “diverse materials” (Pentón Herrera, 2020, p. 6). Bibliotherapy can be extended to incorporate the use of social-stories, as implemented in this study. The use of social-stories in teaching emotions relies heavily on interactions between the teacher and the learners. Bibliotherapy relies upon “dual interaction” between teacher and students. There is a need for “the participant’s personal response to the story”, as well as “dialoguing with the facilitator” as this “can lead to a whole new dimension of insight” (Hynes & Hynes-Berry, 1986, as cited in Pentón Herrera, 2020, p. 7).

2.5 Social Stories

In the area of teaching coping skills, there are various methodologies one could adopt. This study is conducted with social stories as a means of instruction with the experimental group. Social stories are an effective tool in teaching, as they play a “significant part” in helping students “who lack social skills” (Bozkurt & Varan, 2014, p. 1875). Many students who struggle to regulate their emotions in the classroom setting are doing so because they struggle to understand the social context. Most existing research refers to social stories being used when working with individuals on the Autism spectrum however they can be implemented, with efficacy, with all students. This area has yet to be explored in detail via research. This study seeks to assess the benefits of social stories for learners beyond the Autism spectrum, specifically in the TEFL classroom.

Social stories were first created by Carol Gray in 1991, with the aim of “developing the social skills of children with ASD” (Bozkurt & Varan, 2014, p. 1876). They are “short stories, which explain cues and appropriate responses to significant situations in a social context” (Gray,

2002: Gray Center, 1998 as cited in Bozkurt & Varan, 2014, p. 1876). Social stories are “different from other instructional stories”, as they are “shorter” and they “emphasize the student’s perspective”, being written using first person language (Gray, 2000; Gray & Garand, 1993, as cited in Bozkurt & Vuran, 2014, p. 1876). See examples in Figures 2 and 3, displaying a photograph and an illustration used in social stories. The use of photographs within social stories creates a learning opportunity that can be personalized and feel more memorable for students. Using stories in teaching can help students organize the information “into a meaningful context” which will support their memory (Farizawati, 2016, p. 250).

When teaching students how to regulate their emotions, it is helpful to examine “emotion research” (Calkins et al., 2001, p. 3). Emotion research holds a focus on “relations to social competence” and “examining emotion regulation and social behavior” (Calkins et al., 2001, p. 3). As discussed earlier, young students especially can benefit from receiving instruction on how to manage their emotions. One strategy that can be presented via social stories is the use of replacement behaviors. A replacement behavior is “a behavior you want to replace an unwanted behavior” (Webster, 2019, para. 1). These can be a helpful tool in classrooms with students who struggle to regulate, as “focusing on the problem may just reinforce the behavior”, but guiding students to a behavior they can use in place of the problem can help the students redirect themselves (Webster, 2019, para. 1). This can improve the overall classroom environment while also empowering the student. Social stories employ the use of suggested replacement behaviors with both text and images.

In a case study conducted by Haggerty et al. (2005), individualized social stories were created and implemented to assist one 6½-year-old boy who struggled to regulate his emotions (p. 40). The social stories in this context were written and taught in English, the child’s primary

language. While the student “exhibited many behaviors that are typical of children with learning disabilities, at the request of his parents, educators never tested him for a learning disability” (Haggerty et al., 2005, p. 40). The research found that during the third week of intervention, the student was observed using the “newly learned coping strategy” (Haggerty et al., 2005, p. 46). Using the social story method helped the researchers “ensure that [the] student [had] all the social information [he needed]” and that it was presented “in a way that [was] accessible” and “easy to understand” (Haggerty et al., 2005, p. 46).

Figure 2: *Social Story Example, using photographs (Gray, 2022).*



Wherever I go, there are people that help to keep children safe. Parents and grandparents, crossing guards, teachers, police officers and firefighters all work to keep me safe.

Figure 3: Social Story Example, using illustrations
(*Top 5 Tips for Writing a Social Story, 2022*).



2.6 Use of Storytelling in Language Instruction

Storytelling is a strategy that will be used within this research, in order to teach vocabulary terms to the control group. There is a distinct difference between the use of storytelling versus social stories. The use of stories in teaching language is a practice that has been in use for centuries. Since “ancient times,” stories have been used in the form of painting pictures on walls or rocks “to deliver information” (Yang, 2011, p. 4). Stories have taken on new meaning, as they can be shared verbally and visually, with many different mediums. The narrating of stories provides many benefits in language classrooms. Fisher (1984) introduces the concept of *the narrative paradigm*, to describe what narration is. It is “a theory of symbolic actions – words and/or deeds – that have sequence and meaning for those who live, create, or interpret them” (Fisher, 1984 as cited in Yang, 2011, p. 6). Application of storytelling in primary classrooms is an effective and natural process as “young children are great at mimicking and imitating sounds” (Farizawati, 2016, p. 248). Storytelling can be defined as “the art or craft of narration of stories in verse and/or prose, as performed or led by one person before a live audience; the stories may be spoken, chanted, or sung,

with or without musical, pictorial, and other accompaniment” (Wright, 1995, as cited in Farizawati, 2016, p. 250). Storytelling also holds the use of “organizing information into a meaningful context, conveying emotions, and building community” (Leung, 2004, as cited in Farizawati, 2016, p. 250). Stories provide English classrooms with vocabulary terms in a way that is both entertaining and effective.

The use of storytelling is implemented with both the experimental and control groups in this study; however, the experimental group differs in terms of instruction received, as their instruction is done via social stories. As discussed earlier, social stories are “different from other instructional stories”, both in length and in what they emphasize (Gray, 2000; Gray & Garand, 1993, as cited in Bozkurt & Vuran, 2014, p. 1876). While storytelling highlights the use of narration to teach language, social stories hold a specific focus on social skills. The social skills being taught in this experiment are taught via the vocabulary of coping skills and mindfulness. Another difference between social stories and storytelling is regarding the narrative perspective. The stories used with the control group are written with third-person language, while the social stories use first-person language. The use of first-person language personalizes the story, making the content more accessible and memorable for students. Distinct differences exist between social stories and storytelling. This research seeks to highlight the impact that can be found in the use of social stories for TEFL instruction, seen in the vocabulary acquisition of the experimental group. Social stories are used as an avenue for teaching the vocabulary of the coping skills with the experimental group.

2.7 Mindfulness

In teaching coping skills, educators should incorporate the use of mindfulness strategies. Doing so will assist their learners in navigating communicative settings which place a need on vocabulary skills. Many definitions exist for mindfulness. It can be seen as “a relaxation technique” that has been proven to have “positive effects when used as a coping strategy for stress and anxiety” (Skelly & Estrada-Chichon, 2021, p. 965). Mindfulness can be a “positively-oriented lens for students in their learning processes” as it “inspires them to engage in effective and reflective learning, and promotes their self-efficacy, life gratification, and buoyancy” (Moghadam et al., 2022, p. 71). Another definition of mindfulness is “the awareness that emerges through paying attention on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgmentally to the unfolding of experience moment by moment” (Kabat-Zinn, 2003, as cited in Skelly and Estrada-Chichon, 2021, p. 971). Skelly and Estrada-Chichon contend that “mindfulness should be incorporated” within school curriculums in Spain (2021, p. 971). Mindfulness can improve “executive functions in the brain”, including “working memory” (Riggs & Brown, 2017 as cited in Skelly & Estrada-Chichon, 2021, p. 971). Ideally, increasing students’ working memory in the TEFL context should help improve their vocabulary acquisition skills in the target language.

