A Tool Development on Social Emotional Learning's Responsible Decision Making Among College Students: An Initial Validation

Diosdado B. Quiamno, Jr. RGC, Rpm
University Counselor
Office of Counseling and Career Services
De La Salle University, Manila

Abstract: Responsible Decision Making is an important competency in which college students are always confronted with from simple to complex choices in life. The kind of choices that an individual embark into will affect their future and their well-being. In this study, the researcher uses the Social Emotional Learning (SEL) theory as its framework as it initially aimed to develop items that measures students' responsible decision making with its sub-constructs namely identifying problems, analyzing situations, solving problems, evaluating, reflecting and ethical responsibility. Review of literature resulted to the construction of 60 items with its corresponding 10 items per sub-construct. Content validity was based on the evaluation, thorough review and consensus of five (5) experts coming from the different fields of Psychology, Counseling and Educational Measurement. Results revealed items that are acceptable, rejected and for revision. Implications of this attempt led to the use of the items in assessing the responsible decision-making competency of the college students that would result to the development of appropriate interventions for the students when faced with either easy or difficult situation in their college life.

Keywords: *Social Emotional Learning, Responsible Decision Making, College Students*

I. INTRODUCTION

Decision making is an important action which we are always confronted with. It starts from the time when we wake up in the morning until we retire in the evening. The choices we make may start from simple to complex responses. Decision happens every day and is very important for the youth of today. It may be a choice of what to eat, where to go, what to do or not to do, what one wants to happen in life based from the value attached to them. The question is how does a person make a responsible decision? Fagin (2013) wrote that there are times when a person seems to think and feel that his decision is just right, yet they turn out to be the opposite of what he expects. Responsible decision-making depends on several considerations. Zins, Bloodworth, Weissberg, and Walberg, (2004), described responsible decision making as "making decisions based on consideration of ethical standards, safety concerns, appropriate social norms, respect for others, and probable consequences of various actions; applying decision making skills to academic and social situations; contributing to the well-being of one's school and community".

Decision-making is an inevitable act with varying consequences. It can be good to our well-being and at the same time it can also be a source of stress. Two-fold results can occur when a person makes a decision, on one hand, some may feel a sense of satisfaction when they know they do the right thing associated with a right choice. On the other hand, others be distressed by a decision poorly or irresponsibly made, making both decisions a learning experience. (Small & Venkatesh, 2000).

In this study, responsible decision-making is one of the core competencies of Social Emotional

Learning (SEL) theory. The Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL 2012) defines Social Emotional Learning (SEL) as "the process of acquiring the skills to recognize and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, appreciate the perspective of others, establish and maintain relationships, make responsible decisions, and handle interpersonal situations effectively" (p.2). It aims to promote better rapport building among people, thereby improve their social relationship, and efficiently face the demands of academic requirements and learn to develop life skills to meaningfully handle the various aspects of life's challenges.

In the Philippines, there is a dearth in research study of Social Emotional Learning Theory's utilizing one of the core competencies which is the responsible decision- making skills for college students. Secretary of Education, Jesli Lapus, emphasized in 2009 the integration of SEL in the public school curriculum hoping to upgrade the emotional quotient of students. He reported that its integration in the character education (Edukasyong Pagpapakatao) subject will result to develop self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills and responsible decision making. His efforts were designed for elementary levels (Philippines, 2009). However, there is no follow up in terms of the order of the former Secretary Education to pursue such a brilliant idea. There is lack of evidence that focuses on SEL's responsible decision making as a measure for this particular competency and for individual especially college students.

Social Emotional Learning (SEL) has been consistently used as an efficient framework to develop programs for schools for both educators and its stakeholders in developing social emotional competencies. According to Zins et al. (2007) "Social and Emotional Education involves teaching children to be self-aware, socially cognizant, and able to make responsible decisions, and competent in self-management and relationship management skills so as to foster their academic success, p.195". Elias et al. (1997) defined SEL as the process that integrates an individual's cognitive, affective and behavioral aspects in pursuit of becoming self-aware and mindful of others, construct responsible decision making, and manage his own actions and those around him. In addition, a "2011 meta-analysis found that participation in SEL programs and activities positively impacts student SEL competencies and prosocial behavior" (Durlak & Weissberg, et al 2011).

