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RESEARCH

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Voices of teachers: a qualitative analysis of the feasibility and qualitative perceptions of impact of SEE Learning on the well-being of Ukrainian classrooms before and during war

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Abstract

Background This study investigates the feasibility and qualitative impact of SEE Learning, a school-based Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) program, on the well-being of Ukrainian classrooms amidst war. By prioritizing children's social and emotional development and access to quality education during conflict, this research aims to understand the potential contribution of compassion-based training programs to building sustainable pathways toward peace.

Methods Twenty-three implementing teachers participated in in-depth interviews about SEE Learning implementation and impact. The interviews were conducted in Ukrainian, translated into English, and de-identified for analysis. Data was coded by primary and secondary coders, with agreement determined and analyzed through thematic analysis.

Results Teachers expressed the need for SEE Learning in their classrooms during war. They viewed SEE Learning implementation during war as more important than before the 2022 Russian invasion, allocating extra class time to engage in SEE Learning-specific activities. The program helped teachers cultivate a safe and supportive space for processing difficult emotions brought on by war. Its implementation supported teachers' personal and professional development alongside the building of students' social-emotional skills. Teachers noticed that students were better able to identify and understand their emotions and the emotions of others, creating a more compassionate and productive classroom environment.

Conclusions SEE Learning shows promise in helping teachers create safe, supportive environments and address students' emotional needs in high-conflict contexts. Further research and culturally specific implementations are essential to enhance psychosocial support and resilience in such challenging settings.

Keywords Social-emotional learning, Ukrainian classrooms, War impact, Teacher perspectives, Emotional development, SEE learning

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Background

Conflict's impact on educational settings in Ukraine

Since February 2022, Ukraine has endured a full-ground invasion by Russian forces [1]. Although many aspects of normal Ukrainian life have been jeopardized in this situation, education and child development stand out when

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considering reconciliation and the health and success of future generations. More than 3,790 educational facilities have been damaged or destroyed since the invasion [2]. With the education of 5.3 million children threatened, the future of an entire generation is at risk [3]. In a survey conducted by Ukrainian sociologists in February of 2023, 42% of Ukrainian children attending school completely online, 29% engaged in a hybrid school setting, online and in-person as allowed, 26% attended in-person educational institutions full-time, and 3% were being homeschooled [4]. In 2019, the Safe Schools Declaration was endorsed by the Ukrainian government to protect children's right to education "without fear of violence or attack," and to maintain education facilities as safe places for students to foster independent thinking [5]. With compounded impacts on education lingering after the COVID-19 pandemic, the Ukrainian government has made several strides aimed at protecting their education systems from attack.

This has been challenging because the Ukrainian education system has relied heavily on internet accessibility over the last 5 years, and the current war has caused frequent and long-lasting power outages, severely disrupting school lessons [6]. These frequent outages, along with other socioemotional impacts of exposure to armed conflict, are likely to impact the educational success of Ukrainian schoolchildren well into the future. Reports show that the war in Ukraine has deepened education inequity and made access to quality education rare, thus greatly impacting the progress of students and the national educational processes [7, 8]. With the pressure on the Ukrainian education system increasing, teachers have expressed the understanding that their role now goes beyond academics, creating spaces that provide students and families with a sense of stability and comfort during these difficult circumstances [6].

Role of schools and trauma-informed teaching

Trauma-informed practices in schools are increasingly recognized as crucial for supporting students' well-being and academic success, especially in conflict areas affected by war, violence, or displacement. Teachers play a key role in implementing these practices, balancing student needs with their own professional boundaries [7, 8]. Schools provide a stable environment, trained staff, and evidence-based interventions to support traumatized students [9]. Various approaches, including individual, classroom-based, and school-wide programs, have shown promise in addressing trauma, with individual and group-based interventions currently having the strongest empirical support [10]. Teachers are uniquely positioned to support students' post-trauma and identify those needing additional help [11]. For example, in conflict-affected areas such as Israel, schools have been recognized as major sources of social support and recovery facilitators [12].

However, interventions for displaced and war-traumatized youth have shown mixed results, highlighting the need for further research. Programs within schools can provide a stable environment for refugee children, including counseling, peer support groups, and educational support to help them adjust and thrive. Building a sense of community and peer support networks can help youth, particularly those displaced by war, feel less isolated and more integrated into their new environments [13]. Interventions must be culturally sensitive and adapted to the specific backgrounds of the populations they serve [13]. The trauma experienced by youth is often complex, particularly during times of protracted exposure involving multiple traumatic events over extended periods, making it challenging to address, especially with limited resources.

Educators require resources and training to effectively use trauma-informed approaches, focusing on both student and teacher well-being [14, 15]. School leadership is essential in implementing whole-school trauma-informed approaches, which can enhance student learning readiness and overall well-being [16]. Interdisciplinary research highlights the need for more education-focused studies on trauma-informed practices [17]. Integrating trauma-aware perspectives with positive education can strengthen classroom strategies [18]. Overall, trauma-informed practices in schools require a comprehensive, well-supported approach involving teachers, administrators, and researchers. In the context of instability due to war or violence, this can be further complicated by social instability.

Creating trauma-sensitive classrooms is essential for addressing the needs of students who have experienced trauma. Contemporary trauma research demonstrates that all types of trauma can undermine children's abilities to learn, create healthy attachments, form supportive relationships, and follow classroom expectations [19]. Trauma-sensitive education supports educators to understand, act, and respond to this trauma in ways that help to alleviate the impact of trauma on students [20]. Comprehensive guides like "Building Trauma-Sensitive Schools" by Jen Alexander provide valuable strategies for creating supportive educational environments [21]. Additionally, integrating trauma-informed practices with positive education can enhance classroom strategies and support student resilience [18].

Need for social and emotional support through education systems

Schools are essential in helping to manage children's mental health, addressing these concerns at their earliest to avoid the development of life-long problems [4]. They can play a role in tackling the psychosocial stressors and trauma brought upon students and teachers by war, which can be critical to the social and emotional development of children. Those who are exposed to armed conflict are likely to experience a variety of adversities, including lasting impacts on social-emotional development, processing behaviors like emotional recognition and regulation, and psychosocial well-being [8, 9]. Notably, social engagement and supportive relationships are important protective factors when attempting to prevent unfavorable psychosocial outcomes in children exposed to war [10].

Social-emotional learning (SEL) is defined by its 5 core competencies- self-awareness, social awareness, relationship skills, self-management, and responsible decision-making [22]. Participation in school-based (SB) SEL programs has been associated with a decrease in anxiety and emotional distress as well as strengthened relationships among teachers and peers [23]. In addition, hundreds of SEL studies note a positive effect on student's academic outcomes and school functioning [24]. When considering the role of resilience within academic success, after armed conflict, research indicates a positive correlation between multiple conflict susceptibility variables (civil freedoms, political and voting rights, democracy) and education indicators (enrollment and skill levels) [25].