Research conducted on adolescents shows that mindfulness can “reduce depression, anxiety, and stress” (Skelly & Estrada-Chichon, 2021). Skelly and Estrada-Chichon reference a study conducted by Lueke and Lueke (2019), which “investigated the effects of mindfulness on verbal memory and learning” (2021, p. 973). Lueke and Lueke’s study suggests that mindfulness “increases working memory capacity through improving levels of encoding” (Skelly & Estrada-Chichon, 2021, p. 974). This is proven in Lueke and Lueke’s findings, “that mindfulness does increase encoding”, meaning “mindfulness can improve test scores” (Skelly & Estrada-Chichon,

2021, p. 974). A study conducted by Greenberg et al. (2019) found that after two weeks, “mindfulness could increase the capacity to learn new information which would be processed by the left hippocampus working memory” (Skelly & Estrada-Chichon, 2021, p. 974). This short amount of time justifies the use of mindfulness teaching. In this experiment, a five-week intervention period is implemented with the aim of further increasing the benefits of mindfulness teaching.

When discussing mindfulness, one can also refer to *mindful learning*. Mindful learning “considers the students’ abilities to be aware, perceive, and conceive” (Wang & Liu, 2016, p. 142). Mindfulness is a powerful tool as it can result “in an increase in competence, memory, creativity, and positive affect” (Wang & Liu, 2016, p. 142). Wang & Liu found in their study with EFL students that “by engaging in mindful strategies”, the learners took “ownership” of their learning (2016, p. 142). This was noted in the following ways: “students built and became aware of a comfortable learning environment in their classroom through mindfulness; mindful writing helped students generate new thoughts and become aware of their thinking; mindfulness facilitated their learning process” (Wang & Liu, 2016, p. 142). The use of mindfulness in instruction can deepen the learning experience. Mindfulness in teaching can “expand students’ thinking” (Wang & Liu, 2016, p. 143). It is important to note that the process of mindfulness requires effort. Teachers must be prepared with resources and training on how to implement mindful learning in classrooms.

Pentón Herrera also advocates for the use of mindfulness in TESOL settings. Including “mindful practices in learning environments” can help teachers “educate students in understanding and regulating their behavior, improving their social skills, and lowering stress and anxiety” (Pentón Herrera, 2020, p. 8). These practices have also been proven to be “beneficial for improving students’ attention and focus in the classroom” (Su & Swank, 2019, as cited in Pentón Herrera,

2020, p. 9). Pentón Herrera uses the following allegory to address the relationship between SEL and academics:

SEL represents the water and academics represents the soil, both of which are necessary for seedlings to develop and thrive. Without water and soil, the seedlings' growth is compromised and cannot fully flourish. The same happens when academic instruction neglects SEL; students can only develop to a certain point and their growth, as individuals, will be compromised (2020, p. 11).

The use of SEL instruction is imperative in primary classrooms, even within the TEFL setting. This is identified in various studies which indicate that "SEL skills are meaningful" (Swartz, 2017, p. 521). While there is research on implementing SEL in primary TESL classrooms, it has yet to be explored with the use of social stories as bibliotherapy.

Another study that provides insight into how this instruction can benefit students was conducted with Iranian adults. The study found that "the utilization of mindfulness-enhancing intervention in experimental groups led to higher language achievement" (Moghadam et al., 2022, p. 91). Introducing mindfulness in the classroom can provide students with a chance to connect their learning to a part within themselves. Teachers can assist in this area. Harrison and Killion (2007) detail the importance of the teacher being a "reflective specialist" (Moghadam et al., 2022, p. 77). Teachers who instruct on mindfulness can "enhance reflective and deep thinking that affects students' well-being not just today but for all life circumstances and experiences with great possibility to be rendered to future generations" (Moghadam et al., 2022, p. 78). While mindfulness has been proven to be effective in educational settings with adolescents and adults, there is still an existing need for the research on mindfulness in the primary EFL classroom.

2.8 Application of the Literature to this Study

The literature presented above highlights the necessity for an interdisciplinary approach when it comes to designing instruction that will teach the vocabulary of emotions and coping skills. The developmental theories described by Piaget (1964) and Erikson (1975) provide background on how to effectively design instruction that will be developmentally appropriate for primary age children. This study employs the use of evidenced-based teaching practices regarding vocabulary instruction. Research conducted by Nation (1995) and Elley (1989) provide support for the use of repeated opportunities, discussion, and spoken production of terms. The use of these strategies in combination with storytelling and social stories will assist students in their vocabulary acquisition. This research employs the use of emotional literacy as previously studied by Joseph & Strain (2003). The importance of instruction regarding vocabulary terms for emotions is emphasized in Baron-Cohen et al.'s study on the abilities of children to comprehend emotions. The work of Pentón Herrera (2020) and Swartz (2017) highlights a necessity for social emotional learning and the benefits it holds for children in academic and professional success. Social stories, as designed by Gray (1998), have been implemented with efficacy with students on the Autism spectrum. This research will apply the use of social stories and mindfulness with the experimental group, while more traditional storytelling will be used with the control group. The benefits of mindfulness in TESOL classrooms are described in research conducted by Pentón Herrera (2020), Moghadam et al. (2022), and Wang & Liu (2016). The use of mindfulness in primary EFL classrooms has yet to be explored in detail. This research aims to contribute in filling that gap.

3 Research Questions & Hypotheses:

RQ1. What will be the differences documented in student proficiency in the target language, between use of social stories versus use of storytelling?

RQ2. How will the use of mindful learning in the target language (via social stories) impact student perceptions of use of coping skills?

RQ3. How will the use of mindful learning in the target language (via social stories) impact teacher perceptions of use of coping skills?

H1. After instruction on vocabulary terms regarding emotions in the target language, students in both the experimental group and the control group will show an increase in their English proficiency through use of vocabulary. However, the experimental group will show greater progress as their instruction will include the use of coping skills.

H2. The instruction of mindfulness strategies, in the target language, will positively impact student perceptions in the experimental group, on how to use coping skills.

H3. The instruction of mindfulness strategies, in the target language, will positively impact teacher perceptions on how to use coping skills.

4 Methodology

This study employs a quasi-experimental mixed methods research design, as data was collected quantitatively, with the use of pretests and posttests with the students in both the control and experimental groups, as well as qualitatively with the use of interviews with both groups, as well as the teacher. The groups for this experiment were not completely randomly assigned, as the intervention was implemented intentionally with the class that included a student on the Autism spectrum. The study is fully experimental, except for the non-randomization of the group assignment for this reason. Performance in vocabulary acquisition was measured based on a pre and delayed posttest structure. The knowledge of coping skills was assessed with the use of

interviews from both the English teacher and the students in both the control and experimental groups. The teacher was interviewed one week prior to the intervention period, and again one week following the intervention period. Both groups of students were interviewed one week after the intervention period had concluded.

This research study was conducted to explore the repeated use of social stories to teach vocabulary terms relating to emotions and coping skills. Both the control and experimental groups had previously participated in a brief language unit on basic terms for vocabulary of emotions. The sessions conducted with both groups highlighted and reviewed some of the terms previously taught, and then elaborated on them by connecting them to other terms (for example, how coping skills relate to emotions). The researcher conducted six intervention sessions with each group, directing students to specific use of the vocabulary terms. Social stories were implemented with the students in the experimental group, to portray and model appropriate responses and replacement behaviors when identifying and responding to emotions within specific contexts. Samples of lessons taught with each group are exhibited in Appendices A and B. The goal of the sessions with the experimental group was to provide strategies that would assist learners in acquiring the vocabulary terms, by exposing the students to terms for emotions and self-regulation skills within social stories. With the control group, it was important to expose these learners to the same terms as with the experimental group, but not in the same manner. Storytelling was used in place of social stories with the control group. The researcher designed lessons that centered around a story, titled *The Birthday Party*, seen in Appendix C. The story provided exposure to these terms via literature but strayed away from the experimental strategy of social stories, which use coping skills. As discussed in the findings of this study, the use of social stories proved to be beneficial in the acquisition of both vocabulary and self-regulation skills.

