


# Culturally Responsive English Storytelling to Support Social-Emotional Learning in Primary Education

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## Introduction

Primary education plays a foundational role in children’s academic, linguistic, social, emotional, and cultural development. At this level, learning is not only concerned with literacy, numeracy, and subject knowledge, but also with how children recognize emotions, communicate with peers, cooperate in groups, respond to differences, and make responsible decisions in classroom situations. These developmental needs are closely related to social-emotional learning (SEL), which refers to the process through which children and adults acquire and apply knowledge, skills, and attitudes to develop healthy identities, manage emotions, show empathy, build supportive relationships, and make caring and responsible decisions (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning [CASEL], 2024). SEL is particularly relevant in primary education because children’s emotional regulation, peer interaction, and moral understanding are still developing through repeated social experiences in school.

The importance of SEL has been supported by empirical evidence. A meta-analysis of 213 school-based SEL interventions involving more than 270,000 students found that SEL programs were associated with improvements in social-emotional skills, attitudes, behavior, and academic achievement (Durlak et al.,

2011). School-based SEL interventions may also produce positive follow-up effects on youth development (Taylor et al., 2017). These findings suggest that SEL should not be treated as a separate activity outside classroom learning. Instead, SEL can be embedded into daily pedagogical practices, including language learning, classroom interaction, and learning materials.

At the same time, children's learning experiences are shaped by culture. Students bring local languages, family practices, community values, moral traditions, stories, and lived experiences that influence how they interpret learning. Culturally relevant pedagogy emphasizes that teaching should support academic success, cultural competence, and critical consciousness (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Culturally responsive teaching uses students' cultural knowledge and prior experiences to make learning more relevant and effective (Gay, 2018). Pedagogy should also sustain students' cultural and linguistic practices rather than merely acknowledge them (Paris, 2012). Therefore, culture should not be treated as a decorative element in instruction, but as a meaningful resource for designing inclusive learning experiences.

One classroom practice that can connect language learning, culture, and social-emotional development is storytelling. In English language learning for young learners, storytelling provides meaningful input, repeated language patterns, contextualized vocabulary, listening practice, imagination, and oral interaction. Storytelling is useful for primary English language teachers because stories can support language learning while engaging children's emotion and participation (Ellis & Brewster, 2014). Picturebooks also encourage children to respond not only to words, but also to images, characters, emotions, and narrative events (Mourão, 2016). Thus, storytelling can make English learning more accessible and meaningful for primary students.

However, English storytelling should not be understood only as a technique for teaching vocabulary, pronunciation, or listening comprehension. Stories also present emotions, conflicts, relationships, moral choices, and consequences in concrete ways that children can understand. Through stories, students can observe how characters feel, why they act in certain ways, how they respond to problems, and what choices they make. With guided questions, role play, retelling, drawing, and collaborative discussion, storytelling may become a medium for emotional reflection, empathy, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making.

Despite this potential, the relationship among culturally responsive pedagogy, English storytelling, and SEL has not been sufficiently synthesized in an integrated manner. Existing literature on storytelling in English language learning often emphasizes linguistic outcomes such as vocabulary development, listening comprehension, speaking confidence, and engagement. Meanwhile, SEL literature commonly focuses on school-based programs, teacher competence, classroom climate, and psychological outcomes. Studies on culturally responsive pedagogy tend to address identity, equity, and inclusive teaching across broader educational contexts. These bodies of literature are valuable, but they are often discussed separately. As a result, there remains a conceptual gap in understanding how culturally responsive English storytelling can support both English learning and social-emotional development in primary education.

Responding to this gap, this article offers an integrative literature review of culturally responsive English storytelling as a pedagogical approach to support SEL in primary education. This article is guided by three research questions: how culturally responsive English storytelling is conceptualized in the literature, what SEL competencies can be supported through this approach, and what pedagogical framework can be proposed for integrating culturally responsive English storytelling and SEL in primary classrooms.

The novelty of this article lies in its development of a synthesized pedagogical model that integrates culturally responsive pedagogy, English storytelling for young learners, and social-emotional learning within a single classroom-oriented framework. This article does not claim to introduce a completely new theory of storytelling, culture, or SEL. Rather, it offers a new integrative synthesis that operationalizes these three bodies of literature into a pedagogical pathway for primary English learning. Previous literature has discussed culturally responsive pedagogy as an approach that values students' cultural knowledge, identity, and lived experiences in learning (Gay, 2018; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Paris, 2012). Other studies have examined storytelling, picturebooks, and digital storytelling as meaningful practices for young language learners (Ellis & Brewster, 2014; Lestariyana & Widodo, 2018; Mourão, 2016; Ong & Aryadoust, 2023).

Meanwhile, SEL literature has identified key competencies such as self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making (CASEL, 2024; Durlak et al., 2011; Taylor et al., 2017).

However, these three areas are commonly discussed separately. Culturally responsive pedagogy is often positioned within broader discussions of identity, equity, and inclusive teaching. Storytelling in English learning is frequently examined in relation to vocabulary, listening, speaking, motivation, and multimodal engagement. SEL is commonly addressed through school-based programs, psychological outcomes, or classroom climate. The specific mechanism through which culturally responsive English storytelling may support SEL in primary education remains less explicitly formulated. Therefore, this article contributes by proposing the Culturally Responsive English Storytelling for Social-Emotional Learning framework.

The proposed framework is novel because it explains how culturally meaningful story selection, interactive English storytelling, guided emotional reflection, collaborative meaning-making, and social-emotional transfer may work as a gradual pedagogical mechanism. In this framework, cultural relevance supports students' recognition and belonging, narrative engagement supports meaningful English participation, emotional reflection supports the identification of feelings and choices, collaborative meaning-making supports peer interaction, and social-emotional transfer supports the application of story-based lessons to classroom and daily-life situations. Thus, the contribution of this article is not limited to proposing another storytelling activity, but to offering a theoretically grounded synthesis that connects language learning, cultural identity, and SEL outcomes in primary education.

## **Literature Review**

### **Social-Emotional Learning in Primary Education**

Social-emotional learning (SEL) has become an important framework in contemporary education because it addresses children's development beyond academic achievement. In primary education, children are still developing their ability to understand themselves, regulate emotions, communicate with others, build friendships, and make decisions in social situations. SEL can be conceptualized through five interrelated competencies: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making (CASEL, 2024). These competencies are closely related to children's everyday classroom experiences, such as expressing feelings appropriately, listening to peers, cooperating in group work, resolving conflicts, and reflecting on the consequences of their actions.