In war-affected areas, SEL programs are crucial for children's resilience and long-term peace-building [26, 27]. However, systemic barriers such as culture, timing, and government stability can impede SEL implementation in low-income, conflict-affected settings [28]. Quality implementation is fundamental to program success [29], with program support factors like coaching and teacher-coach relationships being particularly important [30]. Despite widespread support for SEL, there is less consensus than supporters believe [31], highlighting the need for a more nuanced understanding of SEL programs in diverse contexts, such as war.

The issue of scalability

Scaling social and emotional development programs in resource-limited, conflict-affected settings faces numerous challenges. Key barriers include structural features in educational settings, inadequate resource management, and insufficient attention to implementer characteristics [32]. Cultural factors, timing, and government stability also impact program effectiveness [28]. Successful implementation requires addressing socioecological factors influencing parenting behaviors [33] and considering scalability domains in program design [34]. To overcome these challenges, the literature suggests building proactive partnerships, investing in adaptation [28], enhancing the documentation of effective approaches [35], and developing organizational leadership capacity [36]. Multi-modal approaches show promise in promoting cross-context competence [37]. However, more comprehensive reporting of scalability domains and formal evaluations of scaled-up programs are needed to ensure that the intended outcomes are achieved [34].

Social, emotional, and ethical learning

Expanding on traditional SEL frameworks, social-emotional and Ethical (SEE) Learning was developed by The Center for Contemplative Science and Compassion-Based Ethics (CCSCBE) at Emory University in collaboration with the Dalai Lama [38]. By including a secular ethical learning component, students are supported in cultivating compassion, systems thinking, and resilience, and encouraged to become more conscious of how they fit into broader societal systems and thus better prepare for their futures as global citizens [39]. With a pedagogical model of experiential learning, SEE Learning curricula aim to promote attention and self-awareness, self-compassion, self-regulation, interpersonal awareness, compassion for others, relationship skills, appreciation of interdependence, recognizing common humanity, and community and global engagement [18].

In the context of war and conflict, integrating SEL programs with trauma-informed practices is essential for effectively supporting both students and teachers. Exposure to armed conflict can lead to lasting impacts on emotional recognition, regulation, and overall psychosocial well-being [10]. Social engagement and supportive relationships are key protective factors in preventing adverse outcomes for children exposed to war [12]. Quality education during conflict addresses the root causes of violence and promotes inclusion, conflict resolution, and human rights awareness, contributing to long-term peacebuilding [26]. Despite the significant benefits, education often receives minimal humanitarian aid, highlighting a gap between the needs of children in crisis-affected areas and international priorities [28].

SEL interventions have been shown to improve student performance, reduce aggression, and enhance prosocial behaviors, making them crucial for building resilience and supporting peacebuilding efforts in war-affected areas. However, implementing SEL programs faces challenges such as cultural differences, timing, and government stability, particularly in low-income,

conflict-affected settings [40]. Effective implementation requires quality support, including coaching and strong teacher-coach relationships [30]. While there is widespread support for SEL, there is a need for a more nuanced understanding of these programs in diverse contexts, including war [31]. Integrating trauma-informed practices with SEL can enhance the effectiveness of these programs by addressing the complex trauma experienced by students and providing a comprehensive, well-supported approach that involves teachers, administrators, and researchers [41]. This integration is crucial for fostering resilience and supporting the long-term social and emotional development of children in conflict zones [17].

SEE learning in Ukraine

EdCamp Ukraine is an NGO committed to the professional development of schoolteachers, enhancing the reputation of teaching careers, and reforming Ukraine's education system [42]. In partnership with Emory University, the State Scientific Institute, Institute of Education Content Modernization, the Institute of Problems on Education at the National Academy of Pedagogical Science, and Civil Peace Service Ukraine [43], educational institutions have implemented the SEE Learning curricula as a national-level SEE Learning pilot since 2019 [44]. As part of an international survey on social and emotional skills conducted by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, results from Ukraine showed the war's impact on the development of specific social-emotional skills in students, including resiliency, emotional control, optimism, and trust. In addition, results demonstrated war's developmental impeding of curiosity, creativity, assertiveness, and tolerance. The survey also illustrated that the older students get, the harder it is for them to adapt to war circumstances, demonstrating the need for specific programs that foster social and emotional development during conflict [42].

Existing research on SEL in conflict/humanitarian settings

Limited studies have been conducted when analyzing the possible effects of SB SEL program implementation on classroom well-being in active conflict. However, two studies were conducted by the International Rescue Committee (IRC) that evaluated their "Healing Classrooms" program which nurtures social-emotional skills and academic success among children exposed to armed conflict [45]. "Healing Classrooms" was implemented in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo in 2011-2013. The evaluation found improvements in students' reading and math performance in one intervention group and teachers' sense of accomplishment in another intervention group [46]. However, no impacts on the mental health problems or peer victimization of participating children were observed in either group A or B [46]. Additionally, significant improvements observed in group A of the first year, including in reading and math performance, were not replicated in the second year [43].

In 2016–2017, "Healing Classrooms" was also implemented in Jordan public schools for displaced Syrian refugees exposed to active conflict in Syria [47]. In a randomized control trial, marginally significant findings indicated that after 16 weeks of integrated SEL curriculum, refugee students reported a decrease in internalization of symptoms, stress reactivity, and school-related stress and an increase in emotional regulation [48].

Separate from the limited studies published on the effects of SB SEL curriculum on well-being in active conflict, there is additional literature highlighting the effects of SB psychosocial curriculums addressing war trauma in children, utilizing many of the activities and skills present in SEL curriculums. When analyzing the effects of a 15-week SB psychosocial intervention among northern Ugandan children exposed to armed conflict, the intervention group showed significant improvement in well-being when compared to the control group [49]. In addition, other studies have confirmed similar outcomes in increased well-being, emotional regulation, and school performance in children exposed to armed conflict who have participated in SB psychosocial interventions utilizing SEL activities [50–52].

The current gaps in the literature are defined by limited studies on SEL in active conflict zones and inconsistent outcomes in SEL program evaluation where studies exist. This makes it difficult to understand how SEL programs might be implemented within the context of war and what the focus of such programming should be. There is also limited information on supporting the mental health of students and teachers within classrooms using SEL skills and practices.

In this study, we aim to address these gaps by determining the feasibility and qualitative perceptions of the program impact of SEE Learning on student well-being in the context of war and better understand how SEE Learning can contribute to Ukrainian classroom well-being. This study may help future researchers understand how SEE Learning can potentially support resilience among conflict-affected communities. Cultivating a type of resilience that is not dehumanizing of self or others is critical for future reconciliation. While this study does not address the issue of reconciliation, it does focus on the cultivation of compassion-based resilience.