4.1 Research Design

To obtain quantitative data and in an effort to answer research question one, a paired samples t-test was implemented with the subjects. Students in both groups were administered a pretest, one week prior to the intervention period, to record a baseline measurement of their knowledge of the vocabulary terms.

Upon completion of the pretests, both the control group and the experimental group participated in six sessions with the researcher, engaging in 30-minute lessons, over the span of five weeks. One week following the conclusion of these six sessions with each group, both groups participated in the posttest to determine which vocabulary terms had been acquired.

In an effort to answer research question three, the English teacher was interviewed one week prior to, and one week following, the intervention period. The primary interview was conducted to obtain a baseline of information on how the teacher has previously interacted with mindfulness and coping skills in teaching. The secondary interview collected information on how the teacher's perception of these skills, and how the students used them, might have changed due to the intervention period. To answer the second research question, students in both groups were interviewed one week after the conclusion of the intervention period, to gather information on their interpretations of how to implement coping skills.

4.2 Data Subjects

This study was conducted within two first-grade TEFL classrooms with students ages 6-7-years-old in the school, Col·legi Lestonnac, in Tarragona, Spain. The control group contained 18 students, 8 boys and 10 girls. The experimental group held 20 students, 11 boys and 9 girls. The students in both classes are homogeneous. The majority of the students are originally from

Tarragona, with Spanish or Catalan as their primary language. One of the students in the experimental group recently moved from Morocco, with Arabic as their primary language. The students in both groups are considered A1 in their English abilities, as identified by the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages. Within the experimental group there is one student identified on the Autism spectrum. This student's participation and success within the intervention and assessments provides evidence that mindfulness is an inclusive strategy that can be implemented with various neuro-diversities. This will be elaborated on in the discussion section of this research.

4.3 Data Collection Instruments and Techniques

The instrument used to collect data for the first research question was a 10-question vocabulary quiz, displayed in Figure 4 below. Students were asked to identify the terms by choosing the matching image. Photographs of children exhibiting emotions and behaviors were chosen for the assessment procedure, as this provides a real-world application for these terms. Instructions for the assessment were provided in Catalan, for both the experimental and control groups. Catalan is the primary language used in the classroom, so this was the language used for the instructions to avoid any confusion for learners. Students were assessed individually with the researcher and were provided with an unlimited amount of time to complete tasks.

Figure 4: Pre & posttest, assessing vocabulary terms

Instruccions: Encercla la imatge que coincideixi amb el terme. Score: ___/10

1. *angry*



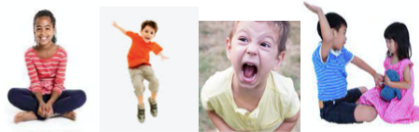
2. *scared*



3. *hit*



4. *yell*



5. *sad*



6. *calm*



7. *happy*



8. *excited*



9. *count*



10. *self-talk*



The pretest questions assessed six terms for naming emotions, two terms for reactions to emotions, and two terms for coping skills. The six questions for naming emotions targeted the vocabulary terms for emotions that would be the focus of instruction, for both the experimental and the control groups. The terms determined for this were: *happy*, *sad*, *angry*, *scared*, *calm*, and *excited*. These terms were chosen as they are commonly used in English when describing feelings, and they are relevant in social emotional learning. The terms *sad*, *angry*, *scared*, and *excited* were chosen as areas of focus for the social stories and teaching of self-regulation skills, as these

emotions, when powerful or overwhelming, can lead to interruptions in the classroom environment. The term *reactions* refers to actions that can be exhibited in response to an emotion. The vocabulary terms chosen for assessment in this area were *hit* and *yell*, as these are behaviors that can negatively impact the classroom when an emotion is not regulated well. The term *coping skills* refers to terms that can be applied to the use of calm down strategies, in response to powerful emotions. The assessment included two terms in this category: *count* and *self-talk*. All assessment questions used photographs to determine student comprehension of the terms. It is important to distinguish the differences in the 10 terms assessed, as an ability to identify terms for general emotions was expected in both the control and experimental groups. During the six sessions both groups received instruction in this area, however only the experimental group was taught alternative terms (on reactions and coping skills) in a way that was relevant to coping skills and self-regulation. The control group was still provided with exposure to the same terms (for reactions and coping skills), but this exposure was done using storytelling. As presented in the literature review, and evident in the images presented in the appendices, social stories and storytelling are quite different. It was an essential finding of this study to determine if direct instruction of coping skills would enhance student acquisition of vocabulary and student perceptions on the use of calm down strategies.

Following the pretest, students participated in six intervention sessions for 30 minutes, over a period of five weeks. Each group sustained a one-week pause in instruction due to a school closure. This occurred following the first two sessions in each group, nearly halfway through the intervention period. In the intervention period, students in the experimental group met with the researcher to participate in interactive readings of the social stories which highlighted mindfulness strategies and coping skills. The social stories modeled the use of vocabulary terms for emotions,

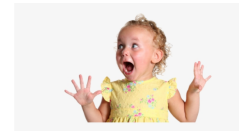
as assessed in the pretest (*happy, calm, scared, excited, and angry*) as well as the use of coping skills to introduce replacement behaviors. Samples of the social stories used in the intervention period can be found in Figure 5. With the experimental group the teacher would pause after the introduction of a new vocabulary term to provide time for discussion and questioning. Images were displayed with each term presented. The mindfulness strategies in the intervention sessions with the experimental group included meditation videos for children, physical calm down exercises, and pneumatic devices. An example of a meditation video used with the experimental group is presented below in Figure 6. One week after the conclusion of the six intervention sessions, the students in the experimental group received a posttest. The posttest provided the same questions and images as the pretest.

Figure 5: Social Stories samples

When I feel excited,



When I feel excited,



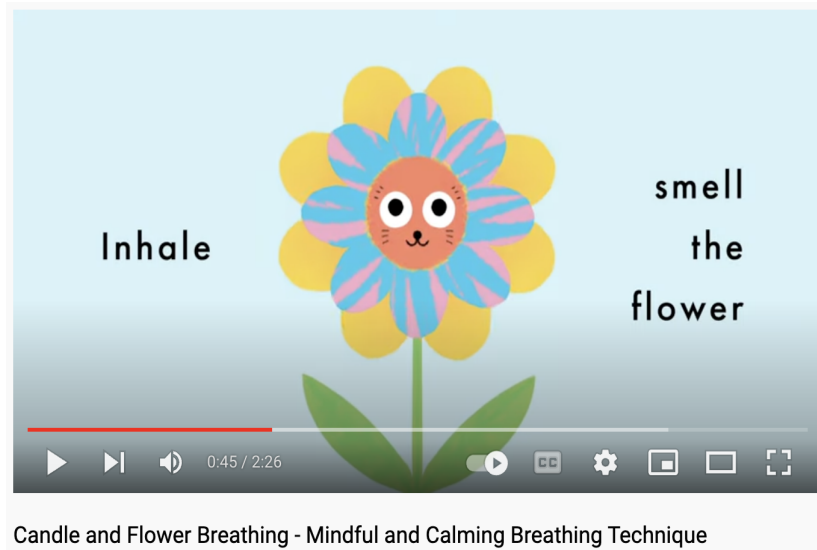
I can drink water.



I can take deep breaths.



Figure 6: Mindfulness video (Candle and Flower Breathing - Mindful and Calming Breathing Technique, 2021)



With the control group, exposure to the terms for coping skills was provided with the use of storytelling. In each of the six sessions the students in the control group participated in lessons that reviewed the terms for emotions, with a read-aloud that would expose them to the terms that had been taught with the experimental group regarding coping skills. The context with which students heard these terms was especially important. Exposure to the same terms had to be provided for the control group, but not within the context of emotions. This is evidenced below in Figure 7. The use of videos was also implemented with both groups, in order to maintain consistency between the instruction that both groups received and to minimize the potential impact of other variables. Each group was exposed to the same number of videos each session. An example of a video that was used with both groups is displayed below in Figure 8. This video exemplifies reactions to emotions (for example, *when I'm sad, I stomp my feet*), without describing a replacement behavior. Replacement behaviors were only taught via social stories with the experimental group, as a coping skill.

