

Teachers' Social-Emotional Competence and Their Teaching Practices that Promote Students' Social-Emotional Learning

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Teachers have a crucial role in the development of the social and emotional skills of students. However, little attention has been given to the cultivation of teachers' own social-emotional competence (SEC). This mixed-methods study focuses on the SEC of teachers in the Philippines and how this SEC relates to their teaching practices that promote students' social and emotional learning (SEL). Results from a cross-sectional survey administered to 102 public and private school teachers revealed a significant positive correlation between teachers' SEC and their teaching practices that promote positive social and instructional interactions. Teachers' knowledge of and amount of training received on SEL were found to have significant effects on both their SEC and implementation of SEL practices. Teaching experience was also determined to be significant to teachers' implementation of social and emotional teaching practices. Findings from the analysis of qualitative data gathered from interviews with ten selected teachers corroborated the quantitative findings. The qualitative data further suggests that the COVID-19 pandemic may have presented a unique opportunity for teachers to strengthen their SEC and prioritize their students' SEL. Implications of these results for teacher preparation programs and professional development are discussed.

Keywords: teachers' social and emotional competence, social and emotional learning (SEL) teaching practices, students' SEL

UNESCO advocates social-emotional learning (SEL) as fundamental skills that need to be developed in our education systems in order to promote human flourishing which is critical for the attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (Asah & Singh, 2019). SEL is composed of core competencies associated with self-management and social interaction, including skills necessary to recognize and manage emotions, establish positive relationships, make responsible decisions, and tackle challenges capably (CASEL, 2020; Denham, 2006). Studies on SEL found its association with children's academic achievement, career preparation, wellbeing, and overall personal success (Chen & Yu, 2022; Durlak et al., 2011).

In the Philippines, the integration of SEL in the curriculum was proposed as early as 2009, through DepEd Order 71, series of 2009, (Department of Education, 2009). This policy called for integration of SEL in *Edukasyon sa Pagpapakatao* (Character Education) and *Sibika at Kultura/HEKASI*. Since then, SEL has been integrated in various school curriculum programs and initiatives of non-governmental organizations. A 2017 World Bank report, however, suggests that the Philippines still lags other developing countries in socioemotional skills development (Acosta et al., 2017). Reasons cited include: uncoordinated efforts among various sectors and agencies; socioemotional skills development not yet mainstreamed into the national educational and training framework; and teachers not appropriately trained to teach and foster the development of these competencies. A lack of attention to the facets of SEL was also found to be correlated with poor scientific and mathematical performance among high school students in the country (Cuenca et al., 2023; OECD, 2020). With the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic, even greater efforts are expected of teachers to meet the social and emotional needs of their students, while also making up for *learning loss* and adjusting to changing modalities of learning (Darling-Hammond & Hyler, 2020).

Teachers are the “engine that drives SEL programs and practices in schools and classrooms” (Schonert-Reichl, 2017, p. 138). They set the tone for optimal social and emotional classroom climate by developing supportive relationships with their students, designing lessons that accommodate students' strengths and abilities, managing students' behavior, coaching students in conflict situations, and acting as a role model of prosocial behavior (Schonert-Reichl, 2017; Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). These expectations pose significant challenges to the teachers' own social-emotional competence (SEC) (Sarabia & Collantes, 2020; Alson, 2019).

However, as most initiatives in SEC and SEL are focused on students, little attention has been given to the cultivation of teachers' SEC in both preservice teacher education (Schonert-Reichl et al., 2015) and in-service program for teachers (Jennings & Frank, 2015). In the Philippines, despite various programs aimed at improving teacher quality such as establishment of better-defined career paths for teachers, increases in salaries, reduction of multishift classes, and formulation of Philippine Professional Standards for Teachers (PPST), a 2022 report suggests that more work still needs to be done in teachers' holistic development and overall teaching quality (Generalao et al., 2022). Described as still at an “early stage in terms of its ability to measure and develop socioemotional skills” (Acosta et al., 2017), the country will greatly benefit from stronger bridges between research, policies, and practice related to social and emotional learning.