According to Weissberg and Cascarino (2013), "the short-term goals of SEL programs are to promote students' self-awareness, self-management, social-awareness, relationship, and responsible decision-making skills, and to improve their attitudes and beliefs about self, others, and school", (p. 9). They mentioned that consistent practice of these competencies results to an opportunity by providing an individual live a better adjustment and school performance as observed in a positive social behavior, less conduct problems, less psychological distress and improved test scores performance. Indeed, this truly shows that the use of SEL interventions are truly beneficial to all students across year levels of a school.

This study attempts to address the gap of Philippine research on SEL focusing on the tool development using responsible decision making which the researcher believes it would foster the ability of the college students to make constructive choices about their personal behavior. In response to this gap, De La Salle University, being one of the top private universities in the Philippines, has emphasized upon the students' well-being and cognitive competency skills, has considered the application of the SEL framework in developing programs and interventions.

There is an absence of a local tool to determine the decision-making capacity of the college students towards personal decisions including career choices. This is one of the reasons this tool is being developed in order to assess the students' responsible decision making competency. It is of paramount importance to validate items initially developed in order to establish the psychometric properties in assessing DLSU students via-a-vis with other SEL's competencies. Responsible Decision Making (RDM) is just one competency of SEL. To have a better picture and appreciation, it is better to look at it together with other SEL competencies. Responsible decision making (RDM) is just a part of a bigger study that are being simultaneously conducted focusing on other SEL competencies namely self-awareness, self- management, relationship management and social awareness. (Siason, 2018)'s research title was "Development and Validation of Self-Awareness and

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Self- Management while Chin's paper (Chin, 2018) was entitled as "Item Development on Social Awareness and Relationship Management Competencies of College Students". The objectives of this paper are the following: To develop items based on the theoretical definitions of responsible decision-making and its sub-constructs; and to develop a reliable and valid assessment tool.

Thus, the utilization of the tool will contribute to the following benefits: Primarily, it will help assess students' decision-making competencies. Secondly, it will serve as a reference for counselors to develop appropriate life skills programs. Finally, the office will produce standardized evaluations which can efficiently improve its services.

Theoretical Framework

Figure 1. A Framework for SEL
The figure below shows the SEL framework with its five core competencies:

Responsible Decision Making
This study uses CASEL as a framework in developing items in the tool to assess a student's cognitive process for responsible decision making. This cognitive SEL competency of the responsible decision making constitutes six (6) sub-constructs under (CASEL, 2004 cited in Russell & Hutzel, 2007): The first three of sub-constructs obtained its definition from (CASEL, 2004) namely 1) "A*nalyzing situations* defines as accurately perceiving situations in which a decision is to be made and assessing the factors that might influence one's response, 2) P*roblem solving* means generating, implementing, and evaluating positive and informed solutions to the problem and 3) P*ersonal or ethical responsibility* defines as recognizing and understanding one's obligation to engage in ethical, safe, and legal behaviors." p 7.
The last three definitions of responsible decision making's sub-construct are based on the

Oxford dictionary namely 4) *identifying the problems* defines as a process of recognizing (especially something considered worthy of attention) (Oxford University Press, 2018) such as a matter or situation needing to be dealt with and overcome (Oxford University Press, 2018), 5*) evaluating* is an act of forming an idea of the amount, number, or value of; to assess (Oxford University Press, 2018) and 6) *reflecting* as the process of thinking deeply and carefully about (Oxford University Press, 2018).

Social Emotional Learning (SEL) Competencies
Earlier in this paper, it was discussed that the present study is based on the Social Emotional Learning Theory (SEL) framework. Specifically, it will be employed in this tool development which has been established and studied for advocating the five (5) core competencies such as self-awareness, social awareness, self-management, relationship skills and responsible decision making among college students to achieve positive academic results and develop social emotional competencies. According to Kansas State Education Department "SEL is a framework by which people of all ages can learn to develop emotional, social and emotional skills. SEL is the bedrock of one's positive academic attitude, social, emotional, health, and civic outcome of both children and adults." The leading organization that espoused SEL's principles and ideas is known as the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) defined SEL" as the process through which children and adults acquire and effectively apply knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions" (CASEL, 2017) para. 1 https:casel.org/what-is-sel/retrieved April 2018.