Figure 7: Literature sample, to provide exposure to terms



Take a deep breath,
and blow out the candles!



Eating cake makes him thirsty.
Time to drink water!

Figure 8: Emotions video (Feelings and Emotions Song for Kids | Kindergarten, Preschool & ESL | Fun Kids English, 2018)



Interviews were conducted with both groups and the teacher, in an attempt to collect data to answer research questions two and three. The classroom teacher participated in a face-to-face interview with the researcher, one week before the intervention period began. This was done to

collect information on her perception of behaviors and emotions within the classroom. Below in Figure 9 are the interview questions.

Figure 9: Interview Questions, pre-intervention (teacher)

1. Have you, the teacher, received any instruction on how to teach mindfulness or emotions? Have you attended courses that teach about how to instruct students on emotions?
2. Have your students received previous instruction on coping skills or mindfulness in classes (in Catalan)?
3. Do you find that your students struggle with regulating their emotions?
4. Do your students discuss their emotions with you or each other? If yes, how often have you noticed them doing this?
5. Which emotions do students typically present in class?
6. Are there any behaviors that you would like to see increase or decrease in your students?

Following the intervention period, the teacher participated in a post-interview. The aim was to identify any changes that might have occurred within the classroom environment as well as the teacher's perception of the students' abilities to manage their emotions. Figure 10 displays the interview questions posed during the follow-up interview.

Figure 10: Interview Questions, post-intervention (teacher)

1. How would you say student behaviors have changed in since the start of the sessions on emotions and calming down?
2. Do you see a difference in behavior between students in and , with emotions or calming down?
3. Do your students seem to respond differently when they are emotional?
4. Have you seen evidence of your students using coping skills and or mindfulness strategies (like taking deep breaths, squeezing something, or drinking water to calm down)?
5. Have your students shared with you about their emotions?
6. Could you discuss any benefits or disadvantages you have seen from this instruction?

The students in both the control group and the experimental group participated in a post-interview following the intervention period. The aim was to investigate differences in student responses and document student perceptions of their own emotions. The post-interview questions are displayed below in Figure 11.

Figure 11: Interview Questions, post-intervention (students)

1. What can you do if you feel angry?
2. What can you do if you feel angry, to be calm?
3. When you have a very strong feeling like very sad, what do you do to fix it, to be calm/feel better?
4. Do you talk to your classmates or your teacher about how you feel?
5. What makes you feel calm when you are feeling very excited?
6. When you feel very scared, what do you do?
7. What is your favorite way to calm down?

The next section presents the results of the experiment with both groups, as well as the results collected from the interviews with the teacher.

5 Results

5.1 Data Analysis

The quantitative data obtained from this study is provided from the pre and posttests. The data for the pretests with both the control group and the experimental group are displayed in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Pretest and posttest scores for the control group

Control Group		
Student Reference Numbers	Pre-Test Scores	Post-Test Scores
1	7	8
2	4	7
3	8	9
4	5	8
5	7	9
6	8	8
7	10	10
8	6	8
9	3	6
10	6	9
11	6	7
12	5	6
13	6	7
14	5	8
15	7	8
16	7	8
17	5	9
18	6	6

Table 2 displays data collected from both groups' completion of the posttest, one week following the intervention period.

Table 2: *Pretests and posttest scores for the experimental group*

Experimental Group		
Student Reference Numbers	Pre-Test Scores	Post-Test Scores
1	7	10
2	4	7
3	9	10
4	4	8
5	9	9
6	8	10
7	7	10
8	3	10
9	4	9
10	4	9
11	6	10
12	7	10
13	7	9
14	5	8
15	9	10
16	6	8
17	5	7
18	9	10
19	5	8
20	7	9

The quantitative data is further presented with Tables 3 and 4, displaying the differences in the experimental and control groups' responses to terms regarding emotions, reactions, and coping skills.

Table 3: Control group responses to emotions, reactions, and coping skills

Control Group: Pretest

Student Reference Numbers	Terms for Emotions (_/6)	Terms for Reactions (_/2)	Terms for Coping Skills (_/2)
1	5	0	2
2	4	0	0
3	5	1	2
4	4	0	1
5	5	0	2
6	5	1	2
7	6	2	2
8	4	1	1
9	2	1	0
10	4	0	2
11	5	0	1
12	4	0	1
13	3	1	2
14	5	0	0
15	5	0	2
16	5	0	2
17	5	0	0
18	4	0	2

Control Group: Posttest

Student Reference Numbers	Terms for Emotions (_/6)	Terms for Reactions (_/2)	Terms for Coping Skills (_/2)
1	6	0	2
2	6	1	1
3	6	1	2
4	6	1	1
5	6	1	2
6	6	1	1
7	6	2	2
8	6	1	1
9	5	0	1
10	6	0	2
11	6	0	1
12	5	1	0
13	6	0	1
14	6	0	2
15	6	0	2
16	6	1	1
17	6	1	1
18	5	1	0

Table 4: Experimental group responses to emotions, reactions, and coping skills

Experimental Group: Pretest

Student Reference Numbers	Terms for Emotions (/_/6)	Terms for Reactions (/_/2)	Terms for Coping Skills (/_/2)
1	5	0	2
2	3	1	0
3	6	1	2
4	2	0	2
5	5	2	2
6	5	1	2
7	5	1	1
8	2	0	1
9	3	0	1
10	2	0	2
11	5	0	1
12	5	0	2
13	5	1	1
14	4	0	1
15	6	1	2
16	5	0	1
17	3	1	1
18	5	2	2
19	5	0	0
20	5	0	2