This study thus aims to contribute in filling these gaps by investigating the SEC of Filipino teachers in the Philippines and the teaching practices they use that promote students' social-emotional development and learning. It contributes to the study of socio-emotional skills development in several ways. First, the investigation focuses on teachers' SEC, an area that has received less attention in various studies, as well as in programs and policies related to SEC. Second, determining

the factors that affect teachers' SEC is useful in designing and implementing preservice and in-service teacher trainings that will equip the teachers in not only teaching these competencies to their students, but in developing their own SEC and navigating the challenges they face in their jobs. Third, teachers' SEC was found in studies from other countries to affect the classroom management strategies used by the teacher, the relationships they have with their students and colleagues, as well as the effective implementation of SEL programs and interventions for their students (Schonert-Reichl, 2017; Jones et al., 2013; Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). An understanding of how such association can also be observed among Filipino teachers is beneficial to the effective implementation of SEL programs and curricula in the country, and ultimately to the social and emotional learning of students in the Philippines.

Teachers' Social and Emotional Competence

The concept of social and emotional competence (SEC) has been investigated since the mid-90s; however, its definition and conceptualization vary for different researchers (Collie, 2020; Stump et al., 2009). For example, the often-cited Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL, 2020) operationalizes SEC by way of five abilities namely self-awareness, self-regulation (or self-management), social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. UNESCO looks at relational competencies as the core of social-emotional learning—healthy relationship with self (emotional literacy, emotional regulation, mindfulness, resilience), healthy relationships with others (empathy, perspective-taking, kindness, communication), and healthy relationships with nature (environmental literacy, sustainability, and purpose) (UNESCO MGIEP, 2021). Social-emotional skills are also referred to by various terms, such as soft skills, noncognitive skills, character skills, or life skills (Puerta et al., 2016). In these myriad conceptualizations, the focus has mostly been on SEC for children and students, and research on

teachers' SEC has also been based on the literature for students. For example, Jennings and Greenberg's (2009) Prosocial Classroom Model used the definition of social-emotional learning (SEL) from CASEL to define teachers' SEC. They argued that using this SEL definition more directly connects teacher competencies with those they are entrusted to teach to their students. Collie and Perry's (2019) framework for cultivating teacher thriving operationalized SEC by way of basic psychological need satisfaction, autonomous motivation, and behaviors. In this conceptualization, which was guided by the Self-Determination Theory of Deci and Ryan, SEC is not a static set of abilities, but is rather a cyclical and changing process that impacts and is impacted by the teacher and his/her experiences (Collie & Perry, 2019). As such, their framework involved *perceived*, rather than actual, competences, as they argued that perceived competence energizes individuals and drives development.

In the few studies that focused on teachers' SEC, a socially and emotionally competent teacher is described as possessing the knowledge, skills, and motivation required to master social and emotional situations and challenges in their teaching work (Aldrup et al., 2020). From the model of Jennings and Greenberg (2009), socially and emotionally competent teachers were described as having/exhibiting:

1. high self-awareness (recognize their emotions, emotional patterns, and tendencies);
2. high social awareness (recognize and understand the emotions of others, able to build strong and supportive relationships with others); and
3. prosocial values (respectful of others, take responsibility for their decisions and actions).

Studies on Filipino teachers' SEC are scant in literature. There are, however, several investigations on related and more specific social-emotional skills. For example, a study conducted in Cebu

Province, Philippines focused on the compartmentalization ability and emotional intelligence of elementary and secondary teachers (Go et al., 2020). Participants were found to display high ability to compartmentalize their problems and high levels of perceiving, understanding, managing, and using their emotions. These skills allowed them to display desirable dispositions and teach effectively despite personal issues that they are going through. In another study, Filipino teachers' psychological capital, composite score of hope, efficacy, resilience, and optimism, was found to be linked to better wellbeing and job performance (Ganotice Jr. et al., 2016). The study by Edara et al. (2021) looked into the religiosity of teachers in the Philippines. Along with optimism, resilience, and wellbeing, their religiosity allowed them to stay contented and carry on despite the challenges brought by the COVID-19 pandemic (Edara et al., 2021).