The relevance of SEL in schools has been supported by strong empirical evidence. School-based SEL programs were associated with improvements in students' social-emotional skills, attitudes, behavior, and academic performance (Durlak et al., 2011). The meta-analysis also indicated that SEL interventions could be implemented by school staff, suggesting that SEL does not always require separate clinical settings or external specialists. SEL interventions may also have positive follow-up effects, including better social-emotional competencies and indicators of positive youth development (Taylor et al., 2017). These findings support the view that SEL should be integrated into ordinary classroom practices rather than treated as an additional program detached from learning activities.

For primary students, SEL is particularly meaningful because emotional and social competencies are learned through concrete experiences. Children often need stories, examples, modeling, guided dialogue, and repeated practice to understand abstract ideas such as empathy, responsibility, respect, fairness, and self-control. Teachers play a central role in SEL because children's social and emotional development is influenced by classroom relationships, teacher modeling, and the emotional climate of learning (Schonert-Reichl, 2017). Thus, SEL in primary education requires pedagogical practices that are developmentally appropriate, relational, and connected to children's everyday experiences.

### **Culturally Responsive Pedagogy and Children's Learning**

Culturally responsive pedagogy is grounded in the idea that students' cultural backgrounds are not obstacles to learning but valuable resources for teaching. Culturally relevant pedagogy supports students' academic success, cultural competence, and critical consciousness (Ladson-Billings, 1995). This perspective challenges instructional practices that separate school knowledge from students' identities and lived

experiences. In primary education, such separation may make learning feel abstract or distant, especially when materials do not reflect children's language, family life, community values, or cultural narratives.

Culturally responsive teaching uses students' cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles to make learning more relevant and effective (Gay, 2018). From this perspective, culture is not merely added to the lesson as a topic; it becomes part of how teachers select materials, design activities, communicate with students, and interpret classroom participation. Culturally sustaining pedagogy emphasizes the need to sustain linguistic, literate, and cultural pluralism in schooling (Paris, 2012). This is especially relevant in multilingual and multicultural contexts where children may navigate local languages, national languages, and foreign languages simultaneously.

Research synthesis also shows that culturally relevant education has been connected to positive student outcomes. A review of culturally relevant education across content areas found that culturally grounded teaching practices can support student engagement and learning (Aronson & Laughter, 2016). In primary classrooms, culturally responsive pedagogy may help children feel that their identities and experiences are recognized. This sense of recognition is important not only for academic participation but also for social-emotional development. When children encounter stories, examples, and classroom discussions that resonate with their cultural worlds, they may be more willing to express feelings, share perspectives, and participate in social interaction.

### **English Storytelling for Young Learners**

Storytelling is widely recognized as a meaningful practice in children's education because stories combine language, imagination, emotion, character, conflict, and moral meaning. In English language learning for young learners, storytelling can provide contextualized language input and support vocabulary, listening comprehension, oral expression, and classroom engagement. Storytelling is useful for primary English language teachers because stories offer repetition, rhythm, predictability, and meaningful contexts that help children understand and remember language (Ellis & Brewster, 2014). Stories also allow children to encounter English in situations that are more natural and emotionally engaging than isolated drills.

The use of picturebooks and story-based materials is also relevant for primary English classrooms. Picturebooks can promote authentic responses from young learners because children respond not only to written words but also to images, characters, emotions, and narrative events (Mourão, 2016). This multimodal nature is important because primary students may still be developing their English proficiency. Visuals, gestures, teacher expression, and repeated story patterns can help children construct meaning even when their vocabulary is limited. Therefore, storytelling can make English learning more accessible, interactive, and developmentally appropriate.

Recent studies further support the role of story-based and multimodal materials in children's language and emotional development. Digital storytelling has been used in both traditional and online classrooms to support language learning through multimodal expression (Ong & Aryadoust, 2023). This review also highlights the need for stronger research designs in studies on digital storytelling, which is relevant for future empirical work on storytelling in primary classrooms. Picture books can also promote social-emotional literacy through themes related to family, friendship, emotions, behavior, and life transitions (Tisnawijaya & Kurniati, 2024). Children's picturebooks can increase the frequency and diversity of emotion-related vocabulary in children's language environments (Green & Sun, 2025). These findings strengthen the argument that storytelling and picturebooks can support not only language exposure but also children's emotional vocabulary and social-emotional reflection.

However, storytelling should not be understood only as a linguistic technique. Stories also create opportunities for children to think about human experiences. Characters in stories may feel afraid, lonely, proud, angry, jealous, confused, brave, or kind. They may face problems, make choices, experience consequences, and learn from relationships. These narrative elements can become starting points for classroom conversations about emotions, empathy, responsibility, friendship, cooperation, and conflict resolution. When teachers ask reflective questions, invite children to retell stories, discuss character feelings, or relate story events to daily life, storytelling can support both language learning and social-emotional reflection.

### **Culturally Responsive English Storytelling and SEL**

Culturally responsive English storytelling refers to the use of English storytelling activities that are connected to students' cultural backgrounds, local values, familiar experiences, and social realities. This approach does not simply mean translating traditional stories into English. It involves thoughtful selection, adaptation, and facilitation of stories so that English learning becomes culturally meaningful and emotionally relevant for children. Stories may come from local folktales, community narratives, family experiences, moral stories, everyday social situations, or culturally familiar characters and settings. These stories can then be used as English learning materials while also opening space for social-emotional dialogue.

The integration of culturally responsive storytelling and SEL is important because children's emotional understanding is shaped by culture. The ways children express respect, apology, gratitude, courage, shame, cooperation, and responsibility may be influenced by family and community values. If SEL is taught only through culturally distant examples, children may learn the vocabulary of emotions without fully connecting it to their own lived experiences. Culturally responsive storytelling can bridge this gap by presenting social-emotional themes through narratives that children can recognize. For example, a story about helping family members, respecting elders, protecting friends, or resolving conflict in a community setting can become a meaningful context for discussing empathy, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making in English.