The figure above presents the SEL framework and its five core competencies as defined by the following: (CASEL, 2017)

1. Self-Awareness – is the ability to accurately recognize one's own emotions, thoughts, and values and how they influence behavior.
2. Self-Management – is the ability to successfully regulate one's emotions, thoughts, and behaviors in different situations, effectively managing stress, controlling impulses, and motivating

oneself. The ability to set and work toward personal and academic goals.

3. Social awareness – is the ability to take the perspective of and empathize with others, including those from diverse backgrounds and cultures.

4. Relationship skills – is the ability to establish and maintain healthy and rewarding relationships with diverse individuals and groups.

5. Responsible decision making is the ability to make constructive choices about personal behavior and social interactions based on ethical standards, safety concerns, and social norms. The realistic evaluation of consequences of various actions, and a consideration of the well-being of oneself and others.

In this paper, the efforts are focused on the responsible decision making. Specifically, it tries to answer the following questions: 1) What are the items generated based on the theoretical identifications of the responsible decision-making competencies in SEL? 2.) Are the items generated from the sub-construct of SEL on responsible decision-making such as identifying the problems, analyzing situations, solving problems, evaluating, reflecting and ethical responsibility considered as valid and accepted by the panel of experts?

II. METHODOLOGY

To answer the statement of the problem, this paper made use of the study done by Hinkin et al. (1997) describing the process of developing reliable and valid measurement instruments which can be utilized in hospitality setting like a school and research institution ". p.1. The first two steps used in the initial validation phase made in the study were item development and content validity assessment" (Hinkin,1998) p.1.

In the initial validation phase, sixty-four items were initially generated based on a review of literature with corresponding seven to twelve items per sub construct. The procedure was done deductively which means that the development of items stemmed from a theoretical foundation in such a way that it would provide a solid explanation in generating the initial set of items. Further, Hinkin (1998) reported that this method provides an understanding of the phenomenon being studied

upon through an initial review of the literature in order to develop the theoretical definition of the construct under study. The review of literature on SEL has been done to familiarize with the underlying factors. It also serves as the strong basis for item writing. "The definition is then used as a guide for the development of items" (Schwab, 1980 cited in Hinkin, 1998) p 4.

The second step, the process of content validity assessment was applied by means of the deliberation of five (5) experts in the various field of Counseling Psychology, Educational Psychology, and Educational Measurement. In the same procedure, the experts were showed with definitions of responsible decision making as one of the core competencies of SEL theory together with the matching definitions of its subs constructs and the developed items which were formulated by the author. The items should be decided upon whether they are accepted, rejected or needed revisions. The items that were initially reviewed and validated shall undergo further statistical analysis to obtain its reliability coefficient.

Measures

This paper attempts to come up with instruments which solely focused on responsible decision making. It aims to develop a tool that will assess students' decision-making competencies and other personal areas that may require interventions and help them to make constructive choices. The instruments consist of a total sixty-four (60) items measuring the 6 sub construct namely *identifying the problems, analyzing situations, solving problems, evaluating, reflecting and ethical responsibility*. The items developed were originally taken from the principles and ideas of Social Emotional Learning (SEL) Theory "as the process through which children and adults acquire and effectively apply knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions" (CASEL, 2018). Under the consistent advocacy and promotion of CASEL (2017 para. 5) as an organization, defines "responsible decision making" as the ability to make constructive choices about personal behavior and social interactions based on ethical standards, safety concerns, and social norms. The realistic evaluation of consequences of various actions, and a consideration of the well-being of oneself and