Methods

Study design

In this study, we explored how the SEE Learning program can impact the well-being of Ukrainian classrooms

Table 1 SEE Learning Curriculum Content

	Chapter 1 LE1	**Chapter 1 LE2**	**Chapter 1 LE3**	**Chapter 1 LE4**	**Chapter 1 LE5**	**Chapter 2 LE1**	**Chapter 2 LE2**	**Chapter 2 LE3**	**Chapter 2 LE4**	**Chapter 2 LE5**	**Chapter 2 LE6**	**Chapter 2 LE7**
Lesson	Exploring Compassion	Exploring Kindness	Class Agreements	Practicing Kindness & Compassion	Recognizing Compassion & Exploring Interdependence	Exploring Sensations	Resourcing	Creating a Resource Kit	Grounding	The Resilience Zone	Exploring the Resilience Zone through Scenarios	How Compassion & Safety Affect the Body
Lesson Objective	Explore the relationship between happiness, kindness, and compassion	Explore how the universal wish for happiness underlies human action, motivation, and emotion	Identify agreements to create a compassionate classroom	Develop ways of exhibiting compassion in the classroom	Recognize how things that meet our needs come from actions of countless others	Develop vocabulary describing body sensations and how to identify them	Track sensations in the body and identify a personal resource that calms their body	Create a resource kit they can use to calm themselves when stressed	Gain proficiency in the practice of grounding through different methods	Understand the zones of wellbeing and recognize which zones they are in at any given moment	Learn to track which zone they are in by tracking body sensations. Use resourcing and grounding to shift	Recognize how class agreements, kindness, and safety can affect the nervous system, and this can affect physical health

affected by war. This study was a qualitative program evaluation consisting of 23 teacher interviews from 10 SEE Learning implementing schools.

Participants

We interviewed 23 teachers who implemented SEE Learning before and during wartime. These teachers came from 10 different schools, with six representing schools in Russian-occupied territories. Tragically, one teacher passed away a week after the interview due to war-related illnesses. The interview guides utilized for data collection were created collaboratively with EdCamp Ukraine employees and the Emory University research team. Questions were developed utilizing the SEE Learning Framework and guided by the work of Baelen et al. in "Implementation Reporting Recommendations for School-Based Mindfulness Programs" [53]. Questions also addressed SEE Learning implementation during wartime, program adaptability, impact on well-being, and effectiveness.

Implementation

Classroom teachers delivered the SEE Learning program weekly. Prior to the war, teachers implemented the program with their 4th and 5th-grade students. Once the war began, school was disrupted to varying degrees depending on the region. This section shares the voices of teachers and their practices to help cultivate compassion. The scope and sequence of the learning experiences delivered are detailed in Table 1. Teachers conducted the learning experiences with their regular classroom students during a time they determined each week. Lessons typically lasted between 30 and 55 min. This cadence of delivery was consistent over the intervention period, prior to the war, which occurred during the first part of the second semester of school. Once the war started, teachers continued implementing the program as much as possible, either in person or online, depending on the school's structure. In some places within occupied territories, schooling had to occur online. In other areas, school continued but with periodic interruptions due to the disruptive nature of the war.

Data collection and analysis

In this study, we conducted a qualitative program evaluation based on deidentified data to assess the implementation of the SEE Learning program in Ukrainian classrooms affected by war. Our analysis focused on data collected from 23 teacher interviews across 10 SEE Learning implementing schools. Emory University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) granted an exemption for this study due to its exclusive use of non-identifiable information and its focus on program evaluation.

Participating teachers were selected by EdCamp Ukraine staff. This organization is responsible for the implementation of SEE Learning across Ukraine. As a part of their program evaluation efforts, they interviewed teachers if they had SEE Learning implementation experience before the initial February 2022 Russian invasion and were able to continue implementation through the time of data collection. Interviews were conducted by phone from July to August 2022 by Edcamp Ukraine in Ukrainian. Interviews were transcribed, de-identified, and then translated into English for analysis by the Emory team. Where phone calls were not suitable, interview questionaries were sent out in free-response survey format. They were subsequently translated into English and de-identified for analysis by the Emory team.

Prior to thematic analysis, a codebook of deductive codes was outlined into themes and subthemes based on Baelen's model of implementation, which was the guide for designing interview questions [53]. The interviews were also preliminarily reviewed for inductive codes that emerged in addition to the a priori deductive codes. During this process, the codebook was filled out iteratively to define and include examples of when each code should or should not be utilized. Two researchers conducted this process. Once the codebook was developed, a subsample of interviews was reviewed and coded independently. The coded responses were then compared, and the codebook was revised as necessary until the coders achieved a kappa score of 0.90 or higher.

Once the codebook was finalized and the thematic analysis of the interviews was completed, the codes were organized in an Excel spreadsheet that color-coded all themes and subthemes into columns with direct quotes from each respective interview. A second coder checked the thematic organization for accuracy. The coding team worked together to interpret the thematic clusters. Finally, a thematic map was created to organize and visualize overarching themes and sub-themes derived from both the deductive and inductive codes (see Fig. 1). This convention was developed to help the team visualize the complex qualitative data in the context of the theoretical framework guiding the study.

Results

Under the domains of the SEE Learning framework and the implementation framework that includes Process/Delivery, Uptake/Impact, and Goodness of Fit, six themes and 17 sub-themes were identified (Fig. 1).

Process/delivery

Fidelity

Fidelity refers to the adherence to a program's core component. It involves accurately delivering these