In general, social-emotional skills enable teachers to provide strong emotional and instructional support which leads to a healthy classroom climate and better learning and achievement for the students (Schonert-Reichl, 2017).

Teachers' SEC and Their Teaching Practices

Some empirical studies are found in the literature regarding how teachers' SEC influence the teaching and management practices they use in their classes. Valente et al. (2019) discovered that teachers in Portugal who have more capacity to deal with emotions demonstrate better management of discipline in their classrooms. In a study with first-grade teachers in Finland, Jögi et al. (2022) concluded that teachers' who reported high ability to manage stress used more child-centered teaching practices, which, in turn, had a marginal effect on students' learning outcomes. For Filipino teachers, studies on their ability to compartmentalize their problems and understand and manage their emotions found correlations with their teaching performance (Jimenez, 2020; Go et al., 2020). However, no specific teaching practices were included. In

relation to this, Wu et al. (2019) argued that SEC is context-dependent. They determined in their study with Chinese teachers that SEC enhances teachers' self-efficacy only when these socio-emotional skills were used in teaching situations (Wu et al., 2019). This implies that the development of SEC for teachers should not be independent of the teaching context.

Teaching Practices that Promote Social and Emotional Learning and Development

A variety of teaching practices were identified as promoting students' social-emotional competencies. These practices include those that help maintain positive teacher-student relationships such as proactive disciplinary strategies, giving students voice and choice, and providing a warm and supportive learning environment (Yoder, 2014a, 2014b). Student-centered classroom activities such as cooperative learning, self-reflection and self-assessment, balanced instruction, giving feedback, and modelling and coaching were also found in existing literature to relate positively with students' social-emotional learning (Yoder, 2014a, 2014b).

During the COVID-19 pandemic, teachers had to rely on self-directed learning activities due to lockdown and travel restrictions. A study with senior high school students in the Philippines revealed how social-emotional teaching practices facilitate self-directed learning (Pedroso & Magno, 2023). Their analysis showed that: direct instruction and skill-based activities help develop students' self-management; collaborative discussions and interactive learning activities improve students' relationship skills; and research-based activities and individualized activities that afford choices help in nurturing students' decision-making capacity (Pedroso & Magno, 2023).

Socio-emotional skills development is regarded as foundational in the curriculum for 5-year-old (kindergarten) Filipino children. Raguidin (2019) studied the strategies that teachers employ to reinforce this curricular aim. She found strong

evidence of utilization of the environmental arrangement—physical structure and organization of the school, routines, and the emotional environment—to teach values such as turn-taking, sharing, collaboration, helpfulness, respect, social propriety and reciprocity, and meaningful interaction (Raguindin, 2019). Finally, kind practices at school or kindness-oriented school climates were found to be associated with increased belongingness and positive emotions, as well as reduced intensity of depressive symptoms in Filipino high school students (Datu et al., 2022).

Factors that Influence Teachers' SEC and SEL Practices in the Classroom

How do teachers become socially and emotionally competent? Research asserts that when teachers receive social and emotional learning training, their wellbeing improves, which in turn contributes to a more positive classroom climate (Zinsser et al., 2016; Schonert-Reichl, 2017). Also, with strong administrative support for social and emotional learning, such as access to mental health consultants, well-crafted curriculum, and the availability of resources, teachers were found to experience less depression, more positive feelings toward work, and have increased job satisfaction (Zinsser et al., 2016). Organizational justice or employee's perception of fairness in the workplace was also found important to Filipino teachers' emotional intelligence and organizational behavior (Pasion, 2023).

Some factors that were identified to influence teachers' use of and confidence in implementing social-emotional practices include years of teaching experience, having teaching certification, use of a defined social-emotional curriculum, child-to-teacher ratio, inclusion of children with disabilities, and age group of children (Luo et al., 2021). Teachers' beliefs about the value of emotions, their dispositions about SEL programs, and their roles as emotion socializers were also found to affect their adoption and implementation of practices that support students' social-emotional development (Zinsser et al., 2014; Buchanan et al., 2009; Luo

et al., 2021). Finally, the implementation of such practices in order to help the students develop social and emotional skills and the creation of positive and safe learning environments requires that teachers themselves are socially and emotionally competent (Yoder, 2014b; Jennings & Greenberg, 2009).