others". This cognitive SEL competency of the responsible decision making constitutes six (6) sub constructs to define the following (CASEL, 2004 cited in Russell & Hutzel, 2007): "1) *analyzing situations* defines as accurately perceiving situations in which a decision is to be made and assessing the factors that might influence one's response. 2) *problem solving* means generating, implementing, and evaluating positive and informed solutions to the problem, 3) *personal or ethical responsibility* defines as recognizing and understanding one's obligation to engage in ethical, safe, and legal behaviors." p 7. 4) identifying the problems, 5) evaluating and 6) reflecting.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The Social Emotional Learning Theory (SEL) is comprised with five (5) competencies. For this study, only one competency was developed, specifically the responsible decision making and made use to assess the college students' ability to choose important options and execute constructive choices, actions with confidence and ethical maturity. The author gathered the feedbacks, remarks and recommendations after the expert validators' careful review of the items generated. The purpose of such review is to improve, modify and decide which items to retain and more importantly were aligned with the SEL framework. A total of 60 items under this competency were identified wherein 10 items of each sub-constructs were finally generated preceding the feedbacks made by the expert validators. Upon the receipt of the feedbacks and recommendations, the author decided to come up with the initial items or measures for the decision making skills for the use of the college students.

Under the results, the author presented the six sub-constructs to be used as references for discussion purposes namely *analyzing the situations* which means "as accurately perceiving situations in which a decision is to be made and assessing the factors that might influence one's response", *problem solving* defines as "generating, implementing, and evaluating positive and informed solutions to the problem and 3) *personal or ethical responsibility* defines as recognizing and understanding one's obligation to engage in ethical, safe, and legal behaviors." p 7. 4) identifying the problems, 5) evaluating and 6) reflecting. (CASEL, 2004 cited in Russell and Hutzel (2007) p. 7. Below are tables that show the sample items which were

concluded as accepted, rejected or needed revision by the validators. A total of twelve sample items are shown for the six subconstructs of responsible decision-making with its corresponding three sample items.

Table 1: Initial Results for Analyzing Situations (Sample Items Only)

Proposed Items	Accept	Reject	Revise	Comments/ Recommendations
1. I make choice based on social…….	/			
2. I weigh the situation before I act…	/			
3. I react right away at any given….			/	

Revise (3), out of context.
What do you mean by "react right away"?

Table I for analyzing situations show that out of three sample items, two items were accepted by the panel of validators while one requires revision for its being out of context. The "react right away" is in question.

Table II: Initial Results for Assuming Personal Responsibility (Sample Items Only)

Proposed Items	Accept	Reject	Revise	Comments/ Recommendations
1. I own my actions without pointing	/			
2. I acknowledge both my right…		/		
3. I take actions to fulfill my dreams.			/	

Comment: (3) Does not necessarily reflect assumption of responsibility

Table II results for assuming responsibility show that out of three sample items, two items were accepted while the other one was rejected by the validators. According to the experts, the statement does not necessarily reflect assumption of responsibility.

Table III: Initial Results for Problem Solving (Sample Items Only)

Proposed Items	Accept	Reject	Revise	Comments/ Recommendations
1. I analyze situations to identify…			/	
2. I participate in the social analysis…			/	
(2) Revise, the term social analysis is vague				

3. I engage in thinking different…   /

Table III results for assuming responsibility show that out of three sample items, each sample items represented its category as accepted, rejected, and a need for revision. The last item is due for revision because according to the expert the term "social analysis" is somewhat vague.

Table 1V: Initial Results for Identifying Problems (Sample Items Only)

Proposed Items			
Accept	Reject	Revise	Comments/ Recommendations
1. I have the ability to spot a problem… /			
2. I can easily sense a concern… /			
3. I am capable of classifying the… /			

Table IV results for identifying problems show that out of three sample items identified, both items 1 and 2 were accepted while item 3 was rejected because according to the validators' comment "the context specific nature of this question may make it difficult to reply".

Table V: Initial Results for evaluating (Sample Items Only)

Proposed Items			
Accept	Reject	Revise	Comments/ Recommendations
1. I assess my own actions after an…		/	
2. I carefully evaluate my thoughts…		/	
3. I set a time to recognize hindering factors…/			
Would a freshman know what hindering factors refer to?			

Table V results show that out of three items reviewed, it is indicated that items 1 and 2 were accepted while item 3 is subject for revision with the comment from validators, "would a typical freshman know what hindering factors the author is referring to? These comments were being considered by the author.