This approach also supports inclusive primary education. In culturally diverse classrooms, stories can help students understand similarities and differences among people. When teachers invite children to compare characters' experiences, discuss alternative choices, and listen to peers' interpretations, storytelling may strengthen social awareness and classroom relationships. English becomes not only a subject to be mastered but also a medium for sharing meaning, negotiating values, and practicing respectful communication. In this sense, culturally responsive English storytelling aligns with the broader goal of primary education: supporting children's academic, linguistic, social, emotional, and cultural development in an integrated way.

Based on the literature, culturally responsive English storytelling can be understood as an interdisciplinary pedagogical practice. From the perspective of English language learning, it provides meaningful input and communicative practice. From the perspective of culturally responsive pedagogy, it values students' identities and cultural knowledge. From the perspective of SEL, it offers narrative situations through which children can recognize emotions, understand perspectives, build relationships, and consider responsible choices. Therefore, this review positions culturally responsive English storytelling as a promising approach for supporting social-emotional learning in primary education.

### **Method**

This study employed an integrative literature review design. This design was considered appropriate because the purpose of the study was not to test the effectiveness of a particular intervention, but to synthesize theoretical, empirical, and review-based literature on culturally responsive pedagogy, English storytelling, and social-emotional learning in primary education. An integrative literature review allows researchers to bring together diverse sources, identify conceptual relationships, and develop a more comprehensive understanding of a topic that has been discussed across different fields (Torraco, 2016; Whittemore & Knafl, 2005). In this study, the review was directed toward developing a conceptual synthesis of how culturally responsive English storytelling may support social-emotional learning among primary school students.

The review procedure followed the general stages of an integrative review, namely problem identification, literature search, data evaluation, data analysis, and presentation of findings (Whittemore & Knafl, 2005). To strengthen transparency, several reporting principles from the PRISMA 2020 statement were also used, particularly in documenting search sources, inclusion criteria, exclusion criteria, the number of excluded sources, reasons for exclusion, and the final sources included in the synthesis (Page et al., 2021). Although this study was not designed as a full systematic review or meta-analysis, the use of PRISMA-informed reporting was intended to make the literature selection process more explicit and traceable.

The problem identification stage focused on the conceptual gap between three bodies of literature: culturally responsive pedagogy, English storytelling for young learners, and social-emotional learning. Previous studies have discussed storytelling as a strategy for supporting children’s English language learning, while SEL literature has emphasized the development of emotional awareness, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. However, the intersection between culturally responsive English storytelling and SEL in primary education remains less explicitly synthesized. Based on this gap, the review was guided by three research questions: (1) how is culturally responsive English storytelling conceptualized in the literature? (2) what SEL competencies can be supported through this approach? and (3) what pedagogical framework can be proposed for integrating culturally responsive English storytelling and SEL in primary education?

The literature search was conducted using several academic databases and scholarly search platforms, including Google Scholar, ERIC, ScienceDirect, SAGE Journals, SpringerLink, Taylor & Francis Online, Wiley Online Library, and official organizational sources relevant to social-emotional learning and education. The search focused primarily on publications from 2014 to 2026 to ensure the inclusion of recent discussions. However, several seminal works published before 2014 were also included because they provided foundational concepts for the review, such as culturally relevant pedagogy, culturally sustaining pedagogy, social-emotional learning, and integrative review methodology.

The search used combinations of keywords related to the three main concepts of the study. The main search terms included “culturally responsive pedagogy,” “culturally relevant pedagogy,” “culturally sustaining pedagogy,” “English storytelling,” “storytelling for young learners,” “picturebooks in EFL,” “children’s literature,” “social-emotional learning,” “SEL competencies,” “primary education,” and “elementary school.” Boolean operators were used to combine the terms, for example: “culturally responsive pedagogy” AND “English storytelling”; “storytelling” AND “social-emotional learning” AND “primary education”; “children’s literature” AND “SEL”; “picturebooks” AND “young learners” AND “English language learning”; and “culturally responsive teaching” AND “social-emotional learning.” The search strategy and eligibility criteria used in this review are summarized in Table 1.

**Table 1. Search Strategy and Eligibility Criteria**

<b>Component</b>	<b>Description</b>
<b>Review design</b>	Integrative literature review
<b>Main focus</b>	Culturally responsive English storytelling and social-emotional learning in primary education
<b>Databases and sources</b>	Google Scholar, ERIC, ScienceDirect, SAGE Journals, SpringerLink, Taylor & Francis Online, Wiley Online Library, and official educational organization sources
<b>Publication period</b>	Primarily 2014–2026
<b>Seminal sources</b>	Foundational works published before 2014 were included when they provided key theoretical or methodological concepts, such as culturally relevant pedagogy, culturally sustaining pedagogy, social-emotional learning, and integrative review methodology
<b>Main keywords</b>	“culturally responsive pedagogy,” “culturally relevant pedagogy,” “culturally sustaining pedagogy,” “English storytelling,” “storytelling for young learners,” “picturebooks in EFL,” “children’s literature,” “social-emotional learning,” “SEL competencies,” “primary education,” and “elementary school”
<b>Boolean combinations</b>	“culturally responsive pedagogy” AND “English storytelling”; “storytelling” AND “social-emotional learning” AND “primary education”; “children’s literature” AND “SEL”; “picturebooks” AND “young learners” AND “English language learning”; “culturally responsive teaching” AND “social-emotional learning”
<b>Inclusion criteria</b>	Sources were included if they discussed culturally responsive, culturally relevant, or culturally sustaining pedagogy; examined storytelling, children’s literature, picturebooks, or story-based instruction in English language learning for young learners; addressed SEL or children’s

Component	Description
	social-emotional development in school contexts; focused on primary education, elementary education, early childhood education, or young learners; and provided theoretical, empirical, or review-based contributions relevant to the synthesis
<b>Exclusion criteria</b>	Sources were excluded if they focused only on adult language learners; discussed storytelling outside educational contexts; lacked clear bibliographic information; were inaccessible for verification; or did not contribute substantively to the relationship among culture, English storytelling, and social-emotional learning
<b>Type of sources prioritized</b>	Peer-reviewed journal articles, academic books, official educational frameworks, and institutional reports from recognized organizations
<b>Analysis approach</b>	Thematic synthesis
<b>Main synthesis themes</b>	Storytelling as meaningful English language input; cultural narratives as identity-affirming pedagogy; storytelling as a medium for social-emotional learning; and a synthesized pedagogical framework for culturally responsive English storytelling