This brief review of literature highlights the important role that teachers play in the socio-emotional development of students. To truly promote SEL in schools, an accurate and thorough understanding of teachers' own social-emotional competence and how they influence students' SEL is necessary (Schonert-Reichl, 2017). However, despite widespread interest in SEL in the past decade, most studies have focused on students. Specifically in the Philippines, there is a dearth of studies regarding SEC as an umbrella construct as most research focused on specific and related skills such as compartmentalization, emotion management, and empathy. Furthermore, there is a need for investigations on factors affecting teachers' SEC, and how this SEC is translated to actual teaching practices in the classroom.

The Present Study

This study looks into the SEC and SEL-related teaching practices of teachers in the Philippines. It was conducted in two phases. The first phase (quantitative) specifically focused on: (1) describing the levels of Filipino teachers' self-reported SEC and their use of social and instructional practices that promote students' SEL; (2) examining the extent to which teacher characteristics (age, sex, years of teaching experience, grade level taught, and familiarity/training received on SEL) are associated with levels of teachers' SEC and their use of social and instructional practices that promote SEL; and (3) investigating the relationship between teachers' self-reported SEC and their use of social and instructional practices that promote SEL. The second phase (qualitative) aimed to explain the quantitative results in more depth using the teachers' perceptions of their own SEC and their SEL-related teaching practices.

Methodology

Research Design

To address the research objectives, this study employed *explanatory sequential mixed methods design* to arrive at a more complex understanding of the research problems from both quantitative and qualitative data. Results from the quantitative phase were analyzed and these results were explained further with the qualitative data (Creswell, 2012). The descriptive-correlational design was used for the quantitative data, while directed content analysis (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005) was employed in the qualitative data.

Research Participants

The research participants were teachers from 26 different public and private schools in the Philippines. Initial set of participants from the researcher's social media network were invited to participate as well as pass on the invitation to other teachers in their network. From this non-probability sampling technique, a total of 102 teachers were recruited for the study. An informed consent form was filled out electronically. All data were gathered via Google Forms. Table 1 provides a summary of the profile of the research participants. Many of the participants were females (80.4%). Majority were teaching in the high school level (80.4%). The age of the participants ranged from 21-60+, and years of teaching experience from 1-30+ years.

Participants were also asked of their training or background knowledge regarding SEL. Table 2 shows that on majority of the teachers in the sample (77%) have limited knowledge on SEL, i.e., they were either aware of the term but do not know much about it, or they were able to attend only one training and/or encountered a few books or articles on the topic.

Table 1

Profile of Research Participants

	Characteristics	Frequency	%
Sex at birth	Female	82	80.4
	Male	20	19.6
	Total	102	100
Age	21-25	14	13.7
	26-30	19	18.6
	31-40	22	21.6
	41-50	30	29.4
	51-60	16	15.7
	61+	1	1.0
	Total	102	100
Grade level taught	Preschool	7	6.9
	Elementary	13	12.7
	Junior and Senior High School	82	80.4
	Total	102	100
	Years of teaching experience	1-3	14
4-5		11	10.8
6-10		18	17.6
11-15		12	11.8
16-20		9	8.8
21-25		13	12.7
26-30		19	18.6
31+		6	5.9
Total		102	100

Table 2*Research participants' extent of training or knowledge on SEL*

Characteristic	Frequency	%
Not aware at all	14	13.7
Aware but do not know much	47	46.1
Has attended one professional development training and/or read few articles/books	30	29.4
Has attended several professional development training on SEL and/or read many articles/books	11	10.8
Total	102	100

For the qualitative phase, teacher-participants were determined through purposeful sampling. The *connecting* approach in mixed methods design, where the quantitative data links to the qualitative data through sampling, was employed (Fetters et al., 2013). Schools with the highest number of participants from the survey were contacted through the principal. The specific teacher characteristics or attributes found in the quantitative phase to significantly have higher SEC and frequency of use of SEL-related practices were given as criteria for recommending participants. A total of 10 teachers out of the 13 recommended by their respective principals, agreed to participate.