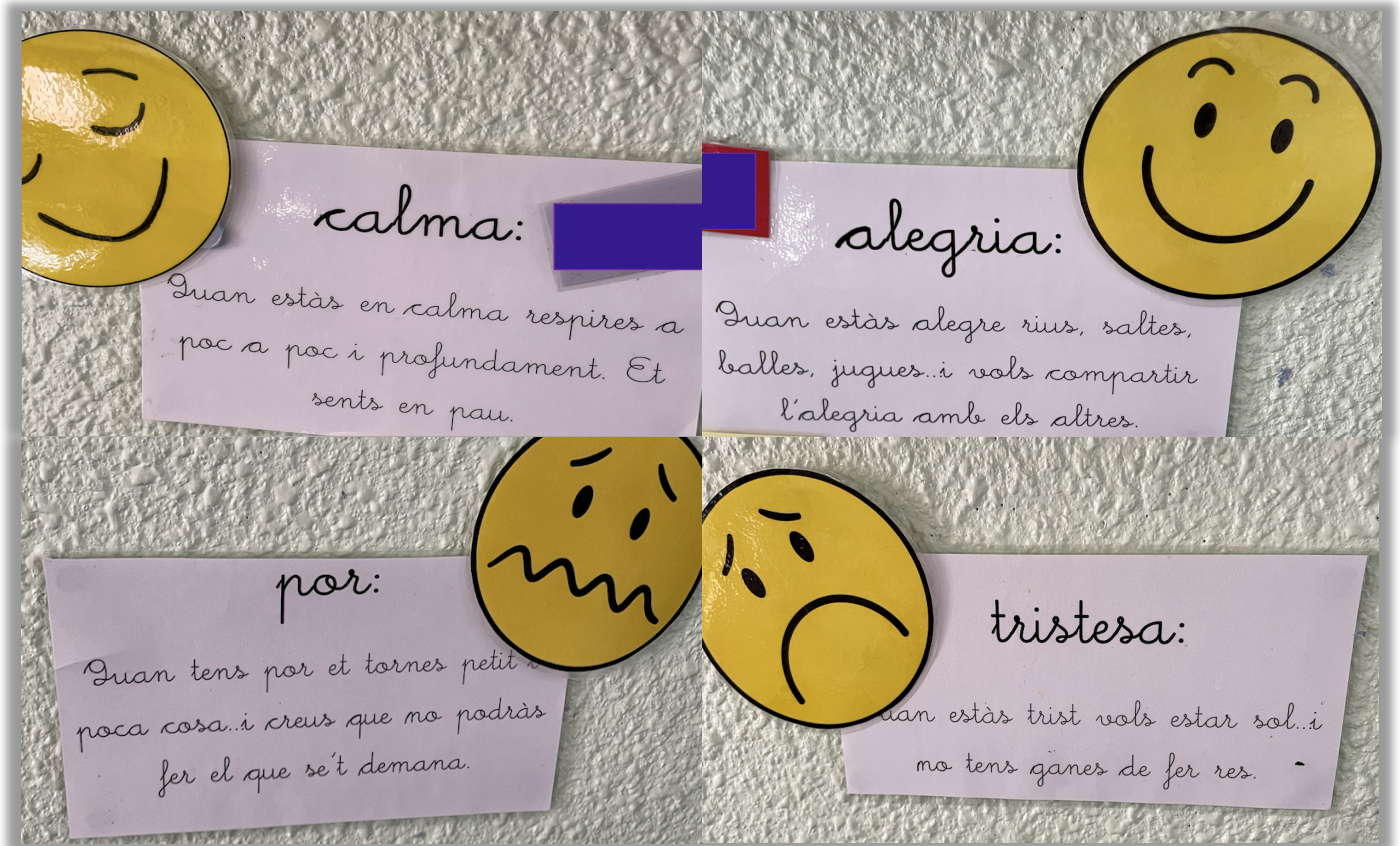
Experimental Group: Posttest

Student Reference Numbers	Terms for Emotions (/_/6)	Terms for Reactions (/_/2)	Terms for Coping Skills (/_/2)
1	6	2	2
2	6	0	1
3	6	2	2
4	5	1	2
5	6	2	1
6	6	2	2
7	6	2	2
8	6	2	2
9	6	1	2
10	6	2	1
11	6	2	2
12	6	2	2
13	6	0	2
14	6	0	2
15	6	2	2
16	6	0	2
17	5	0	2
18	6	2	2
19	6	1	1
20	6	2	1

5.2 Responses Collected from the Teacher, Pre-Intervention

Before conducting the intervention period, the English teacher was asked about any previous instruction she had received on teaching mindfulness or emotions. The teacher shared that in her teacher preparation there had not been a huge focus on this area, but she had previously attended a seminar in September 2021 which detailed how to work with animals to teach children about emotions. The teachers in the school visited a nearby farm for this seminar, but the teacher noted that she was not sure how to apply this seminar to her current classroom, as they do not have access to animals in the typical school day. When asked if the students in her classes had received any instruction on coping skills or mindfulness, in the target language or in Catalan, the teacher responded that yes, in Catalan, the students will respond to questions about how they are feeling. At the front of the classroom there are laminated emoticons with labels in Catalan. Throughout the school day, students are encouraged to place their name tags on the feeling that best matches their emotion. At times, this will prompt class discussions when the teacher notices a student has moved their name tag from *calm* to *sad*. Figure 12 presents photographs of this area of the classroom. It is important to note that the researcher had seen this practice in place with the experimental group before the intervention period; in this instance a discussion was conducted regarding how the students felt. However, within that discussion there was no conversation regarding how the students could manage or cope with that emotion, thus encouraging the necessity for this study.

Figure 12: Emotion labels with name tags (Check-In, Check-Out system)



When asked if the students struggle with managing their emotions, the teacher shared that some of them will appear “frustrated” or “angry” in class. Other students might feel sad because they struggle to keep up with their peers and they want to be on the same level as them. The teacher also shared that sometimes students will be angry with one another after recess, due to social conflicts. She shared that sometimes she wonders if students say they are angry in order to receive some attention from the teacher. When the researcher asked if the teacher discusses emotions with the students, the teacher shared that the students begin their school day with her each morning, by discussing how they are feeling. She essentially references the beginning of a *Check-In, Check-Out (CICO)* system, a tactic used in social emotional learning to gauge how students are feeling

and progressing throughout the school day. This will be elaborated on in the discussion section. When asked if there are any behaviors that the teacher would like to see increase or decrease, she shared that she would be pleased if they showed less frustration. She elaborated by saying that she has noticed when her students find something to be difficult, they often become frustrated and struggle to accomplish the task. She also expressed a hope for increased patience with the class, as some students tend to grow impatient when they are not called upon (when raising their hands).

5.3 Responses Collected from the Teacher, Post-Intervention

In the post-interview, following the six sessions with both groups, the teacher shared the following responses. When asked about any changes she had seen in the experimental group following the intervention period, she shared that while they seemed aware of many emotions from the beginning of the school year, they now seem more aware of ways to calm down. She noted that this was an important distinction she had seen following the intervention period. When asked about any differences noted in terms of behavior between the experimental and control groups, she shared that it can be difficult to compare the two as they are quite different. The control group is a bit more homogenous than the experimental group, but she also feels that the experimental group is more eager to participate in English classes. She noticed that the control group seemed to identify technology as a calm down strategy and attributed to this being a strategy these students must use at home, as phones and tablets are not generally available in the school setting. She compared this to the experimental group; when asked how they prefer to calm down, the students in the experimental group shared, using English vocabulary, distinct coping skills like yoga, meditation, and other self-regulation skills.

When asked about any changes in how the students respond to emotions following the intervention period, the teacher shared that the students in the experimental group seem to be better at expressing their emotions, vocalizing how they feel with their peers and teachers. She also shared that the students who attend school more frequently seem to be less anxious in class, compared to students with inconsistent attendance. The teacher shared that she sees the students using coping skills and mindfulness strategies often times after recess and after lunch. They will drink water and close their eyes to relax before the start of a lesson. When asked about any benefits or disadvantages noticed from the interventions implemented, the teacher emphatically shared that the students in both groups have learned more English vocabulary. She shared that the students in the experimental group are now able to associate different actions with an emotion, and that they are now able to implement strategies to calm themselves down. This aids in her instruction as the students can self-regulate in the midst of class sessions, requiring less teacher support in this area.

5.4 Responses Collected from the Students, Post-Intervention

One week following the conclusion of the six sessions, both the control group and experimental group participated in a whole-group interview led by the English teacher. The interview questions were the same for both groups and were presented first in English and again in Catalan when clarification was needed. The researcher indicated this along with the student responses, shown below.

When asked, in English, what they do if they are feeling angry, the students in the control group first showed hesitation to respond. After some prompting, one student responded in English that she stomps her feet. Others then shared, in Catalan, that they cry, wrinkle their brow, do not want to talk to others when angry, want to be left alone and breathe hard out of their nose. When

asked, in English, how they can calm down when feeling angry, again students struggled to provide answers. The question was translated in Catalan, and then paraphrased in Catalan, and students began to share responses that translated to, “you need to be calm” and “you don’t need to be nervous”. One student shared, in Catalan, “take deep breaths” and another said, “play with your friends”. The students were then asked what they do when they have a strong emotion and want to feel better or calm down, first in English and then in Catalan because there were no responses initially. Students then answered in Catalan, stating “I can cry,” “I don’t want to talk to people when I’m sad,” “forget the bad things and do what you like,” and “play on your phone”. When asked if the students feel comfortable talking about their emotions with their classmates or teacher, 10 of the 14 students present shared that they do. When asked, in English, what they do to feel calm if they are feeling very excited, students shared in Catalan that they “stop playing” and “relax”. Many of the students answered by describing the feeling of excitement (“really happy”) but struggled to describe what physical steps they can take to go from feeling excited to feeling calm. When asked in English what they do when feeling scared, students answered solely in Catalan. Responses included “I hide”, “I talk to my parents,” “I run away,” and “turn on the lights”. The last interview question was “What is your favorite way to make yourself feel calm?”. This was first posed in English and then again in Catalan, as students struggled to form answers the first time. Students shared the following responses in Catalan: “to hide,” “to lay in bed,” “play with my phone,” “do yoga,” “sleep,” and “drink water”.