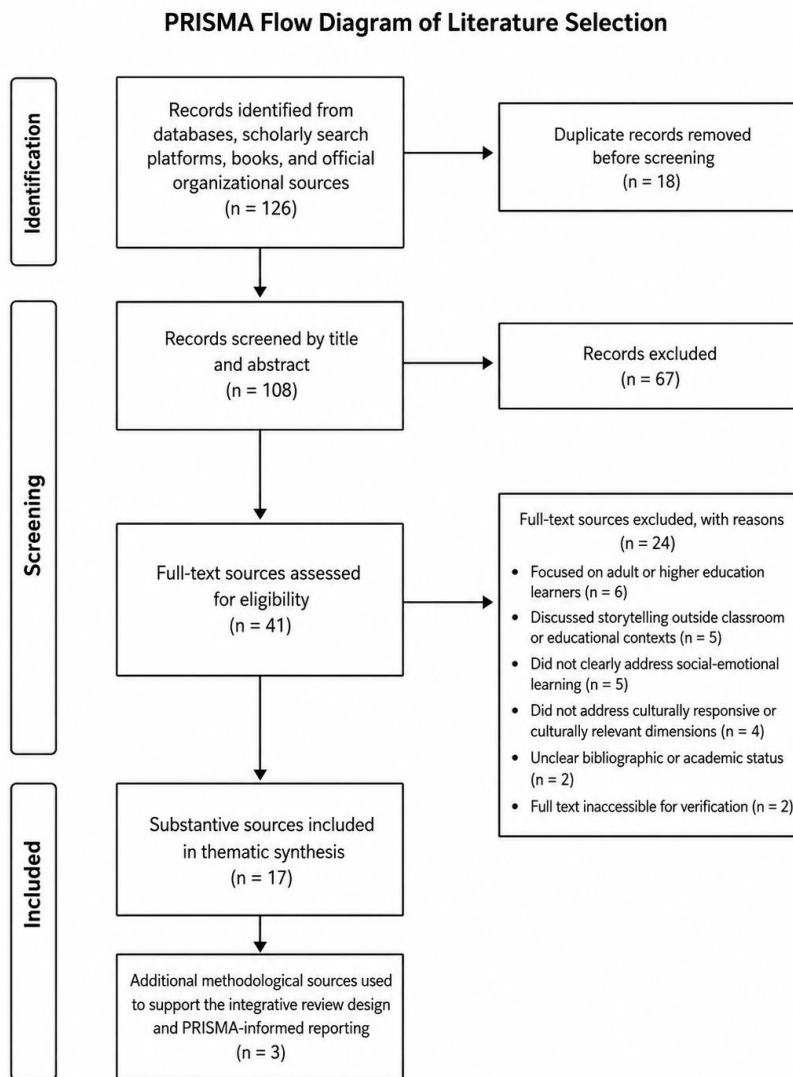
The inclusion criteria were established to ensure that the selected literature was relevant to the focus of the study. Sources were included if they met at least one of the following criteria: (1) discussed culturally responsive, culturally relevant, or culturally sustaining pedagogy; (2) examined storytelling, children’s literature, picturebooks, or story-based instruction in English language learning for young learners; (3) addressed social-emotional learning or children’s social-emotional development in school contexts; (4) focused on primary education, elementary education, early childhood education, or young learners; and (5) provided theoretical, empirical, or review-based contributions relevant to the development of the conceptual synthesis. Peer-reviewed journal articles were prioritized, but books, institutional reports, and official frameworks were also included when they were widely recognized and directly relevant to the topic.

The exclusion criteria were also applied to maintain the focus and quality of the review. Sources were excluded if they focused only on adult language learners, discussed storytelling outside educational contexts, lacked clear bibliographic information, were not accessible for verification, or did not contribute substantively to the relationship among culture, English storytelling, and social-emotional learning. Opinion pieces, non-academic blog posts, and sources without identifiable authorship or publication details were not included in the synthesis.

The literature selection process was conducted through four stages: identification, screening, eligibility assessment, and final inclusion. During the identification stage, 126 records were initially identified from academic databases, scholarly search platforms, books, and official organizational sources. After removing 18 duplicate records, 108 records were screened based on titles and abstracts. During the screening stage, 67 records were excluded because they did not directly address the relationship among culture, storytelling, English language learning, and social-emotional learning in primary or young learner contexts. A total of 41 full-text sources were then assessed for eligibility.

From the 41 full-text sources assessed, 24 sources were excluded for several reasons. Six sources focused on adult or higher education learners, five discussed storytelling outside classroom or educational contexts, five did not include a clear connection with social-emotional learning, four did not address culturally responsive or culturally relevant dimensions, two had unclear bibliographic or academic status, and two were not accessible for full verification. Finally, 17 substantive sources were included in the thematic synthesis. These sources consisted of peer-reviewed journal articles, academic books, review-based studies, and official educational frameworks directly related to culturally responsive pedagogy, English storytelling, children’s literature, picturebooks, and social-emotional learning. In addition, three methodological sources were used to support the integrative review design and PRISMA-informed reporting procedure. Therefore, the final reference corpus consisted of 20 sources in total, while the thematic synthesis was based on 17 substantive sources.

The article selection process is presented in Figure 1.



**Figure 1.** PRISMA Flow Diagram of Literature Selection

During the data evaluation stage, each selected source was examined based on relevance, credibility, conceptual contribution, and connection to the research questions. Priority was given to peer-reviewed articles indexed in reputable academic databases, books published by academic publishers, and official frameworks from recognized educational organizations. The selected sources were then organized according to their dominant contribution: culturally responsive pedagogy, English storytelling and young learners, children’s literature and picturebooks, social-emotional learning, and review methodology.

The data analysis process used thematic synthesis. The selected literature was read repeatedly to identify recurring concepts, relationships, and pedagogical implications. Notes were made on how each source explained the role of culture, storytelling, language learning, children’s emotional development, and classroom interaction. These notes were then compared and grouped into broader categories. The synthesis process resulted in four major themes: (1) storytelling as meaningful English language input, (2) cultural narratives as identity-affirming pedagogy, (3) storytelling as a medium for social-emotional learning, and

(4) a synthesized pedagogical framework for culturally responsive English storytelling in primary education.

To maintain the integrity of the review, the synthesis did not claim causal effectiveness because the reviewed sources varied in design, context, and purpose. Instead, the analysis focused on conceptual integration and pedagogical interpretation. The aim was to develop a framework that can inform primary education practices and future empirical research. Therefore, the findings of this review should be understood as a conceptual contribution rather than as evidence of measured intervention outcomes.

