



BRIEF #8

Identifying the SEL Competencies of Spanish Speaking Students

Development and Initial Validation of the SSIS SELb and SSIS SELb+MH Spanish Forms

Students enrolled in US schools who have limited ability to read, speak, write, or understand English are often identified as English Language Learners (ELL). According to the National Center for Education Statistics and the Office of English Language Acquisition, in 2017, approximately 10.1% of students enrolled in US schools were identified as ELL. The National Education Association (July 2020) identified English Language Learners (ELLs) as the fastest growing group of students enrolled in US schools. Although ELLs speak a variety of different languages, the National Center for Education Statistics reports that currently, 74.8% of these students speak Spanish as their primary language.

As a group, ELLs face a variety of challenges that have been documented to include lower graduation rates, higher retention rates, higher dropout rates, and lower academic performance on standardized tests. The National Assessment of Education Progress (2017) indicates that there are significant gaps in reading and math performance between ELLs and their Non-ELLs peers and that these gaps do not seem to be closing with time. The US Department of Education (2017) also reported that the graduation rate for all students is 84.1%, while the graduation rate for ELLs is significantly lower at 66.9%. In regard to retention rates, the office of English Language Acquisition reported that during 2015-2016 school year, 14.3% of ELLs were retained in comparison to 2.1% of all students enrolled in US schools for the same period.

The challenges faced by ELL students can lead to disengagement, lower self-esteem, and lower levels of school belonging (Martinez et al., 2004). Interventions that focus on social emotional learning (SEL) can build an ELL student's resiliency to increase academic engagement, self-worth, and higher school belonging (among other things) can lead to positive results in and out of classroom (Sabol & Pianta, 2012). However, there are few Spanish assessments available to assess SEL skills that are aligned to evidence-based intervention programs (Russo et al., 2018). There are even fewer assessments that are designed to be time-efficient and multi-informant for use within multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS). To promote inclusion and address the systemic challenges faced by ELL students, more and better assessments are needed of these students' SEL strengths and competencies in need of improvement. Ideally, these assessments also would be highly aligned with the SEL competencies in the popular and recently revised CASEL Competency Framework (CASEL, 2020). This framework serves as the guidepost for SEL-focused service delivery for most states and large school districts in the US. It

SEL advances educational equity and excellence through authentic school-family-community partnerships to establish learning environments and experiences that feature trusting and collaborative relationships, rigorous and meaningful curriculum and instruction, and ongoing evaluation. SEL can help address various forms of inequity and empower young people and adults to co-create thriving schools and contribute to safe, healthy, and just communities. (CASEL, 2020)

includes five core domains as featured in the accompanying table.

The CASEL framework was revised to explicitly include an emphasis on promoting equity (CASEL, 2020). Such goals are particularly important for Spanish-speaking students in light of the substantial challenges they face and the lack of culturally and linguistically appropriate tools for fostering authentic school-family partnerships that are essential for empowering these students. The SSIS SEL Brief Scales Spanish Forms (SSIS SELb-Spanish Forms) were created to address this significant need.

The CASEL Competency Framework	
Self-Awareness	The abilities to understand one’s own emotions, thoughts, and values and how they influence behavior across contexts
Self-Management	The abilities to manage one’s emotions, thoughts, and behaviors effectively in different situations and to achieve goals and aspirations.
Social Awareness	The abilities to understand the perspectives of and empathize with others, including those from diverse backgrounds, cultures, and contexts.
Relationship Skills	The abilities to establish and maintain healthy and supportive relationships and to effectively navigate settings with diverse individuals and groups.
Responsible Decision Making	The abilities to make caring and constructive choices about personal behavior and social interactions across diverse situations.