The answers collected from interviewing the experimental group show distinct differences. The students in the experimental group rarely needed any of the questions clarified in Catalan, and they were also able to provide correct answers to the prompts in the target language, English. The first question, asked in English, was “what do you do if you feel angry?”. Students responded with

“stomp my feet,” “yell,” and “hit”. These reactions were taught in the first intervention session, using the social story *When I Feel Angry*. When asked how to calm down when feeling angry, students shared that they can “count to 10,” “take deep breaths,” “talk to self,” and “drink water”. These responses correctly identify coping skills in the target language, as taught in the social stories during the intervention sessions. When students were asked if they would talk to their classmates or teacher about how they are feeling, 15 of the 20 students present responded that yes, they felt comfortable discussing this. When asked about what makes them feel calm when they are feeling very excited, they shared that they can “count to 10,” “talk to yourself,” “use self-talk,” “squeeze something,” and “take deep breaths”.

5.5 Statistical Analysis

The data from the pre and posttests were compared with the use of paired t-tests conducted via JASP. Table 5, below, displays the descriptive statistics collected for the control group’s pre and posttest scores.

Table 5: Descriptive statistics for the control group’s pre and posttest scores, provided by JASP

Descriptive Statistics		
Control Group		
Descriptive Statistics		
	Pretest	Posttest
Valid	18	18
Missing	0	0
Mode	6.000	8.000
Median	6.000	8.000
Mean	6.167	7.833
Std. Deviation	1.618	1.150
Minimum	3.000	6.000
Maximum	10.000	10.000

In Table 6, the results for the paired samples t-test for the control group are displayed.

Table 6: Paired Samples T-test for the control group's pre and posttest scores, provided by JASP

Paired Samples T-Test					
Paired Samples T-Test					
Measure 1	Measure 2	t	df	p	
Pretest	- Posttest	-5.718	17	< .001	

Note. Student's t-test.

Table 7 displays the descriptive statistics as collected from the paired samples t-test for the control group.

Table 7: Descriptive statistics for the control group's paired samples t-test, provided by JASP

Descriptives ▼				
Descriptives				
	N	Mean	SD	SE
Pretest	18	6.167	1.618	0.381
Posttest	18	7.833	1.150	0.271

Figure 13 holds a descriptive plot, marking the scores from the control group's paired samples t-test.

Figure 13: Descriptive plot for the control group's paired samples t-test, provided by JASP

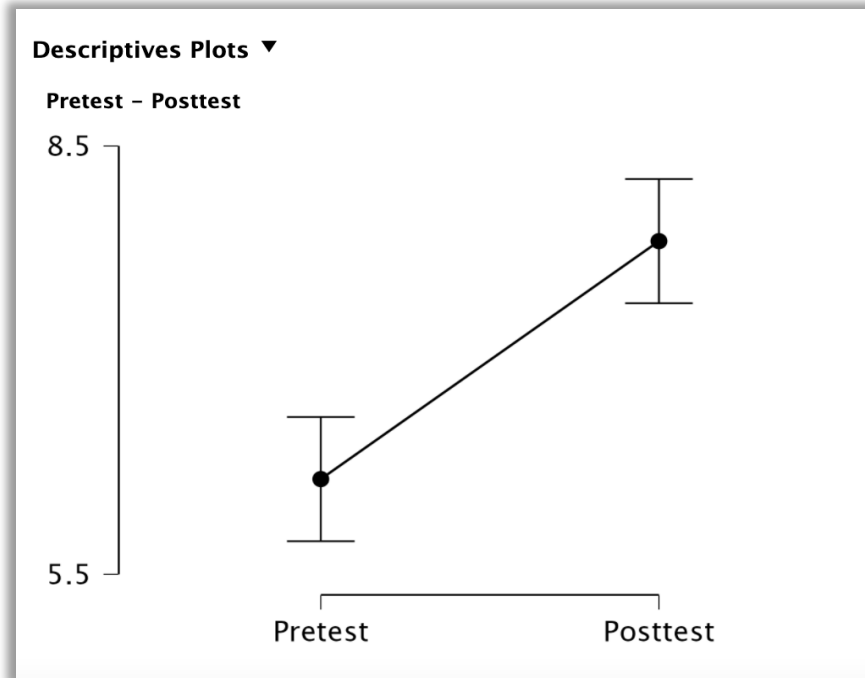


Table 8 displays the descriptive statistics that were collected following the experimental group's participation in the pre and posttests.

Table 8: Descriptive statistics for the experimental group's pre and posttest scores, provided by JASP.

Descriptive Statistics		
Experimental Group		
Descriptive Statistics		
	Pretest	Posttest
Valid	20	20
Missing	0	0
Mode	7.000	10.000
Median	6.500	9.000
Mean	6.250	9.050
Std. Deviation	1.943	1.050
Minimum	3.000	7.000
Maximum	9.000	10.000

Table 9 details the results collected from the paired samples t-test, which was run using the scores from the experimental group's pre and posttest scores.

Table 9: Paired Samples T-test for the experimental group's pre and posttest scores, provided by JASP

Paired Samples T-Test				
Measure 1	Measure 2	t	df	p
Pretest	- Posttest	-7.628	19	< .001

Note. Student's t-test.

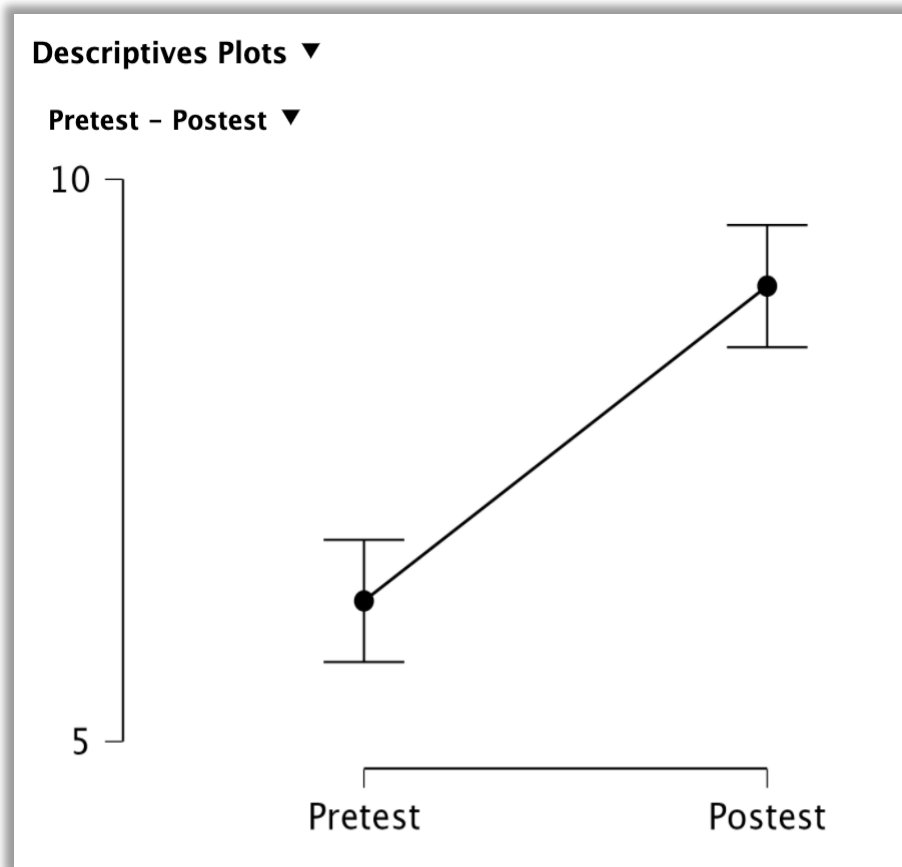
In Table 10, the descriptive statistics collected from the experimental group's paired samples t-test are displayed.