## Results

The integrative synthesis resulted in four major themes that explain how culturally responsive English storytelling may support social-emotional learning in primary education. These themes were developed by comparing and integrating literature on social-emotional learning, culturally responsive pedagogy, English storytelling for young learners, children’s literature, and picturebook-based instruction. The four themes are: (1) storytelling as meaningful English language input, (2) cultural narratives as identity-affirming pedagogy, (3) storytelling as a medium for social-emotional learning, and (4) a synthesized pedagogical framework for culturally responsive English storytelling in primary education. The thematic synthesis of the reviewed literature is presented in Table 2.

**Table 2.** *Thematic Synthesis of the Reviewed Literature*

Theme	Main Focus	Key Literature	Pedagogical Implications
<b>Storytelling as meaningful English language input</b>	Storytelling provides contextualized, repetitive, multimodal, and emotionally engaging English input for primary students. This theme supports the component of interactive English storytelling and narrative engagement in the proposed framework.	(Ellis & Brewster, 2014; Lestariyana & Widodo, 2018; Mourão, 2016; Ong & Aryadoust, 2023)	Teachers can use stories, picturebooks, gestures, visuals, repetition, dialogue, and retelling activities to support vocabulary, listening, oral participation, and meaning-making.
<b>Cultural narratives as identity-affirming pedagogy</b>	Culturally responsive storytelling affirms students’ cultural backgrounds, local values, family life, community experiences, and familiar social situations. This theme supports culturally meaningful story selection and cultural relevance in the proposed framework.	(Aronson & Laughter, 2016; Gay, 2018; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Paris, 2012)	Teachers can select or adapt stories that reflect students’ cultural realities while using English as a medium for meaningful expression, identity affirmation, and inclusive classroom interaction.
<b>Storytelling as a medium for social-emotional learning</b>	Stories help children identify emotions, understand perspectives, discuss moral choices, and reflect on relationships. This theme supports guided emotional reflection, collaborative meaning-making, and social-emotional transfer in the proposed framework.	(CASEL, 2024; Green & Sun, 2025; Morton, 2022; Parker & Cronin, 2025; Schonert-Reichl, 2017; Tisnawijaya & Kurniati, 2024)	Teachers can guide students through emotion identification, reflective questions, role play, drawing, collaborative discussion, peer interaction, and responsible decision-making activities.

Theme	Main Focus	Key Literature	Pedagogical Implications
<b>Synthesized pedagogical framework for culturally responsive English storytelling and SEL</b>	Culturally responsive English storytelling integrates language learning, cultural meaning, and SEL through a gradual mechanism from cultural relevance to behavioral application.	(CASEL, 2024; Durlak et al., 2011; Gay, 2018; Jagers et al., 2019; Taylor et al., 2017)	Teachers can apply five connected components: culturally meaningful story selection, interactive English storytelling, guided emotional reflection, collaborative meaning-making, and social-emotional transfer to support SEL competencies in primary English classrooms.

### Theme 1: Storytelling as Meaningful English Language Input

The first theme indicates that storytelling provides meaningful and developmentally appropriate English language input for primary students. Young learners need language exposure that is concrete, repetitive, contextualized, multimodal, and emotionally engaging. Stories offer these conditions because they present language through characters, settings, events, problems, and resolutions. In primary English classrooms, storytelling is useful because it provides repeated language patterns, meaningful contexts, and opportunities for active participation (Ellis & Brewster, 2014). This makes storytelling different from isolated vocabulary drills or mechanical sentence practice, since children encounter English as part of a meaningful narrative experience.

The reviewed literature suggests that storytelling supports language learning by combining linguistic, visual, emotional, and social elements. In picturebook-based English learning, children do not rely only on written text. They also use illustrations, facial expressions, gestures, voice, and story sequence to construct meaning. Picturebooks in the primary EFL classroom can stimulate authentic responses because children interact with the relationship between images and words (Mourão, 2016). This multimodal quality is especially important for primary students whose English proficiency is still developing, because it allows them to participate in meaning-making even when they do not fully understand every word.

Recent literature also shows that story-based learning has expanded through multimodal and digital forms. Digital stories enable young learners to use English, Bahasa Indonesia, local languages, visuals, and technology to express real-life experiences (Lestariyana & Widodo, 2018). Similarly, digital storytelling in children’s language learning has been used to support multimodal expression in both traditional and online classrooms (Ong & Aryadoust, 2023). These findings suggest that English learning through stories does not need to be separated from students’ multilingual and cultural resources. Instead, storytelling can become a space where students use available linguistic, visual, and cultural resources to gradually build meaning in English.

Across the reviewed sources, storytelling appears to support English language learning in at least four ways. First, it provides meaningful exposure to vocabulary and sentence patterns. Second, it encourages listening and oral participation through repetition, prediction, retelling, and response. Third, it increases engagement because stories contain emotions, conflicts, and characters that attract children’s attention. Fourth, it allows language learning to occur through interaction rather than passive memorization. Therefore, storytelling can be understood as a language learning practice that is both pedagogically structured and emotionally meaningful for primary students.

Within the proposed framework, this theme serves as the theoretical basis for the component of interactive English storytelling. The findings indicate that students are more likely to engage with English when stories are presented through voice, visuals, gestures, repetition, and dialogue. In other words, storytelling does not only provide language input, but also creates narrative engagement that prepares students to participate in emotional reflection and social interaction. Thus, meaningful English input is not an isolated outcome of

storytelling, but an important pedagogical foundation for the later development of social-emotional learning through the storytelling process.

### **Theme 2: Cultural Narratives as Identity-Affirming Pedagogy**

The second theme shows that culturally responsive storytelling can affirm children's identities and cultural experiences. Culturally responsive pedagogy views students' cultural backgrounds as valuable resources for learning rather than as barriers to instruction. Culturally relevant pedagogy supports academic success, cultural competence, and critical consciousness (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Culturally responsive teaching uses students' cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles to make learning more relevant and effective (Gay, 2018). In storytelling, these principles can be applied through the selection and adaptation of stories that reflect students' cultural values, family life, community realities, and familiar social situations.