Quantitative Phase

Instruments

The *Tool for Self-Assessing Social and Emotional Instruction and Competencies of Teachers* (Yoder, 2014a) by The Center on Great Teachers and Leaders (GTL) at American Institutes for Research was used in this study. Permission to use the tool was sought and granted by the GTL Center via email correspondence. Each item was examined for their accurate operationalization of the social-emotional competencies. Some items were revised for clarity and contextualization.

The tool is divided into three sections: Teachers' SEC, Social Interaction Assessment, and Instructional Interaction Assessment.

Teachers' SEC. This section consists of 21 items that asks teachers to rate their own social and emotional skills namely self-awareness, self-management/emotion regulation, social awareness, relationship/social skills, and responsible decision making. Teachers rated their SEC on a four-point scale, from 1 = "strongly disagree" to 4 = "strongly agree."

Social Interaction Assessment. In this section, teachers self-assess how often and how well they implement teaching practices that focus on positive *social* interactions. A total of 23 items covered the following teaching practices: Student-Centered Discipline (8), Teacher Language (3), Responsibility and Choice (5), and Warmth and Support (7). Teachers self-assessed using a scale of 1—"I do not implement this practice" to 5—"I implement this practice extremely well." (Yoder, 2014a).

Instructional Interaction Assessment. For this part, teachers self-assess how often and how well they implement teaching practices that elicit positive *instructional* interactions. This section consists of 39 items which are subdivided into the following practices: Cooperative Learning/Group Learning (7), Classroom Discussions (5), Self-Assessment and Self-Reflection (8), Balanced Instruction (6), Academic Press and Expectations (5), and Competence Building (8). Rating is based on a 5-point scale, from 1—"I do not implement this practice" to 5—"I implement this practice extremely well."

The Cronbach alpha reliability coefficients of the three sections of the questionnaire, obtained from the sample used in this study, were all $>.91$. This means that the instrument is reliable and has good internal consistency.

Quantitative Data Analysis

Participants' responses to the *Self-Assessment Tool for Social and Emotional Instruction and Competencies* were gathered and coded. The mean scores were obtained for teachers' level of self-reported SEC and the frequency and confidence with which they implement social and instructional interaction practices. To examine the extent to which teacher characteristics are associated with their SEC and use of social and emotional teaching practices, non-parametric statistics were used. Specifically, the Mann-Whitney U-test for the variable sex at birth and Kruskal-Wallis test for the following variables—age, grade level taught, years of teaching experience, and familiarity/training received on SEL were employed. Finally, in order to determine the association between teachers' SEC and their use of social and instructional practices that promote SEL, the Spearman correlation coefficients were obtained. All statistical tests were done through SPSS ver. 23.

Qualitative Phase

Interview Protocol

The content of the interview protocol was grounded in the quantitative results obtained from the first phase of the study, following the mixed-methods integration approach called *building* (Fetters et al., 2013). The one-on-one interviews lasted for 30 to 45 mins and were semi-structured, with topics prepared and identified beforehand but the actual wording of questions varied in order to offer flexibility. Depending on their location, some interviews were conducted face-to-face while some were online. A pre-interview section served as an orientation on the interview process, aims and procedures of the study, confidentiality and anonymity assurances, as well as introduction and

relationship building. The first section of the interview explored how the teachers understand SEC or SEL, how they acquired this knowledge or understanding, and how they practice SEL in their teaching and other administrative work. The second section focused on their assessment of the importance of SEC on *teachers*, their own SEC, and the ways in which teachers' SEC may be supported. The post-interview section, both parties were offered an opportunity for both parties to clarify aspects of the interview and to provide a closure on the experience ensuring that the participants left in a positive frame of mind.