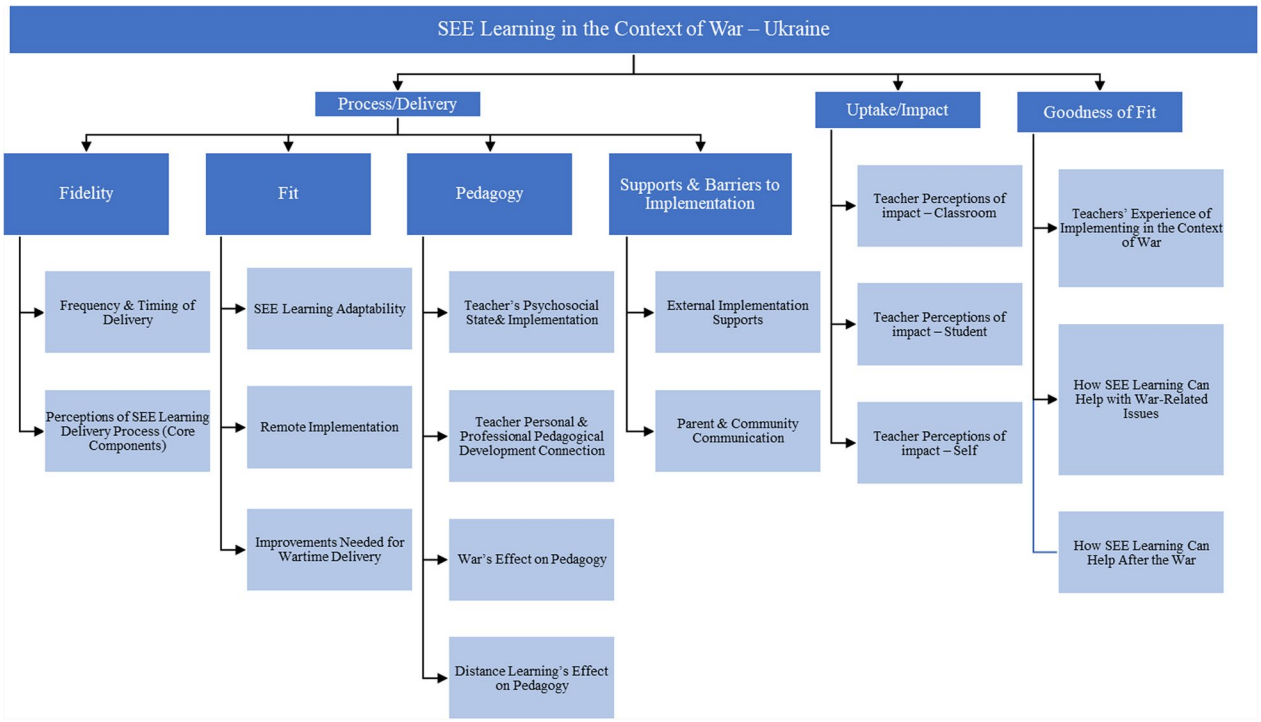


Fig. 1 Thematic Map of SEE Learning Implementation in Ukraine. We conducted a thematic analysis to identify key themes within each domain of the implementation framework. In this paper, we present a thematic map of the identified themes related to each explored domain. This visualization was developed during the analysis process to help represent complex qualitative data

components as intended while adapting methods to meet the immediate needs of students in a crisis. The implementation of SEE Learning in Ukraine during the war reflects teachers' perceptions of fidelity in several ways. Despite the challenging circumstances, teachers maintained the regular use of SEE Learning components, with some adjustments. They increased the frequency of practices aimed at emotional regulation and resilience, such as Help Now! strategies, grounding, tracking, resourcing practices, and breathing exercises. Core components like emotional regulation, resilience, and compassion were consistently highlighted as effective, with practices like grounding, breathing, and stabilizing one's emotional state being particularly efficient.

However, the lack of physical interaction, the presence of armed forces, and the constant danger posed significant challenges. One respondent noted, "Sometimes this is more important than listening and speaking," highlighting the importance of physical connection. Teachers adapted by focusing more on emotional management and resilience-building activities, using tools to help students cope. Distance learning required further adaptations, such as shorter lessons and modified exercises.

Overall, the fidelity of SEE Learning implementation involved maintaining core components, increasing the frequency of emotional regulation practices, and adapting the curriculum to meet the needs of students in a crisis context. This experience suggests that in the context of war, SEE Learning can still be effective if it is flexible and responsive to the immediate needs of students, emphasizing emotional regulation and resilience while adapting to the limitations imposed by the environment.

Frequency and timing of delivery

Often, online lessons were interrupted due to internet instability and air raid sirens. Most teachers expressed the need for more frequent SEE Learning classes during wartime compared to the need before wartime. Most teachers integrated SEE Learning practices into all academic lessons to compensate for lost time during isolated SEE Learning-specific lessons to maximize SEE Learning skill building. This integration ensured that students continued to receive the benefits of SEE Learning despite the disruptions, highlighting the importance of flexibility and adaptability in the delivery process.

Perceptions of SEE Learning delivery process (core components)

Teachers expressed their own and their students' desire to implement and receive SEE Learning as separate lessons in addition to integrating SEE Learning practices into already established academic lessons. Moreover,

teachers explained the need for genuine delivery to achieve maximum effectiveness. One interviewee stated that SEE Learning delivery "should come from your heart, be sincere and truthful. Otherwise, a child will not believe it and will not learn and use it."

This emphasis on authenticity in delivery underscores the importance of teacher engagement and sincerity in the successful implementation of SEE Learning, especially in a crisis context.

Fit

Fit of SEE Learning's program within the specific school culture and societal context is represented in several ways.

Firstly, the program demonstrates amenability to adaptation and flexibility by adequately trained teachers. One teacher noted, "Older kids coped with their emotions using the practices more easily, while younger children needed help from their teachers or parents," indicating the program's need for flexibility in addressing different emotional needs based on age, provided the adults in the environment are prepared or trained to meet the children's needs.

Secondly, gender-related observations might highlight the program's responsiveness to different engagement levels. Some teachers observed that girls responded more to the SEE Learning practices, with one teacher mentioning, "I noticed that girls respond more actively to the proposed SEE Learning practices (they are more open and show a desire to share)." However, other teachers did not notice significant gender differences, as one stated, "I haven't noticed significant gender-related differences in the perception of the SEE Learning."

Lastly, the program's ability to fit within the larger societal context of war was evident, but there might be ways in which the program could be tailored to address this very specific context. For example, one teacher observed that "boys in the 9th grade seemingly grew up faster. They became more restrained and serious," reflecting the reality that many men were recruited to fight. This means that, in some cases, boys were either preparing for the idea that they may be called to fight or facing the reality that male adults might be leaving the household as a part of the impacts of war.

SEE Learning adaptability

During wartime, SEE Learning demonstrated significant adaptability by addressing the immediate needs of students and helping them cope with the challenges brought about by the conflict. Teachers emphasized the importance of recognizing and catering to the immediate needs of their students. For instance, one teacher explained, "before choosing the topic of the next class, I must first pay attention to the needs of the children… there were times when we revised some topics, including the topic of kindness and emotions." This flexibility allowed teachers to address the emotional and psychological needs of students more effectively during the war. The curriculum delivery was adapted to focus more on resilience and grounding exercises, which helped students cope with the stress and trauma of living in a war zone. Teachers in Multipool and Zaporizhzhia adapted their lessons to include more activities that promoted emotional stability and resilience because there were areas where occupation was actively taking place.

SEE Learning became a guideline for action for many teachers, emphasizing finding personal resources, helping others, and showing compassion. One teacher noted, "It has been my guideline to action: find your resource, help others, and show compassion." Time for these exercises and dedicated communication hours provided students with creative outlets to express their emotions and facilitated open discussions about their experiences and feelings. Teachers observed that "these communication hours might even be more necessary than some school subjects."

These adaptations helped students cope with anxiety and stress, supported displaced students, and fostered a sense of community among students and teachers. However, SEE Learning could not replace the need for professional psychotherapy for severe trauma and mental health disorders. Teachers acknowledged that "some issues, particularly severe trauma and mental health disorders, required the expertise of trained psychotherapists." The adaptability of SEE Learning during wartime highlights its importance in addressing the emotional and psychological needs of students and provides teachers with tools to support their students in crisis situations. It also underscores the need for continued support and training beyond the teachers during these difficult times.

Remote implementation

SEE Learning can be effectively implemented remotely through various tools and practices that cater to the unique challenges of distance learning. Teachers found that grounding practices, audio practices, body scans, stress resiliency activities, and reflective practices worked well in a remote setting. These tools helped maintain students' emotional and psychological well-being despite the physical distance. However, some activities that required students to move around the room were less effective remotely. As one teacher explained, "It was often difficult to evaluate (these) exercises because the children were going out of sight, and I did not know what they were doing." This indicates the need for adaptations to ensure

all activities can be effectively monitored in a remote environment. Teachers also received substantial support from various sources, including the administration, colleagues, school counselors, and the EdCamp Ukraine NGO. This support network was crucial in facilitating the remote implementation of SEE Learning.