The synthesis indicates that culturally responsive English storytelling should not be reduced to the translation of local folklore into English. Although folktales may be useful, cultural responsiveness is broader than folklore. It may include stories about family relationships, friendship, community cooperation, respect for elders, local celebrations, moral dilemmas, environmental practices, traditional games, or everyday experiences that are meaningful to children. In this sense, culture becomes part of the narrative context, character development, conflict, and moral reflection. English is used not only as a foreign language but also as a medium through which children can express culturally familiar meanings.

This theme is closely connected to children's sense of belonging. When students encounter stories that resemble their lives, they may feel that their experiences are recognized in the classroom. This recognition can increase willingness to participate, especially in language learning contexts where children may feel anxious about using English. Pedagogy should not only recognize but also sustain students' cultural and linguistic practices (Paris, 2012). From this perspective, culturally responsive English storytelling can help students move between local cultural knowledge and English language learning without positioning one as superior to the other.

The reviewed literature also suggests that cultural narratives can support inclusive classroom interaction. When children listen to and discuss stories from different cultural backgrounds, they may learn to respect differences, compare perspectives, and understand that people may solve problems in different ways. A review of culturally relevant education across content areas also shows that culturally grounded teaching practices can support student engagement and learning (Aronson & Laughter, 2016). This is particularly relevant in primary education, where children are beginning to form attitudes toward identity, difference, and belonging. Thus, culturally responsive storytelling can contribute not only to language learning but also to social awareness and inclusive classroom relationships.

Within the proposed framework, this theme provides the theoretical basis for culturally meaningful story selection. The framework assumes that social-emotional learning through storytelling begins with cultural relevance. When stories are connected to students' lived experiences, family values, community practices, and familiar social situations, students are more likely to engage emotionally and socially with the narrative. This cultural relevance becomes the first mechanism that allows storytelling to move beyond language input and become a space for identity affirmation, emotional reflection, and respectful interaction.

### **Theme 3: Storytelling as a Medium for Social-Emotional Learning**

The third theme indicates that storytelling can function as a medium for social-emotional learning. SEL involves the development of self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making (CASEL, 2024). These competencies are often abstract for young children. Stories make them more concrete by presenting emotions, conflicts, relationships, choices, and consequences through characters and narrative events. Through stories, children can observe how characters feel, why they act in certain ways, how they respond to problems, and what happens after they make decisions.

Children's books and stories can help students identify and discuss emotions in a safe and indirect way. A first-grade teacher used children's books to address SEL competencies, including managing emotions, building relationships, and making responsible decisions (Morton, 2022). This suggests that stories can

provide a shared reference point for classroom dialogue. Instead of asking children to immediately talk about their own personal problems, teachers can begin with questions about characters: What does the character feel? Why does the character feel that way? What could the character do? How would you help the character? These questions can gradually guide children toward emotional reflection and perspective-taking.

Recent studies strengthen the link between picturebooks and children's social-emotional development. Picture books can promote social-emotional literacy through themes related to family, friendship, emotions, behavior, and life transitions (Tisnawijaya & Kurniati, 2024). Children's picturebooks can increase the frequency and diversity of emotion-related vocabulary in children's language environments (Green & Sun, 2025). Children's books can also portray SEL themes through plots, conflicts, and character development (Parker & Cronin, 2025). Together, these studies suggest that stories and picturebooks can provide children with language for naming emotions and narrative situations for understanding empathy, relationships, and responsible choices.

The synthesis shows that storytelling can support each SEL competency in a specific way. Self-awareness can be supported when students identify and name emotions experienced by characters and themselves. Self-management can be supported when students discuss how characters calm down, wait, apologize, or solve problems. Social awareness can be supported when students consider different perspectives and understand the feelings of others. Relationship skills can be supported through collaborative retelling, role play, group discussion, and respectful listening. Responsible decision-making can be supported when students evaluate character choices and imagine alternative actions.

However, the SEL potential of storytelling depends on teacher facilitation. Reading or telling a story does not automatically lead to social-emotional learning. Teachers need to create reflective moments before, during, and after storytelling. These may include prediction questions, emotion cards, guided discussion, drawing activities, pair sharing, role play, and reflective retelling. Teacher facilitation is important because children's social and emotional development is influenced by classroom relationships, teacher modeling, and the emotional climate of learning (Schonert-Reichl, 2017). Therefore, storytelling becomes a medium for SEL when it is accompanied by intentional pedagogical strategies that help children connect narrative events with emotional and social understanding.

Within the proposed framework, this theme provides the basis for guided emotional reflection, collaborative meaning-making, and social-emotional transfer. Guided emotional reflection helps students identify emotions, motives, conflicts, and choices in a story. Collaborative meaning-making gives students opportunities to discuss, retell, role-play, and negotiate meaning with peers. Social-emotional transfer helps students connect story-based lessons with real classroom and daily-life situations. Thus, the framework explains that storytelling may support SEL not because stories automatically change behavior, but because stories create a structured pathway from emotional recognition to peer interaction and behavioral application.

#### **Theme 4: A Synthesized Pedagogical Framework for Culturally Responsive English Storytelling**

The fourth theme presents a synthesized pedagogical framework for integrating culturally responsive English storytelling and social-emotional learning in primary education. Based on the synthesis, the framework consists of five connected components: culturally meaningful story selection, interactive English storytelling, guided emotional reflection, collaborative meaning-making, and social-emotional transfer. These components are not intended as separate classroom activities, but as a connected pedagogical pathway through which English storytelling may support children's language engagement, cultural recognition, and social-emotional development.

The first component is culturally meaningful story selection. This component is grounded in culturally responsive pedagogy, which views students' cultural backgrounds, lived experiences, and community values as important resources for learning (Gay, 2018; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Paris, 2012). In this stage, teachers select or adapt stories that are appropriate for students' age, English proficiency, cultural background, and social-emotional needs. The stories may come from local folktales, community narratives, picturebooks, children's literature, family experiences, or teacher-created stories. The purpose is not simply

to insert culture as a decorative element, but to make the story emotionally and socially recognizable for children. When students encounter stories that reflect familiar values, relationships, conflicts, or everyday situations, they may be more willing to participate and connect the story with their own experiences.

The second component is interactive English storytelling. This component is related to the role of storytelling as meaningful language input for young learners. Stories provide repeated language patterns, contextualized vocabulary, visual support, character actions, and emotional situations that help children understand English in a meaningful way (Ellis & Brewster, 2014; Mourão, 2016). In this stage, teachers present the story through voice, gesture, images, objects, digital media, or picturebooks. Students are invited to predict events, repeat key phrases, respond to simple questions, imitate expressions, and participate in short dialogues. Through this interaction, English becomes a medium for meaning-making rather than only an object of memorization.