Qualitative Data Analysis

The interviews were transcribed and analyzed using the principles of qualitative content analysis (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Qualitative content analysis is a research method “for the subjective interpretation of the content of data through the systematic classification process of coding and identifying themes and patterns” (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005, p. 1278). The specific approach used was *directed content analysis*, where the analysis of data starts with a theory or relevant research findings as guidance for the initial codes. Coding, therefore, is primarily deductive. After the data have been transcribed, read, and re-read, texts that appear to represent an explanation for the major research findings were highlighted and assigned codes. Some flexibility, however, was also employed to allow other meaningful groups or codes to be included. The initial codes were then sorted into potential *categories*. These categories were reviewed and refined to ensure that they are reflective of the meanings evident in the data as a whole. Detailed analysis of each category was then conducted in relation to the research objectives. A constructionist epistemology, i.e., theorizing the sociocultural contexts and structural conditions that enable the individual accounts (Braun & Clarke, 2006), was also employed in the analysis. In validating the findings of the study, *member checking*, rich and thick descriptions, and search for disconfirming

evidence (Creswell, 2013) were used. The researcher also kept a self-reflective journal throughout the whole process to maintain reflexivity. In reporting the results, the *weaving* approach (Fetters et al., 2013) was utilized, i.e., presenting the quantitative and qualitative findings together on the basis of their relevance to each of the research objectives.

Results

Teachers' Self-reported SEC and SEL Teaching Practices

This section presents the quantitative and qualitative findings on teachers' self-reported SEC, as well as their self-assessment of their implementation of social and instructional practices that promote students' SEL.

Quantitative Results

Teachers from the sample reported above average SEC ($M = 3.48$, $SD = .313$). They generally agreed that they possessed various areas or skills under SEC, namely self-awareness ($M = 3.54$, $SD = .351$), self-management ($M = 3.51$, $SD = .362$), social awareness ($M = 3.44$, $SD = .378$), relationship skills ($M = 3.43$, $SD = .405$), and responsible decision-making ($M = 3.50$, $SD = .393$).

In terms of their use of teaching practices that focus on positive *social* interactions, teachers reported that they generally implemented the practices well ($M = 4.30$, $SD = .477$). The practices related to Teacher Language ($M = 4.44$, $SD = .541$) and Warmth and Support ($M = 4.42$, $SD = .522$) were rated higher compared to other social practices (Table 3).

Teachers' assessment of how well they implement practices that promote positive *instructional* interactions are presented in Table 4. The mean rating shows that teachers also believed they implemented these practices well ($M = 4.18$, $SD = .508$). The practices related to *Self-Assessment and Self-Reflection* obtained the highest rating ($M = 4.22$, $SD = .589$).

Table 3

Teachers' self-assessment of their use of teaching practices that focus on positive social interactions

Social Interactions	Mean	Std. Deviation
Student-Centered Discipline	4.15	.531
Teacher Language	4.44	.541
Responsibility and Choice	4.18	.565
Warmth and Support	4.42	.522
Overall Mean (Social)	4.30	.477

Table 4

Teachers' self-assessment of their use of teaching practices that focus on positive instructional interactions

Instructional Interactions	Mean	Std. Deviation
Cooperative Learning	4.18	.505
Classroom Discussions	4.19	.593
Self-Assessment and Self-Reflection	4.22	.589
Balanced Instruction	4.15	.542
Academic Press and Expectations	4.19	.582
Competence Building	4.17	.571
Overall Mean (Instruction)	4.18	.508

Qualitative Results

In general, the teachers reported high levels of SEC. They also highly believed that they implemented SEL-related practices well. The following categories analyzed from the qualitative data correspond with these results:

The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the need to prioritize SEC and SEL. When the teachers were asked about their familiarity with SEL, almost all of them mentioned that they came across the concept, or were reminded of it, during the pandemic. This was because a lot of initiatives were organized by their schools in relation to it. The initiatives were prompted by problems that their schools observed during and after the height of the pandemic: students lacking social skills, abundance of discipline problems, increased cases of anxiety and other mental health problems, and a host of other social- and emotional- related issues. Experiences during the pandemic also took a toll on the *teachers'* well-being, and that they had to bank on their own social and emotional skills to cope with these problems.

SEC is fundamental to being a teacher. When asked how they managed to perform their work despite challenges, the teachers not only mentioned skills that were related to SEC, they also expressed that such skills are associated with being a teacher. For example, a teacher's response to the mounting paperwork: "It made me cry while working on it in the wee hours of the morning. But, I am a teacher. I chose this. Nothing will happen if I sit here and do nothing." Another teacher said this about personal issues at home and the cases she handles as a discipline officer, "My issues at home, I don't bring in school. The cases I deal with in the discipline office, I leave in the office. That's how a teacher is—you cannot bring your emotional baggages inside the classroom."