Overall, the remote implementation of SEE Learning was sometimes successfully adapted and sometimes did not work well for this context. This suggests that lessons would need to be intentionally redesigned for the kind of remote use that is necessary for contexts of war and social unrest. This experience also underscores the importance of flexibility and community support in maintaining effective educational practices during challenging times.

Improvements needed for wartime delivery

To improve the delivery of SEE Learning during wartime, several key areas were identified based on teacher feedback. Teachers expressed the need for specific training on how to implement SEE Learning in the context of war, addressing unique challenges such as constant danger and emotional stress. One teacher suggested, "To acquire new knowledge, to use practices in the life of your own family, in the life of the class and school." Additionally, teachers requested the inclusion of grieving practices in the curriculum to help students cope with loss and trauma, providing them with tools to process their emotions and support each other during difficult times. Given the heightened anxiety among children, there was an emphasis on the need for emotional support over academic learning. One teacher noted, "Children are anxious now, and if there is anxiety, the desire to learn disappears. The SEE Learning program will teach you and your children to be in resource, because children now need emotional support perhaps more than learning."

Teachers also highlighted the importance of delivering SEE Learning with sincerity and genuine interest. One interviewee stated, "A sincere interest in social, emotional, and ethical learning is required. There should be a genuine desire to improve one's skills in this area, an honest desire to help the students grow, and a sincere belief that the SEE Learning will be beneficial." They recommended that those involved in SEE Learning should practice the techniques themselves to better understand and teach them, with one teacher advising, "Trying SEE Learning practices by themselves." Careful preparation and understanding of the topics being taught were also stressed, as one teacher mentioned, "Prepare for classes very carefully, do not use topics that you do not understand." Furthermore, teachers encouraged spreading information about SEE Learning to others, emphasizing its value and potential for positive change. One teacher compared this to Prometheus bringing fire to people, stating, "To realize that your ability to support yourself and others has become much greater. To spread information about SEE Learning among others, as Prometheus brought fire to people, with great value for great changes."

In terms of post-war support, SEE Learning can help students become more stress-resilient and compassionate. One teacher emphasized, "We must teach young people to be stress-resilient and to be able to show compassion." Preparing students to navigate a complex post-war world is also essential, including teaching systems thinking and practical application. One teacher noted, "It is necessary to prepare students to be citizens of the new complex world and to cope with it in a way that contributes to the thriving of both oneself and the others." SEE Learning can play a crucial role in protecting children from the harmful effects of trauma and stress, as one teacher stated, "We must protect children from the harmful effects of trauma and stress." The program can help individuals return to their resilient zones and provide support to others, with one teacher mentioning, "[It can help] us all survive the stress, return to our resilient zones, provide support to other people." Finally, SEE Learning can instill hope and encourage effort towards a better future, as one teacher remarked, "It can make us believe that everything will be better than it was, but we have to put in ten times more effort."

In summary, to improve SEE Learning delivery during wartime, it is crucial to provide specific training for wartime implementation by including grieving practices, emphasizing emotional support, ensuring genuine and sincere delivery, encouraging the personal practice of SEE Learning techniques, preparing carefully, and spreading awareness about the program. Additionally, post-war support should focus on teaching stress resilience, preparing students for a complex world, protecting children from trauma, supporting resilience and recovery, and instilling hope and effort. These steps will help address the unique challenges posed by the war and enhance the effectiveness of SEE Learning in supporting students' emotional and social well-being.

Pedagogy

Pedagogy refers to how teachers integrate learning experiences and skills into daily classroom practices and academic curricula. This approach is critical for impactful SEL programs [54, 55]. Teachers are essential drivers of impact, and pedagogical approaches that include constructivist and student-centered practices have demonstrated greater effectiveness. These methods directly foster supportive teacher-student relationships and create more positive classroom environments [56, 57]. However, teachers are often not prepared for this. SEE

Learning has structured the learning experiences to be constructivist and student-centered.

Implementation regarding the teachers' psycho-social state

The key aspects regarding implementation and the teachers' psycho-social state included emotional control, support with teacher-student relationships, and having support in the face of trauma. War is traumatizing, and the emotional toll of the war was evident, with some teachers experiencing visible signs of distress. One teacher admitted, "I often had tears in my eyes. My voice trembled. However, with such amazing children as mine, it is possible to overcome everything. They come to help; they can finish my thought; they can give a word of support and a smile." This mutual support between teachers and students was crucial in maintaining a positive learning environment. Teachers talked about how easy it is for students to sense if their teacher is experiencing emotional hardship and how, in these times, students can be a support system for their teachers.

Teachers also emphasized the importance of controlling their psycho-emotional state to avoid transferring negative emotions to their students. One teacher mentioned, "My colleagues shared that many of them could not conduct online classes due to their psychological and emotional state. This is better than having a lesson with your students and passing your feelings of panic or hysteria to them." Many interviewees recounted instances in which they practiced SEE Learning tools on their own before class, "before performing them with students" so they felt grounded and more in control of their emotions during implementation. When they used the tools of SEE Learning they were more able to find calm, balance, and get back in control of their own emotions. Overall, the psychological and emotional state of teachers played a critical role in the implementation of SEE Learning. The practices not only supported students but also provided teachers with tools to manage their own stress, creating a more resilient and supportive educational environment during the war. This dual benefit underscores the importance of SEE Learning in fostering both student and teacher well-being, particularly in crisis contexts.

Teacher personal and professional pedagogical development

Teachers offered advice for future SEE Learning facilitators, emphasizing the need for peace, success, and continuous learning. One teacher advised, "To acquire new knowledge, to use practices in the life of your own family, in the life of the class and school." Another highlighted the importance of genuine interest and sincerity, stating, "A sincere interest in social, emotional, and ethical learning is required. There should be a genuine desire to improve one's skills in this area, an honest desire to help the students grow, and a sincere belief that the SEE Learning will be beneficial." The relationship between personal engagement with the tools and their professional development and improvement in their pedagogical impact were tied together. Because the psychological and emotional state of teachers significantly influenced the delivery of SEE Learning classes during the war, and because the concepts were new to many teachers, they emphasized linkage and the importance of personal development alongside professional development.

Many teachers found that engaging with SEE Learning practices helped them manage their own stress and emotions, which in turn positively impacted their teaching. One teacher shared, "I did some of the exercises for the first time with members of my family, and then used the most efficient ones with the class," highlighting the personal benefits of these practices. Another teacher noted, "during the SEE Learning classes, the teacher starts calming themselves down and becomes more relaxed," indicating that the act of teaching SEE Learning itself supported teacher wellbeing.

War's effect on pedagogy

The war in Ukraine has profoundly affected the pedagogical practices of teachers implementing SEE Learning. Teachers emphasized the importance of centering students' experiences and prioritizing emotional support over academic lessons, dealing with hate, aggression and hopelessness, and adapting their teaching to more flexible approaches that can be responsive to the war's unpredictability. One teacher explained that there were "a lot of classes on the topic of safety, support, (and) creating a safe place" when they had seldom utilized these lesson plans before wartime. This was necessary to achieve a conducive learning environment. Emotions that had not previously shown up in the classroom became very present. One teacher noted, "Hate, aggression, hopelessness, despair, loss of meaning…" issues teachers felt that SEE Learning was helping to address. "I considered the program to be great before the war, and I still think so." This was driven by the program's orientation towards compassion.