Table VI: Initial Results reflecting (Sample Items Only)

Proposed Items			
Accept	Reject	Revise	Comments/ Recommendations
1. I spend time introspecting…/			

2. I usually find lessons in life's challenges…./
3. I am able to discover insights after significant experiences…   /
Does not explicitly indicate an act of reflecting

Table VI items results show that out of three items included, only items 1 and 2 were accepted while item is recommended for revision because the statement does not explicitly indicate an act of reflecting.

In summary, as observed in the six tables that represent each sub-construct, the different competencies were initially validated by the experts indicated as accepted, rejected and for revision. It shows that the **accepted** items in all six tables followed the rubrics of test development particularly for its being simple and clear. Whereas, those items marked as *rejected* were because of its being a complicated sentence and out context while items that were recommended for revisions had the following reasons: Its being both out of context, its being a vague statement, and confusing statements. For instance, the phrase "react right away" under analyzing situations needs clarity under item **3** while the term "social analysis" is blurry under item **2** for problem solving. However, majority of the sample items checked by the panel of experts were accepted because of its simplicity and brevity. To support this statement, Harrison & McLaughlin, (1993) stated that statements necessitate simplicity, as much as possible they are briefly stated, and language are not foreign from the target participants. Likewise, consistency of the items when it comes to perspectives pose a strong consideration, such as to avoid mixing the items to what it is supposed to assess. It also means that an item should measure one's behavior are not found in the cognitive or affective domain.

With the foregoing initial findings above, it is clearly obvious that the expert validators were keen in determining what to include in the items generated, what items are rejected and items that are subject for revision considering that item context and views are within the framework of SEL. Thus, to make sure that all items are being developed are consistent in its content. During the initial tool development, several items were suggested to be rephrased in such a way that it follows simple statements, clear words and devoid of technical terms that may make the items vague to the respondents. By doing so, it will facilitate the easy grasp and understanding of the college students

especially that this particular measure is all about responsible decision making. This process signifies a good direction towards appropriate assessment of the college students' social emotional competencies to make their college life meaningful and productive in their whole stay in the university.

IV. CONCLUSIONS

Building one's knowledge, intellectual acquisitions and technical skills are not the sole measure towards success. Zins, Weissberg, Wang, & Walberg (2004) reported that today, it is common to respond to academic issues vis- a-vis with social-emotional issues together with the results of that endeavor. However, there is an absence of a measure using SEL's responsible decision to help college students act on better choices and achieve a balance in the application between academic and social and emotional domains. As (Elias, 2007) stated that "there is pressure and modelling in the mass culture for impulsive behavior, abrupt decision making, short term goal setting, extreme emotions and violent problem solving" p. 253. Thus, there is a great necessity for a measure to be standardized in order to help students address rush decision-making process and unevaluated actions that might result to unhealthy or distressing predicament. Having a standardized test measures will also help the university and a particular office to design a program as interventions specific to responsible decision making domain.

The role of Social Emotional Learning (SEL) Theory in producing the items that are relevant to the college students in this research endeavor is indeed a positive output. The current sub-constructs of responsible decision-making such as identifying the problems, analyzing situations, solving problems, evaluating, reflecting and ethical responsibility serve as major ingredients in ascertaining that items generated are within the context of Social Emotional Learning. This process posits its significance to obtain reliable and appropriate competencies designed for the college students in terms of their choices whether they may be simple or complex in nature. Items generated that were considered as accepted by the experts has a great value in coming up with a tool.

Implications of this research will result to the final validation of the standardized items in the scale which will help in assessing the college students' needs. It will also guide counselors to come up with programs and interventions in the context of this competency.

V. RECOMMENDATIONS

The first two procedures in tool development had been already done and used in this study namely Hinkin's, (1998) such as the item development and content validity assessment. Since they had been also integrated in the administration of other required mass testing of the university of the first-year college students. It is recommended that the next steps to focus on will be the data analysis, initial term reduction and exploratory factor analysis. Those procedures are meant to be used in order to check the reliability and internal consistency assessment of the test measurement being developed. Hopefully, it is further recommended to proceed for further study in phase two (2) of this tool development endeavor in order to be replicated and maybe shared with other college students of other university in the Philippines. Likewise, it may be interesting to integrate SEL Theory in their school curriculum and programs.

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