The SSIS SEL Brief Scales Spanish Forms

The SSIS SELb-Spanish Forms include a Parent (SSIS SELb-P Spanish) and a Student (SSIS SELb-S Spanish) form. These measures are fully aligned with the five domains of the CASEL Competency Framework and were designed according to the same principles used to generate their English Form counterparts. Specifically, we utilized Item Response Theory (IRT) methodology to analyze items from the original SSIS SEL (Gresham & Elliott, 2017) and identify those that were most important for inclusion on a brief SEL-focused measure (see *Assessment Simplified Brief #2* for a full explication of this methodology). We used the total Spanish-speaking sample of respondents from the SSIS national standardization ($n = 234$ students; $n = 482$ parents). As with the English Form of the SSIS SELb, however, we did not rely solely on statistical information when determining which items to include on the SSIS SELb-Spanish Forms. Instead, we considered both statistical and content-related information when evaluating items for inclusion on the final forms. This process was facilitated by a bilingual expert in SEL assessment (Daniella Bashner-Maglione), who rigorously evaluated each Spanish item on the SSIS SEL for cultural relevance and Spanish language clarity. Utilizing this information in conjunction with IRT-based statistical information, we identified 20 items for both the SSIS SELb-P Spanish Form and the SSIS SELb-S Spanish Form. To further confirm the cultural relevance and clarity of Spanish expression of all SSIS SELb-Spanish Form items and directions, a panel of five bilingual school psychologists from different regions across the U.S. were asked to provide feedback on two factors of the SSIS SELb-Spanish Forms: cultural relevance and readability of the items and directions on the forms. Recommended modifications to the items and assessment directions were then discussed and made by the author team for both the Student and Parent forms.

Once items were identified, we conducted a psychometric evaluation to ensure that scores from the SSIS SELb-Spanish Forms did not show meaningful sex-based bias. We also evaluated the utility of the cut scores used to define the SEL Competency-Referenced Performance Framework for the English Forms of the SSIS SELb-Scales to the Spanish Forms. This framework transforms raw scores on the SSIS SELb into four performance levels reflective of the developmental level of students' reported behavior: *emerging, developing, competent, and advanced* (see *Assessment Simplified Brief #5* for a full description of this scoring and interpretive framework). Our analyses indicated that this performance framework functioned similarly for the SSIS SELb-Spanish Forms as their English counterparts and supported the fairness of use of the Competency-Referenced Performance Framework for the Spanish Form. Finally, we conducted reliability and validity analyses to evaluate the technical characteristics of scores from the SSIS SELb-Spanish Forms. As with the SSIS SELb-English Forms, evidence supported the use of SSIS SELb-Spanish Form Scores

Reliability Coefficients (Cronbach's α) for Spanish Form SSIS SELb and EBC Scales

SSIS SELb Scale	Student	Parent
SEL Scales		
Self-Awareness	.67	-
Self-Management	.74	.68
Social Awareness	.65	.78
Relationship Skills	.70	.76
Responsible Decision Making	.71	.80
SEL Composite	.91	.91
EBC Scales		
EBC-Internalizing	.81	.74
EBC-Externalizing	.80	.78

Note. The SSIS SELb-P SEL Composite coefficient was adjusted using the Spearman Brown Prophecy formula.

(especially the SSIS SELb Composite Scores) for their intended purposes. The above table provides a summary of reliability estimates for the two forms. The Technical Manual Supplement for the SSIS SEL Brief + Mental Health Scales Spanish versions provides more information (visit SSIScolab.com).

Concurrent Assessment of Emotional Behavior Concerns for ELL Students

As discussed in *Assessment Simplified Brief #4*, it is not atypical for many children to experience periods of social or emotional difficulty as they grow and learn. Emotional behavior concerns (EBC) that are present for longer periods of time or are more severe than typical, can lead to undesirable outcomes. These difficulties can present alongside positive SEL skills – having SEL strengths is not a failsafe against experiencing EBCs (Elliott et al., in press). As a result, it is important that tools which target both positive SEL skills, as well as EBCs, are available for students in need, including Spanish-speaking ELLs. As with the SSIS SELb+MH English Forms – we targeted two critical areas of EBC – EBC-Internalizing (EBC-I) and EBC-Externalizing (EBC-E). The scale development process proceeded in the same manner as described for the SSIS SELb Scales and produced evidence that scores from the Spanish Form EBC Scales are reliable, valid, and can be utilized in conjunction with the cut scores derived for the English Form EBC Scales.

Conclusion: Using the SSIS SELb and SSIS SELb+MH Spanish to Improve Outcomes for ELL Students

Considering the substantial educational challenges faced by Spanish-speaking ELL students and the lack of appropriate assessments to identify these students' needs, we were motivated to design assessments that would more fully integrate Spanish-speaking ELL students and their parents' voices into SEL-focused programs and service delivery systems. The results of this work are the SSIS SELb and SSIS SELb+MH Spanish Form Scales. These assessments are culturally and linguistically sensitive, fully aligned with the CASEL framework, and aligned with the SSIS SEL Classwide Intervention Program (CIP), an evidence-based universal program shown to foster students SEL skills (e.g., DiPerna et al., 2017). The SSIS SELb and SSIS SELb+MH Spanish Forms have immense potential to promote more comprehensive service delivery for Spanish-speaking ELL students throughout the United States.

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