Compassion emerged as a critical theme during the war. Teachers and students grappled with the concept of compassion, especially towards the enemy. One teacher shared, "For my students, compassion is the ability to feel the emotional states of other people. It is a shared experience. The enemy is also a human being. However, this is the human being who interfered in the lives of people of another nation. An aggressor cannot be a friend." Another teacher expressed the difficulty of showing compassion after witnessing atrocities, stating, "No, compassion is impossible after the atrocities in Bucha and other

cities." What teachers were expressing was that compassion is critical and important and provides a way to maintain humanity for the enemy. It is not required to extend compassion or forgiveness for those who are currently doing harm, but the conversations about the humanity of the other remains present. Teachers also observed that students became more empathetic and supportive of each other. One teacher described, "We have different children. We have children whose parents are at war, two people; but we have never had such a thing as offending someone or saying a bad word, something that would hurt a child." This sense of unity and mutual support was crucial in maintaining a positive learning environment.

Overall, the war necessitated a shift in pedagogy towards more flexible, emotionally supportive, and adaptive teaching practices. Teachers focused on helping students develop stress resilience and emotional regulation skills, often integrating these practices into their daily routines. Teachers also expressed the need for continued implementation and scaling of SEE Learning in Ukraine after the war to provide students and teachers essential support to foster resilience and well-being in the face of ongoing challenges to come.

Distance learning's effect on pedagogy

Distance learning was consistently discussed when asked about pedagogy in the context of war. Most teachers expressed how crucial it is to be able to read and sense the students' emotional responses to SEE Learning exercises. Teachers explained how, ideally, they would like to be reactive to students' reactions to SEE activities because, if needed, they "could change the progress of the exercise… (they) could add another method if the previous one did not work." Implementors stressed the barrier presented by distance learning in adjusting SEE Learning delivery based on student reactions, causing them to spend more time encouraging in-depth communication and participation.

Supports and barriers to implementation

Supports and Barriers to Implementation refer to various influences beyond the standard supports built into the program, such as training and materials. One significant barrier was the war, which created a stressful and unstable environment for teachers and students. Despite this, teachers received substantial support from multiple sources, which played a crucial role in the successful implementation of the program.

External implementation supports

Teachers expressed satisfaction with the informational and methodological support provided by EdCamp Ukraine NGO. One teacher mentioned, "I have always used the SEE Learning implementation methodology in my work," indicating the consistent use of the provided resources. Another teacher noted, "The EdCamp team, the professional learning community that works with the SEE Learning program (colleagues of the educational institution and schools piloting the program), to look for certain ways to interact with the students," highlighting the diverse sources of support. It was also crucial to receive support from the school administration and colleagues within the school. Teachers did receive assistance from school counselors and other staff members. One teacher shared, "From the administration and my colleagues," while another mentioned, "From the administration and school counselor of my grammar school." This support helped teachers navigate the challenges of implementing SEE Learning during the war.

Parent and community communication

Parental involvement was another critical support for the implementation of SEE Learning. Teachers communicated with parents through online Parent Teacher Association (PTA) meetings, individual conversations, and parent meetings. One teacher described, "During online PTA meetings and in individual conversations... I have talked to parents and even conducted some SEE Learning practices at parent meetings, during individual communication." These interactions helped build a cooperative and understanding parent team, which supported the program's success.

Acknowledging that parents also need support, many accompanied their children to SEE Learning lessons delivered online. Parents and students utilized SEE activities and built SEE skills together, further encouraging students' participation and practice. Now, "parents believe [that] these classes provide an opportunity to communicate, to show self-compassion and compassion to others, manage one's emotions, work in a team, think creatively and critically, lead and thoughtfully follow leaders… [and develop] awareness, compassion, and engagement in students." However, there were also challenges in engaging parents. Some parents struggled to be stress-resilient under pressure. One teacher observed, "it is very difficult to be stress-resilient when you are under pressure."

Uptake and impact

Uptake and Impact refer to the core components of SEE Learning that were actually used within the classroom and by the individual students. Uptake and impact are linked because the teachers are referencing effects based on the actual program components that were used as a class and by the individual students.

Teachers' perceptions of impact - classrooms

Resourcing and grounding practices were seen as mechanisms to help relieve both teachers' and students' anxiety and stress. Teachers observed that students became better at managing their emotions and recognizing the emotions of others as implementation continued. One teacher noted that SEE Learning transitioned from being something "required" by administrators to an "integral part of life, a necessary component required for mental health…, positive emotional state," and classroom well-being after the start of the war. Teachers felt that the program components were crucial and timely in fostering classroom compassion, resilience, unity, and support. However, feeling compassion and empathy for the enemy (Russia/Russian soldiers) was seen as nearly impossible among students and most teachers. Additionally, activities requiring participants to close their eyes were ineffective, as children often closed their eyes out of fear rather than relaxation. To combat this, teachers allowed students to keep their eyes open or closed, depending on what they chose to do to avoid invoking fear.

Teachers' perceptions of impact - students

Teachers expressed that SEE Learning helped build strong support systems within the classroom. SEE Learning provided a space for students to "describe their sensations…, [share] their emotional reactions to the events that were going on…, [this] contributed to reducing the level of anxiety. Communication gave a sense of unity and security." SEE Learning was seen to help "students understand how to care for themselves and each other, especially when it comes to social and emotional health and well-being." Specific activities that worked to decrease students' anxiety and stress included "Help Now!", "Step In, Step Out," and exercises focused on grounding and finding their resilience zone.

Teachers noticed significant changes in their students during the war. Initially, many students experienced excessive anxiety, despair, and confusion, but also hope for victory. One teacher observed, "At the beginning of the war, many kids were depressed. When the territory got temporarily occupied, some of the children asked, 'Are we traitors now?'" Over time, students' emotional states became more stable, and they began to actively talk about their feelings during classes, improving their emotional state. Another teacher noted, "Later, thanks to SEE Learning practices, the children became calmer, more controlled, and balanced. They began to support each other and the teacher more." Teachers reported that SEE Learning classes became a great resource for reducing students' anxiety and increasing resilience. They used SEE Learning practices outside of school, especially during air raid alarms and when communicating with classmates and friends. One teacher shared, "Yes, they do. They even teach SEE Learning practices to their relatives and friends."

Goodness of fit

Goodness of Fit refers to key Contextual Factors, including descriptions of how teachers and students first experienced war versus how they were experiencing war at the time of data collection, and the ways in which the program was adaptable to these contexts.