The third component is guided emotional reflection. This component explains how storytelling begins to support SEL outcomes. Social-emotional learning involves self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making (CASEL, 2024). These competencies may be abstract for primary students, but stories make them more concrete through characters, emotions, conflicts, choices, and consequences. In this stage, teachers guide students to identify what a character feels, why the character acts in a certain way, what problem occurs, and what choices are available. Through guided questions, emotion cards, drawing, or short reflective tasks, students learn to name emotions, understand motives, compare perspectives, and think about possible actions. The framework also recognizes that SEL should be understood in relation to students' sociocultural contexts, because emotional expression, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making may be shaped by cultural values and classroom communities (Jagers et al., 2019).

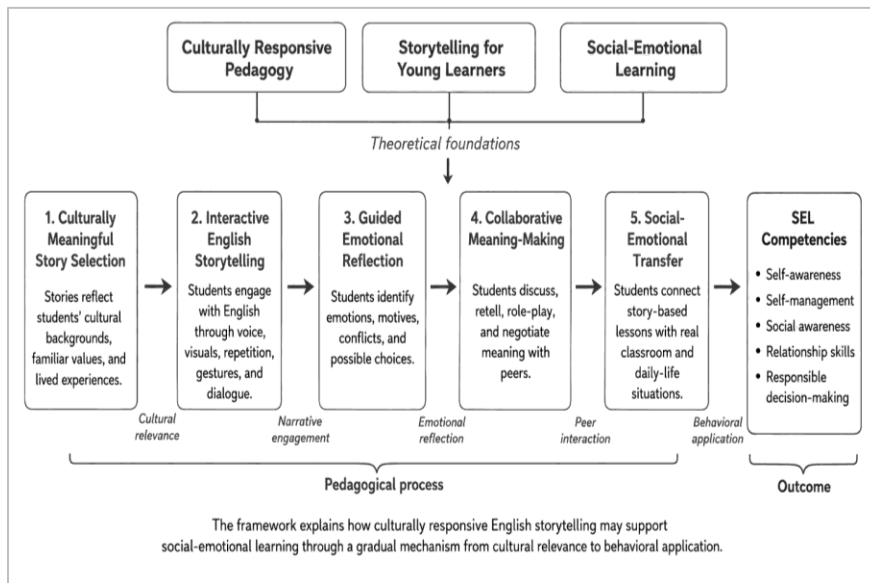
The fourth component is collaborative meaning-making. This component links storytelling with peer interaction and relationship skills. After listening to or reading the story, students work with classmates through retelling, pair discussion, role play, drawing, story completion, or group reflection. These activities allow students to practice listening, taking turns, expressing opinions, respecting different interpretations, and responding to others. Collaborative meaning-making is important because SEL does not develop only through individual reflection, but also through social interaction and repeated classroom practice (Schonert-Reichl, 2017). At the same time, students are able to use English in a supportive and meaningful context.

The fifth component is social-emotional transfer. This component refers to the process of connecting story-based reflection with students' everyday behavior. Teachers help students relate the story to real classroom and social situations, such as helping a friend, apologizing, managing anger, showing respect, cooperating in a group, or making responsible choices. This stage is important because SEL requires more than recognizing emotions in a story; it also requires students to understand how emotional and social lessons can be applied in daily life. Through this transfer process, storytelling becomes a bridge between narrative experience and social-emotional practice.

The proposed framework suggests that culturally responsive English storytelling may support SEL through a gradual mechanism. Cultural relevance helps students feel that the story is meaningful and connected to their lives. Narrative engagement helps students understand English through characters, events, images, and emotions. Emotional reflection helps students identify feelings, motives, conflicts, and choices. Collaborative meaning-making allows students to practice communication and relationship skills with peers. Social-emotional transfer helps students apply story-based insights to real situations. Therefore, the framework explains not only the stages of storytelling, but also the mechanism through which storytelling may contribute to SEL competencies.

Compared with general storytelling approaches, this framework gives stronger attention to cultural relevance and social-emotional transfer. General storytelling in English classrooms often focuses on vocabulary, listening, pronunciation, or speaking practice. In contrast, the proposed framework places language learning, cultural identity, and SEL within one connected process. Compared with stand-alone SEL programs, this framework may be more feasible for primary classrooms because SEL is embedded into ordinary English learning activities rather than treated as a separate program. Therefore, this framework

should be understood as a synthesized pedagogical model that operationalizes culturally responsive pedagogy, English storytelling, and SEL for the specific context of primary English learning. The proposed framework is illustrated in Figure 2.



**Figure 2.** *Conceptual Framework of Culturally Responsive English Storytelling for Social-Emotional Learning*

Figure 2 illustrates the proposed conceptual framework developed from the integrative synthesis. The framework shows that culturally responsive English storytelling begins with the selection of culturally meaningful stories, followed by interactive storytelling, emotional reflection, collaborative meaning-making, and social-emotional transfer. These stages are expected to support five SEL competencies: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making.

### Discussion

The findings of this integrative review suggest that culturally responsive English storytelling can be understood as more than a language teaching strategy. It may function as an interdisciplinary pedagogical practice that connects English language learning, cultural meaning, and social-emotional development in primary education. This interpretation is important because language learning in primary classrooms is often approached through vocabulary, pronunciation, listening, and speaking objectives, while children’s emotional and social development is frequently addressed through separate character education or counseling-related activities. The synthesis indicates that these areas do not need to be treated as disconnected domains. When storytelling is culturally meaningful and pedagogically guided, English learning can become a space where children also practice emotional awareness, empathy, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making.

The first implication concerns the position of storytelling in English learning for young learners. The findings support the view that storytelling provides contextualized and meaningful language input. For primary students, language is easier to understand when it is presented through characters, images, events, actions, emotions, and repeated patterns. This is consistent with the idea that stories and picturebooks can help children construct meaning through multimodal resources, not only through written or spoken words (Ellis & Brewster, 2014; Mourão, 2016). In culturally responsive English storytelling, language input becomes even more meaningful because the story is connected to familiar cultural references and social experiences. Therefore, storytelling may reduce the distance between English as a foreign language and students’ everyday lives.