Table 10: Descriptive statistics for the experimental group's paired samples t-test, provided by JASP

Descriptives				
Descriptives				
	N	Mean	SD	SE
Pretest	20	6.250	1.943	0.435
Posttest	20	9.050	1.050	0.235

Figure 14 displays a descriptive plot, marking the scores from the experimental group's paired samples t-test.

Figure 14: Descriptive plot for the experimental group's paired samples t-test, provided by JASP



6 Discussion

This study seeks to answer three research questions regarding vocabulary acquisition, mindfulness teaching, and student and teacher perceptions. Research question one aims to identify the differences in student proficiency in the target language, between the use of social stories versus the use of storytelling. Upon review of the results provided in the above analyses, this study

concludes that the use of social stories is more effective in increasing students' vocabulary skills. This is evident in the scores collected from the posttests. Both groups showed an increased vocabulary proficiency following the six sessions over the course of five weeks; however, the experimental group still outperformed the control group.

The temporal span of five weeks allotted for the six intervention sessions is supported by studies conducted by Greenberg et al. (2009) and Haggerty et al. (2005). Greenberg et al.'s study found that after two weeks of mindfulness instruction, students showed an increase in their ability to learn new information. Haggerty et al. found that within three weeks of social story interventions with a struggling student, the student was able to use the "newly learned coping strategy" (Haggerty et al., 2005, p. 46). These studies use a shorter amount of time to justify the use of mindfulness and coping skills in teaching. The findings of these studies support the five-week intervention period implemented in this study, which aims to increase the benefits of these teaching practices with a longer intervention period.

Upon reviewing Table 5, it can be noted that the control group's overall scores on the assessments improved, following the six sessions of instruction. On the pretest, the average score in the control group was 6.1, whereas after the six sessions the average was 7.8. This provides support for hypothesis one, proving an increase in vocabulary acquisition within the control group. In Table 6, the results for the paired samples t-test for the control group are displayed. The p-value is identified as less than .001, thus supporting hypothesis one, as this is statistically significant. The t-value is also significant and provides support for the instruction of vocabulary terms regarding emotions. Table 8 provides evidence to further support the first hypothesis, as the experimental group's test score average increased from 6.2 on the pretests to 9.0 on the posttest.

This also supports the notion that students in the experimental group would outperform students in the control group, with the variable being instruction on coping skills via social stories.

Further support for hypothesis one is found in Table 9, as the t-value with the experimental group is increasingly more significant than with the control group. The t-value with the control group was -5.7, whereas the experimental group performed with a t-value of -7.6. This contrast can be attributed to the variable of coping skills instruction, as the students in the experimental group were provided interaction with terms for coping skills as opposed to the control group, who were solely exposed to the language for coping skills. The p-value with the paired samples t-test for the experimental group is less than .001, also showing statistical significance.

The delayed posttest results within the assessment of this study argue that these interventions are effective not only in a short-term context but can also be retained. Students in the experimental group outperformed those in the control group on the posttest, arguing that instruction via social stories can hold a lasting impact which supports memory of vocabulary terms.

Another area worth highlighting is in regard to the use of social stories with students on the Autism spectrum. The student in the experimental group who is identified as Autistic showed success within the interventions and on the assessments, providing evidence that mindfulness is an inclusive strategy that can be implemented with various neuro-diversities. This also confirms the claims made by Gray & Garand (1993) and Bozkurt & Varan (2014), that social stories are an effective strategy to implement with students on the Autism spectrum. This research provides support for this notion, while also opening up the conversation on using social stories as a tool for English language instruction as well. The student with ASD in the experimental group is identified on Table 2 with the label Student Reference Number 8. The student correctly identified 3 of the

10 terms on the pre-assessment, and then was able to correctly identify all 10 of the vocabulary terms on the post-assessment. While many students in the experimental group showed progress, this difference in scores is the highest. This provides support for the use of social stories with learners on the Autism spectrum in the TEFL setting. The increase in student scores overall in the experimental group argue that social stories are an effective teaching tool with all students, as claimed earlier in this study. Piaget (1964) and Erikson's (1975) developmental theories assisted in the design of the sessions with both the control and experimental groups, as well as the vocabulary teaching techniques shared by Nation (1995) and Elley (1987). These techniques proved to be effective in increasing vocabulary proficiency, especially when used in combination with social stories to present coping skills.

In interpreting the qualitative data collected from the pre-intervention interview conducted with the teacher, a gap is found in terms of resources for social emotional learning. The teacher shared that she has had minimal training on coping skills and mindfulness, and that she has found it difficult to adapt instruction to include these aspects. This highlighted a need for the instruction that would be implemented in the intervention period of this research. The teacher did reference the use of the beginning stages of a CICO system, which is a "behavior intervention," where "students begin the school day by checking in with a CICO coordinator" (Hawken et al., 2014, p. 636). Teachers and "school staff" can act as CICO coordinators (Hawken et al., 2014, p. 636). A key detail missing from the implementation that is being done in the classes where this study took place would be the check-out aspect. The teacher was checking in with students on their emotions, but there was no inclusion of an end-of-day check-out. To increase the effects of mindfulness teaching, a full CICO system could be implemented within the classroom. This could also be used as a communicative opportunity for students to practice their vocabulary skills.

The teacher's response to the first question in the post-interview provides validity to this research, especially research questions two and three. The teacher shared that since participating in the invention period, the students in the experimental group exhibited a stronger awareness of strategies for calming down. This displays a positive impact on student perceptions of mindfulness, as well as on the teacher's awareness of coping skills exhibited by the students in the classroom. The teacher shared that the majority of the students in the control group identified technology as their preferred calm down strategy, whereas the students in the experimental group were able to identify mindfulness strategies such as yoga and meditation, and coping skills like deep-breathing and self-talk. This finding confirms hypothesis two, as students in the experimental group were able to identify mindfulness strategies as their preferred method of calming down. The reference made by the control group to using technology as a self-regulation strategy is certainly interesting and seems extremely relevant in the current climate, which includes heavy use of technology and devices in the home for entertainment purposes. Again, the post-interview with the teacher supports the claims made in hypothesis three, as the teacher shared that the students in the experimental group have been able to associate actions with their current emotion, and then choose a strategy with which to calm themselves down.

The teacher's post-intervention interview responses also provided insight on hypothesis one, as the teacher emphasized that both groups had increased their English vocabulary skills, due to the sessions they had participated in with the researcher. Hypothesis two was also confirmed, as the teacher emphatically shared that the students in the experimental group were seen practicing coping skills and mindfulness strategies. This shows an increased awareness of coping skills and a willingness to draw upon them in social settings.

Research question two was validated in the responses collected from both groups in the post-intervention interviews. The students in the control group showed hesitation to answer the post-intervention interview questions in the target language. Many of the questions had to be repeated, scaffolded, or translated to Catalan in order to obtain responses. The majority of the responses collected from students in the control group were in Catalan, showing difficulty to discuss the topic of emotions in the target language. This is especially relevant when compared to the responses collected from the experimental group. Students in the experimental group were able to answer the questions in the target language, sharing their answers in English. This supports the claims made in hypothesis two, as the students in the experimental group outperformed the control group in discussing these topics, both in Catalan and in the target language. These findings support the use of emotional literacy as emphasized by Joseph & Strain (2003). These findings also confirm the claims by Pentón Herrera (2020) and Swartz (2017), expressing the benefits of social emotional learning in all classrooms.