Teachers' experience implementing in the context war

At the start of the war, teachers described feeling shocked, worried and pressured to help others stay calm. As the war went on, teachers found themselves supporting both parents and students, in addition to managing their own stress and practicing compassion and emotional regulation. During war, many noted that schools became more than just a place for education. One teacher recalled that "school became a center that brought together people who cared" and served as a place for community and support. As perceived by teachers, students first experienced feelings of depression, anxiety, confusion, shock, and fear. "They had the need to talk about… [the] situation, to understand what was incomprehensible to them." SEE learning was able to help cultivate the necessary space for processing within the classroom from the start of the war onward. As time went on, "kids calmed down thanks to the correct interpretation and understanding of the situation." There was a continuous need for protection, "reassurance, communication, good news…, joint activities," and a "hope for victory."

How SEE learning can help to cope with war-related issues

Within the classrooms, teachers have seen and reported on the importance of showing compassion among all classroom members. This was expressed as crucial for the well-being of a classroom and society, as understanding the emotions of oneself and others was seen to foster an important sense of security and allow for processing to happen as needed among classmates and teachers. In addition, SEE Learning was seen to help students mitigate and challenge negative emotions, including anger, frustration, and irritability, by managing stress and guiding students to their "resilient zones."

How SEE learning can help after the war

Teachers who were interviewed believe that SEE Learning can help individuals and communities develop stress resiliency and emotional stability, helping "them preserve their mental health or give them an opportunity to recover quicker." As conveyed by many who were interviewed, SEE Learning can help facilitate a classroom

that encourages communication and connection and, in return, nurture and "rebuild constructive relationships that will facilitate the recovery of [Ukraine]."

Discussion

This evaluation sought to understand the feasibility of SEE Learning and its ability to affect well-being in the context of Ukrainian classrooms even as war broke out. These results show that school can become an important place beyond the purpose of traditional education. Quality education is crucial to the academic, social, and emotional development of students and their futures [58]. But beyond that, school may become the only sense of "normalcy" that is left during armed conflict [59]. In this context, teachers are tasked with the difficult responsibility of creating a safe and secure environment that is needed and valued by students, teachers, and even parents.

In this study, teachers expressed that SEE Learning was able to help them cultivate the necessary space for processing difficult emotions brought up by war. This provided students with the platform to talk about and work through emotions with their peers, allowing them to feel safe and supported. Ukrainian teachers explained how this step was crucial for the delivery of and participation in quality education. As previous research has shown, feeling safe in school positively correlates with academic achievement [60, 61]. Regardless of what the classroom looks like or whether teachers are well-prepared to deliver, the need for educational consistency and student emotional support during armed conflict will still be there.

In attempts to meet these social and emotional needs, teachers in this study used tools and skills that were anchored in SEE Learning training and curricula. We hypothesize that because of SEE Learning, implementing teachers were better equipped for this task, but further research is needed. Teachers reported SEE Learning's ability to help students manage stress, frustration, and anger by giving them a coping mechanism toolkit and a safe space for processing. Studies have shown that encouraging students' social and emotional needs and development can help reduce the need for longer-term mental health services and support in the future [62, 63].

In addition, participating teachers utilized SEE Learning tools in their own personal and professional development, potentially positively impacting their ability to perform as educators and better meet the needs of their students. While the general SEE Learning curricula played a role in creating a supportive and safe environment, there is a need for a more context-specific curriculum to be developed, as requested by Ukrainian teachers, to help address the specific hardships of war within the classroom.

While the aim of this study was not to assess the impact of SEE Learning on reconciliation, situating these results into frameworks presented in peace literature might be helpful to understand what further research is needed. SEE Learning activities, as suggested by participants in this study, may help discourage negative emotions and the desire for revenge. When looking at this in the context of the peace literature, this might be critical for not dehumanizing the other and oneself. This act of maintaining one's humanity and that of the other is what compassion training does, and it might be critical for setting individuals on a path that may eventually lead towards reconciliation. When we examine this in the context of the reconciliation literature, the below theoretical shifts need to be further studied to determine the potential for SEE Learning to play a role in these more extended processes that lead to reduced violence.

SEE Learning aims to create a hopeful pathway toward compassion and forgiveness [64]. This focus is interesting in this context when reflecting on teachers' experiences because parallels can be drawn between Botcharova's seven steps toward reconciliation and the teachers' experiences. In Botcharova's model, those experiencing violence need first to recognize and confront their trauma instead of denying or suppressing it.

SEE Learning helps students and teachers express their emotions and share their stories, creating a supportive environment. Teachers reported that SEE Learning provided a space for students to describe their sensations and emotional reactions, which contributed to reducing anxiety and fostering a sense of unity and security. Victims can restore their self-identity and regain rational thinking by acknowledging their feelings. Teachers found that engaging with SEE Learning practices helped them manage their stress and emotions, positively impacting their teaching. This personal engagement with the tools may have helped teachers and students maintain their self-identity and emotional balance, but this needs further study.

Another critical component within Botcharova's model is seeing the perpetrator as a human being rather than a dehumanized entity. Compassion emerged as a critical theme during the war. Teachers and students grappled with the concept of compassion, especially towards the enemy. SEE Learning facilitated conversations about the humanity of the other, helping to maintain a sense of humanity even towards those causing harm. This did not extend into an expression of compassion for the enemy, but the enemy was not completely dehumanized. Further research is needed to understand how this shift might support compassion over longer periods of time, both during and after war.

Teachers also expressed the need to continue with SEE Learning. At the time of these interviews, they were in the heart of the war. This is not the time for reconciliation. However, an analysis of the feedback in the context of Botcharova's model suggests a possible door that might allow for reconciliation in the future. What was also happening within the communities was a fostering of supportive teacher-student relationships, creating positive classroom environments. Teachers emphasized the importance of showing compassion among all classroom members, which helped build trust and mutual support. This may or may not extend to an eventual trust between the warring communities. This is one of the reasons teachers talked about the need to continue SEE Learning even after the war. Further study is needed in this area as well.

The last two stages of Botcharova's model focus on understanding the perspective of others and finding a sustainable kind of peace where both parties can coexist. This is a very distant goal that would also need further study. Interestingly, the concepts introduced in the later chapters of SEE Learning focus on tools to foster compassionate engagement for those outside of one's inner circle through exercises that foster common humanity, empathy, and interdependence. The data presented here suggests that SEE Learning may encourage more open communication and empathy among students and teachers within the classroom. What is not known is if this mutual support within may support the fostering of mutual support beyond the created safe space, but there is a long way to go for that to occur, given that war still rages.

What we see in aligning SEE Learning with Botcharova's model, through the voices of Ukrainian teachers, is that SEE Learning practices may potentially help individuals and communities develop stress resiliency and emotional stability. This is all we can know based on what is presented here. Through the lens of this reconciliation model, the next question is if the integration of compassion-based practices contributes to teachers and students maintaining their ability to see the enemy as human, keeping the door open for future reconciliation. This is an interesting yet unstudied question.

Improving SEE Learning delivery during wartime

Based on the feedback from teachers and the gaps identified in the field of SEL in the context of social traumas such as war, the key findings below are important to consider moving forward.