This awareness of the necessities of their job is complemented by an awareness of who they are as persons—what triggers negative emotions in them (what makes them annoyed or angry or sad), what can bring them positive emotions (e.g., journaling, watching their favorite shows, being with supportive friends or family, doing spiritual activities), how their emotions affect their behavior, and what their strengths and limitations are. They also expressed how important it is to

extend this awareness to the needs of their students and their parents, as well as their colleagues. Finally, a factor that repeatedly came up in the interviews is the recognition that as teachers, they cannot work alone. They have to be team players. To perform their job effectively, a good relationship should be maintained with parents, co-teachers, non-teaching personnel/staff, administrators, and their friends outside the school.

SEL can be integrated in almost all school activities. With regard to how they teach or integrate SEL in their classes, the teachers mentioned both direct and indirect ways that these skills can be taught. In terms of direct ways, they mentioned how the teaching of SEL can be integrated in homeroom guidance program, in Values Education or Religious Education, and in their own subject areas. Indirectly teaching SEL involves modeling the skills and behavior. The teachers mentioned strategies such as constantly checking in with the students, making sure the students are "seen," setting up a safe and supportive learning space, being sensitive to the needs and readiness of your students, and making lessons relevant to your students' lives. Two of the interviewees also mentioned the importance of being vulnerable and opening up to their students. Four of the respondents who held administrative positions related to discipline/formation and student affairs emphasized how extracurricular activities (which showcase students' diverse talents) and disciplining students when they committed violations are also opportunities to develop SEL.

Teacher Characteristics Associated with Teachers' SEC and SEL Practices

The following section presents the quantitative and qualitative findings on teachers' characteristics that pose significant effects on their SEC and SEL practices.

Quantitative Results

Differences in teachers' SEC ratings across sex at birth, age, grade level taught, years of teaching experience, and familiarity/training received on SEL are given in Table 5.

Table 5

Significant effects of sex at birth, age, grade level taught, years of teaching experience, and familiarity/training received on SEL on teachers' self-reported SEC

Characteristic	Test statistic (U/H)	p value
Sex at birth	828	.946
Age	5.892	.317
Grade level taught	.325	.728
Years of teaching experience	5.343	.618
Familiarity/training received on SEL	20.835	.000*

Note: * Scores are significantly different at the 0.001 level.

There were no significant differences in SEC ratings across teachers' sex at birth, age, grade level taught, and years of teaching experience. Familiarity with or training on SEL, however, showed significant effects on teachers' SEC based on the Kruskal-Wallis test, $H(3) = 20.835, p = .000$. Pairwise comparisons were performed using Dunn's (1964) procedure with a Bonferroni correction for multiple comparisons. This post-hoc analysis revealed significantly higher SEC scores among

teachers who have attended several SEL trainings (mean rank = 83.27) and those who have no idea about SEL at all (mean rank = 32.25 ($p = .000$)); as well as those who are aware of SEL but have not attended any training (mean rank = 45.64) ($p = .001$).

A comparison of teachers' self-assessment on the use of practices that promote SEL when grouped according to the same characteristics is given in Table 6.

Table 6

Significant effects of sex at birth, age, grade level taught, years of teaching experience, and familiarity/training received on SEL on teachers' use of social and instructional practices that promote students' SEL

Characteristic	Social		Instruction	
	Test statistic (U/H)	p value	Test statistic (U/H)	p value
Sex at birth	997.500	.135	939.000	.316
Age	5.666	.340	4.280	.510
Grade level taught	1.363	.506	.736	.692
Years of teaching experience	17.840	.013**	11.982	.101
Familiarity/training received on SEL	9.193	.027*	9.492	.023*

Note: * Scores are significantly different at the 0.05 level.