The second implication relates to cultural identity and classroom inclusion. Culturally responsive pedagogy emphasizes that students' cultural backgrounds should be treated as resources for learning. In this review, storytelling appears as a practical way to bring that principle into English classrooms. Local stories, community narratives, family experiences, and culturally familiar moral situations can help students see that their lives are relevant to classroom learning. This is particularly important in primary education because children's sense of belonging can influence their participation and confidence. When English learning materials are culturally distant, students may experience English as a subject that belongs to others. In contrast, culturally responsive storytelling can present English as a language that can also express their own values, emotions, and social realities (Gay, 2018; Paris, 2012).

The third implication concerns the relationship between storytelling and SEL. Stories provide concrete situations through which children can observe emotions, conflicts, relationships, and choices. This is pedagogically useful because primary students may find it difficult to discuss abstract concepts such as empathy, self-control, fairness, or responsibility without examples. Through characters and story events, teachers can guide students to identify emotions, infer motives, compare perspectives, and discuss possible actions. In this sense, storytelling can serve as a safe entry point for social-emotional dialogue. Children do not have to begin by exposing their own personal experiences. They can first discuss what happens to a character and then gradually connect the discussion to their own lives.

Recent studies on picturebooks and digital storytelling strengthen this interpretation. Picture books can introduce social-emotional literacy through themes such as family relationships, friendship, emotions, behavior, and life transitions (Tisnawijaya & Kurniati, 2024). Picturebooks can enrich children's exposure to emotion vocabulary, which is important for helping children name and discuss feelings (Green & Sun, 2025). Digital storytelling can also support children's language learning through multimodal expression (Ong & Aryadoust, 2023). These studies suggest that storytelling can support SEL more effectively when language, visual meaning, emotional vocabulary, and classroom dialogue are integrated intentionally.

The integration of culture and SEL is also important. Social-emotional learning is not culturally neutral because emotional expression, respect, apology, responsibility, cooperation, and decision-making may be understood differently across families and communities. SEL should be understood in relation to educational equity and students' sociocultural contexts (Jagers et al., 2019). This perspective is relevant to culturally responsive English storytelling because stories can situate SEL competencies within cultural meanings that are recognizable to children. For example, a story about helping family members, respecting elders, caring for friends, or resolving conflict in a community setting may provide culturally meaningful contexts for discussing empathy, relationship skills, and responsible choices. Thus, culturally responsive storytelling can prevent SEL from becoming a set of abstract competencies detached from children's lived realities.

The proposed framework also has implications for classroom practice. The framework consists of five connected components: culturally meaningful story selection, interactive English storytelling, guided emotional reflection, collaborative meaning-making, and social-emotional transfer. These components show that storytelling requires intentional facilitation. Simply reading or telling a story does not automatically support SEL. Teachers need to design activities that help children notice emotions, use English meaningfully, listen to peers, reflect on choices, and connect story events with everyday behavior. This means that teachers require not only language teaching skills but also sensitivity to children's cultural backgrounds and social-emotional needs. This is consistent with the view that children's social and emotional development is influenced by classroom relationships, teacher modeling, and the emotional climate of learning (Schonert-Reichl, 2017).

For teachers, the framework can be applied flexibly. In a lower-grade primary classroom, teachers may use picturebooks, puppets, gestures, simple emotion cards, and short English expressions such as "I feel sad," "I am sorry," or "Can I help you?" In upper primary classrooms, teachers may guide students to retell stories, compare character choices, rewrite endings, perform role plays, or discuss moral dilemmas in simple English. These activities can support language learning while also strengthening social awareness,

relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. The key point is that English should be used as a medium for meaningful communication, not only as an object of memorization.

This review also contributes to the field of educational counseling and guidance. Although the article is situated in primary education and English language learning, its concern with social-emotional development is closely related to guidance and counseling. In many school contexts, especially at the primary level, social-emotional support cannot rely only on formal counseling sessions. It also needs to be embedded into daily classroom practices. Culturally responsive English storytelling offers one possible classroom-based strategy for supporting children's emotional literacy, empathy, cooperation, and respectful interaction. This does not replace the role of school counselors or structured SEL programs, but it can complement them by making social-emotional support part of ordinary learning experiences.

Nevertheless, several limitations and implementation challenges should be considered. Since the framework was developed through an integrative literature review, it cannot yet be used to claim causal effectiveness in classroom practice. Its implementation may also depend on teachers' ability to select culturally meaningful stories, facilitate emotional reflection, and manage peer interaction sensitively. In multicultural classrooms, teachers need to avoid treating culture as a fixed identity and should use stories as entry points for dialogue across diverse student experiences. Therefore, future empirical studies are needed to examine how this framework can be adapted across different primary classroom contexts, English proficiency levels, and sociocultural backgrounds.

Overall, the discussion shows that culturally responsive English storytelling has potential as a holistic pedagogical approach in primary education. It can connect language learning with cultural identity, emotional reflection, and inclusive classroom relationships. Its main contribution lies not in claiming that storytelling automatically improves SEL, but in offering a conceptual framework for designing English learning activities that are culturally meaningful, emotionally responsive, and developmentally appropriate for primary students.

## **Conclusion**

This integrative literature review concludes that culturally responsive English storytelling can be positioned as a synthesized pedagogical model that connects English language learning, cultural identity, and social-emotional learning in primary education. The synthesis shows that storytelling provides meaningful English language input through contextualized vocabulary, repeated language patterns, multimodal support, emotional engagement, and interactive participation, while cultural narratives function as identity-affirming pedagogy by recognizing students' cultural knowledge, family experiences, community values, and everyday social realities. The main contribution of this article lies in the development of the Culturally Responsive English Storytelling for Social-Emotional Learning framework, which explains how culturally meaningful story selection, interactive English storytelling, guided emotional reflection, collaborative meaning-making, and social-emotional transfer may work as a gradual pedagogical mechanism. Through this mechanism, cultural relevance supports students' recognition and belonging, narrative engagement supports meaningful English participation, emotional reflection supports the identification of feelings and choices, collaborative meaning-making supports peer interaction, and social-emotional transfer supports the application of story-based lessons to classroom and daily-life situations. The findings suggest that this approach may support SEL competencies, including self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. However, because the framework was developed through conceptual synthesis rather than direct classroom intervention, it should be understood as a theoretically grounded pedagogical model that requires empirical validation through future classroom-based research in diverse multicultural and multilingual contexts.

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