Implementation support

1. *Specialized training for wartime implementation*: Teachers expressed the need for specific training on how to implement SEE Learning during wartime. This training should address the unique challenges posed by the war, such as dealing with constant danger and emotional stress, and provide practical strategies for integrating SEE Learning into their daily routines.
2. *Inclusion of Grieving Practices*: Teachers requested the inclusion of grieving practices in the SEE Learning curriculum to help students cope with loss and trauma. This addition would equip students with tools to process their emotions and support each other during difficult times, fostering a supportive classroom environment.
3. *Emphasis on emotional support over academics*: Given the heightened anxiety among children due to the war, teachers emphasized the need for emotional support over academic learning. They noted that addressing students' emotional needs is crucial for maintaining their desire to learn and overall well-being, suggesting that SEE Learning can help create a resourceful and emotionally supportive space.
4. *Genuine and sincere delivery of SEE learning*: Teachers highlighted the importance of delivering SEE Learning with sincerity and genuine interest. They stressed that a sincere commitment to social, emotional, and ethical learning, along with a genuine desire to help students grow, is essential for the program's success. Teachers stated that other teachers should understand the impact and goals of SEE Learning and strive to improve their skills in this area.
5. *Personal practice and spreading awareness*: Teachers recommended that those involved in SEE Learning should practice the techniques themselves to better understand and teach them. Additionally, they encouraged spreading awareness about SEE Learning to others, emphasizing its value and potential for positive change. This approach can help build a broader community of support and understanding around SEE Learning.

Post-war support

1. *Teaching stress resilience and compassion*: Teachers state that SEE Learning has the potential to help students become more stress-resilient and compassionate, even during wartime. They emphasize the impor-

tance of fostering conversations about the humanity of others, including the enemy, to maintain a sense of humanity and prevent complete dehumanization.

2. *Preparing students for a complex post-war world*: Teachers suggest that the program has the potential to prepare students to navigate a complex post-war world by teaching systems thinking and practical applications. This preparation is crucial for helping students become responsible citizens who can contribute to their thriving and that of others in a new, complex environment.
3. *Protecting children from trauma and supporting emotional well-being*: Teachers highlight that SEE Learning has the potential to play a vital role in protecting children from the harmful effects of trauma and stress. They note that it provides tools for emotional regulation, stress management, and fostering a supportive classroom environment, which are essential for maintaining emotional stability during and after the war.
4. *Fostering genuine compassion and mutual support*: Teachers emphasize the importance of genuine compassion and mutual support among teachers and students. They stress that SEE Learning has the potential to help build trust and support within the classroom, which can potentially extend to fostering trust between warring communities in the future.
5. *Instilling hope and encouraging effort towards reconciliation*: Teachers believe that SEE Learning has the potential to instill hope and encourage effort towards a better future. They suggest that by focusing on compassion, common humanity, and interdependence, the program can help students and teachers maintain a balanced emotional state, which is a step towards healing and reconciliation. This approach supports emotional well-being during the war and lays the groundwork for potentially rebuilding relationships and achieving sustainable peace.

Limitations and recommendations

This study contributes significantly to the literature on education and social-emotional well-being in the context of war. However, the limitations must be acknowledged. The study exclusively collected data from teachers, omitting direct student perspectives, which may result in missing key insights regarding students' views on their future success, mental health, and educational attainment. The qualitative nature of the data is subject to potential bias; however, the research team adhered to standard practices of intercoder agreement to ensure reliability. Data was captured during the first year of the conflict, which may not reflect the long-term feasibility for teachers to maintain a safe space for processing and social support as the conflict continues. Interviews were conducted exclusively with implementing teachers, raising concerns about selection bias, as those who continued implementing SEE Learning during the war may have a positive perception of the program. Nonetheless, the teachers from the supporting organization were asked to implement the program without a biased preference based on those who wanted to versus those who did not. To further validate the findings, incorporating quantitative methods and a control group could provide more definitive conclusions on SEE Learning's impact on teacher preparedness in addressing the social and emotional needs of students in the context of war. While future work aims to include longitudinal studies to assess long-term effects, the instability of the context poses significant challenges to this approach. Despite these limitations, the study provides valuable insights into the implementation of SEE Learning in a conflict zone and highlights the resilience and adaptability of teachers in such challenging circumstances.

Implications for further research

Based on the discussion, the next steps in research on SEE Learning in the context of Ukrainian classrooms during armed conflict should focus on several key areas. Firstly, there is a need to develop and evaluate how a more context-specific curriculum is tailored to the unique challenges faced by students and teachers in war-torn regions. This curriculum should address the specific emotional and psychological needs arising from the conflict. Secondly, further research should investigate the long-term impact of SEE Learning on students' and teachers' emotional resilience and stress management, particularly in maintaining their ability to see the humanity in others, including adversaries. Additionally, studies should explore the potential role of SEE Learning in fostering reconciliation and reducing violence, aligning with peace and reconciliation models like Botcharova's. Finally, it is crucial to assess the sustainability and scalability of SEE Learning practices in different conflict settings to ensure that they can be effectively implemented and maintained over time, providing consistent support for emotional and social well-being.

Conclusion

This study is a qualitative evaluation of SEE Learning in a high-conflict context. In such contexts, beyond traditional education, schools can serve as vital havens during armed conflict, providing a sense of normalcy for students. This study also introduced a novel visualization method, the thematic map, that can be broadly applied when compiling complex qualitative data.

Teachers play a critical role in creating safe and secure environments, and SEL programs, such as SEE Learning, may provide the teacher with skills in cultivating spaces for processing difficult emotions related to conflict. This study showed that by fostering dialogue and emotional support, SEE Learning may equip educators to address some of students' needs. While the general SEE Learning curricula contribute to safety, there are opportunities for context-specific adaptations. Additionally, programs such as SEE Learning need to extend beyond the classroom into parent communities. Parental involvement, particularly during periods when education is impacted or disrupted by social adversity, is crucial in supporting student resilience. While situating these findings within peace literature frameworks highlights the potential of SEE Learning to foster compassion and forgiveness, countering negative emotions and revenge, more studies are needed to further explore the themes identified in this study and the general impact in these challenging contexts. The continuation of culturally specific SEE Learning implementation and engagement in further research can help inform the larger literature on school-based approaches to psychosocial support in war, peacebuilding, resilience, and reconciliation in the future.

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Author contributions
O. M., N. V., O. E., and T. D. contributed to the development of data collection tools as well as collected and translated data S. R. organized the data and conducted an initial analysis of the data. She also contributed to the writing of the manuscript. T. F. contributed to the study by conceptualizing the project, analyzing the data, writing the manuscript, and manuscript review. She is also the corresponding author. All coauthors reviewed, revised, and approved the final version of the manuscript for publication.

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Data availability
Data can be available from the corresponding author at reasonable request, based on review by the team.

Declarations

Ethics approval and consent to participate
This study was a program evaluation and was deemed non-human subject research by Emory IRB review.

Consent for publication
Based on the Emory IRB review of this work, this study does not include identifiable information and does not require extra consent for publication.

Competing interests
The authors declare no competing interests.

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