7 Conclusion

As described in the introduction of this research, to discuss language requires a conversation regarding vocabulary. The areas of teaching the vocabulary of emotions, coping skills, and mindfulness have been under-represented in many classrooms and fields of research. This study aimed to investigate the use of social stories as a means to support learners in acquiring vocabulary for coping skills and emotions in the primary TEFL classroom. The results obtained from the paired samples t-tests and interviews with the teacher and students provide compelling data which advocates for the use of coping skills instruction via social stories. These tools can be used as teaching strategies by educators who seek to improve students' vocabulary in the target language, as well as improve classroom interactions via emotional regulation. With these strategies

implemented in the classroom, students will be able to retain vocabulary terms and navigate situations with an increased emotional intelligence.

This research provides support for an interdisciplinary approach to teaching the terms for emotions and coping skills within a target language. The responses gathered from the students in the post-interviews provide evidence of this. These findings can be used to answer the first research question, seeking to identify the differences documented in student proficiency in the target language. It is of great significance that the experimental group was able to listen to and respond to the questions in the target language, providing correct responses. In contrast, the students in the control group required clarification in the classroom language (Catalan) and then provided their responses in Catalan. It is also important to note that many of the responses obtained from the control group were not correct answers. This supports the notion that coping skills must be explicitly taught to students, despite the control group receiving instruction on terms for emotions. This is supported as well in the comparison of test scores.

The second research question references use of mindful learning instruction in the target language, with the use of social stories, to identify an impact on student perceptions regarding the use of coping skills. Reviewing the responses collected from the post-interviews, it is clear that students in the experimental group were far more prepared to answer questions pertaining to the use of coping skills. The students in the control group required prompting and clarification in the primary language in order to attempt to answer the questions. The answers provided from the experimental group show an understanding of the application of coping skills. For example, when asked what the students' favorite ways were to feel calm, they shared various responses that reference coping skills, like "count to 10," "talk to yourself," "use self-talk," "squeeze something," and "take deep breaths". Each of these refers to a coping skill that was taught during the five-week

intervention period, in the social stories presented. The findings collected from the teacher's responses within the post-intervention interview provide evidence in answering the third research question. The teacher's perception of coping skills and mindful learning instruction were impacted positively, as the teacher was now able to identify the use of these skills in her classroom.

The objectives of this study were met as they provide insight on the differences in vocabulary acquisition when students are exposed to language via storytelling, versus the use of teaching the language via social stories. An especially significant aspect of this research applies to the student in the experimental group who is identified with ASD. This student's test scores validate the use of this instruction for various neuro-diversities and contribute to the existing research in support of the use of social stories with students who are Autistic.

These results contribute to the existing literature, as highlighted in the literature review, which support the use of mindfulness and social emotional learning. The results also support the novelty of this research, which claims that social stories can be used as an inclusive resource with students of various abilities. Social stories invite personalization in instruction, which can make the learning experience more memorable. This is seen in the delayed posttest scores provided by the experimental group, as they showed greater progress in their scores than the control group. The findings presented above support the notion that the use of social stories with primary children, and in the TEFL setting, can show an increased awareness of vocabulary terms. This use of social stories could be extended to other vocabulary areas in the TEFL field.

7.1 Limitations of the Study

A limitation within this study stems from access to resources. When students in the experimental group were presented with the social stories, it was done using the classroom

technology by projecting the story on the Smart Board. Ideally, the teacher would be able to print and distribute a copy of each social story as it is being taught. Doing so could increase students' literacy skills in the target language, as they could follow along with the text in front of them. It would also provide students with the chance to take the social stories home, leaving time for students to review the topics in their own free time.

Another limitation to this study is regarding the population with the data subjects. Ideally, it would have provided helpful data if there were a student in the control group who was also on the Autism spectrum. Such information could provide further insight on the different responses to social stories versus storytelling.

7.2 Further Research

Another research study that could stem from the results of this experiment would be the application of the use of social stories in other contexts of TEFL. While this study applied the use of teaching vocabulary with social stories to primary learners, it would be beneficial to see a similar study conducted with students of various ages. This could also be applied to the use of self-regulation skills. Self-regulation skills have been taught to various ages, but there could be further research investigating the best strategies for teaching coping skills to students of older ages. This would provide more information for educators on how to emotionally support learners of all ages.

Another way this study could be extended would be to include other neuro-divergent populations, for example, students with ADHD. Doing so could further justify the use of social stories with various kinds of learners. This research could also promote future experiments regarding the use of social stories to teach other aspects of English, for example the teaching of grammar in the target language.

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9 Appendices

Appendix A

Outline of the lesson for Session 1 with the control group

Control Group: S1 - Friday, 8 April

Objective: To review the terms for feelings and provide exposure to terms

Vocabulary Terms: angry, sad, calm, excited, scared, happy

Exposure to (via children's story, not told through 1st person and not teaching coping skills):
deep breaths, count, stomp, yell, hit, drink water

Timing	Procedure
5 minutes	T will display images on PPT showing emotions. Ask students if they can identify the terms, then repeat them as a class.
5 minutes	T will ask students. "what do you do when you're happy/angry/sad?" (Play song, "when I'm angry, angry, angry, I stomp my feet..." Video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eMOnyPxE_w8 T will pause the video for questioning and repetition. (Stop at 1:53)
5 minutes	T will read the story, The Birthday Party, to review terms and provide exposure to the terms.
5 minutes	T will act out an emotion and students will provide the vocabulary
10 minutes	T will distribute a matching worksheet, where students will match the terms to the face and then color the images.

Appendix B

Outline of the lesson for Session 1 with the control group

Experimental Group: S1 - Thursday, 7 April

Objective: To review terms of feelings and introduce coping skills for feelings of anger

Vocabulary Terms: Review terms of emotions (based on pre-test): angry, happy, sad, scared, excited

New terms (to be introduced in the social story):

"When I feel angry, I want to **stomp** my feet. I want to **yell**. I want to **hit** something. But I cannot. When I feel angry, I **can take deep breaths**, I **can count to 10**. I can **drink water**. This will help me **feel calm**"

Timing	Procedure
5 minutes	T will display images on PPT showing emotions. Ask students if they can identify the terms, then repeat them as a class.
5 minutes	T will ask students. "what do you do when you're happy/angry/sad?" (Play song, "when I'm angry, angry, angry, I stomp my feet..." Video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eMOnyPxE_w8 T will pause the video for questioning and repetition. (Stop at 1:53)
5 minutes	T will read the social story, "When I feel angry...". T will use questioning strategies while reading.
5 minutes	T will review the coping skills, showing a list of the coping skills for <u>angry</u> and have co-T explain in Catalan. List of coping skills: I can take deep breaths, count to 10, drink water.
5 minutes	T will act out an emotion or coping skill and students will provide the vocabulary
5 minutes	T will distribute a matching worksheet, where students will match the terms to the face and then color the images.

Appendix C

The Birthday Party, a story designed by the researcher to provide students in the control group with exposure to terms that were introduced via social stories to the experimental group

The Birthday Party



Welcome to the birthday party!



The kids are excited.



*They count to 10
and yell, "Happy Birthday!"*



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*Take a deep breath,
and blow out the candles!*



*Eating cake makes him thirsty.
Time to drink water!*



*Let's dance! The kids stomp
their feet to the music.*



*Look, a piñata!
They hit the piñata with sticks.*

Appendix D

Social story, designed by the researcher to be implemented as an intervention for session 1 with the experimental group


When I feel angry



When I feel angry,



I want to stomp my feet.



When I feel angry,



When I feel angry,



I want to yell.



I want to hit.



When I feel angry,



When I feel angry,



I can be calm.



I can take deep breaths.



When I feel angry,



When I feel angry,



I can count to 10.



I can drink water.



When I feel angry,



I can be calm.



Great job!