** Scores are significantly different at the 0.01 level.

Statistically significant differences in levels of use of social practices were observed across teachers' years of teaching experience, $H(7) = 17.840$, $p = .013$) and familiarity with/training on SEL, $H(3) = 9.193$, $p = .027$) from Kruskal-Wallis test. Post-hoc analysis revealed specific significant differences between those teaching for 16-20 years (mean rank = 24.83) and those with 21-25 years of teaching service (mean rank = 75.58) ($p = .002$). Those with 21-25 years of service reported using more practices that promote social interactions compared to those with 16-20 years of service. Pairwise comparisons also revealed significant differences between those who had no awareness of SEL (mean rank = 35.71) and those who have attended several trainings (mean rank = 71.82) ($p = .015$).

On the use of practices that focus on positive instructional interactions, training/knowledge on SEL, $H(3) = 9.492$, $p = .023$) was again found to have significant effects. Post-hoc analysis showed significant differences on the use of instructional practices between those with no training/knowledge on SEL (mean rank = 32.18) and those with several trainings/wider knowledge on SEL (mean rank = 67.82) ($p = .017$). Those who have attended more trainings reported higher use of strategies that promote positive instructional interactions.

There were no statistically significant differences on teachers' use of practices that promote students' SEL when grouped according to sex at birth, age, and grade level taught.

Qualitative Results

Quantitative findings revealed that among the teacher characteristics investigated, the amount of training received or knowledge on SEL posed significant effects on teachers' levels of SEC and use of social and instructional practices that promote SEL. Years of teaching experience also mattered, particularly on the implementation of positive social practices. Qualitative categories that correspond with these findings are as follows:

Trainings are helpful in understanding SEL and learning SEL teaching strategies. At the height of the pandemic when classes had to shift online, some of the teacher-respondents were made to attend various webinars focused on SEL. For some of the teachers, the SEL-related trainings and seminars came when they were preparing to go back to school for limited and/or full face-to-face classes. Through the seminars, they were taught some strategies that they can do in class, such as emotion check-ins, "kumustahan" (asking how the student is doing), and self-reflection. There were also trainings on basic counseling, how to deal with behavior problems, and when to do referrals. According to them, trainings were very helpful, especially when they imparted concrete strategies or step-by-step procedures that teachers can readily apply in their classrooms. Four of the teachers related, however, that they could not remember much about the specifics of those webinars. They stated that those times were kind of a "blur." What was very clear to them though was the need to prioritize students' emotional and social wellbeing while continuing the academic activities—something that they knew and understood as teachers long before the pandemic came.

Consistent practice and experience also matter in developing SEC and SEL. While these trainings have been helpful, many of the teachers admitted that some skills and practices related to SEL, such as "processing" students' difficulties, seamlessly integrating SEC in academic subjects, and changing strategies on the fly, require some years of exposure and practice. They also found value in the practice of senior teachers mentoring the junior or novice teachers. This is because almost all of the respondents mentioned that SEC is a challenge for *new/beginning* teachers. Two reasons repeatedly came up. First, they were the generation of teachers who did not have the chance to have face-to-face practicum as they finished their degrees via online modalities. As a result, they may not have been adequately equipped to handle the challenges of in-person

classes. Second, the age gap with their students was very small (especially for high school teachers). This presents difficulties in terms of the kind of relationship they should have with their students.

Relationship between teachers' SEC and their use of social and instructional practices that promote SEL

Finally, the relationship between teachers' self-reported SEC and their use of social and instructional practices that promote students' SEL was determined. Quantitative and qualitative findings are presented below.

Quantitative Results

Spearman correlation coefficient (P) was obtained to assess the linear relationship between the two variables (Table 7). There was a significant positive correlation, $P(100) = .694, p = .000$, between teachers' SEC and use of teaching practices that focus on positive social interactions. A significant positive correlation, $P(100) = .624, p = .000$ was also computed for teachers' SEC and their use of practices that promote positive instructional interactions. All components of SEC were also found to be significantly positively correlated with the use of both social and instructional practices that promote SEL (see Table 8).

Table 7

Correlation between teachers' SEC and their use of social and instructional practices that promote SEL

	Teachers' SEC	Teachers' Use of Social Practices
Teachers' SEC	1	.694*
Teachers' Use of Social Practices	.694*	1

	Teachers' SEC	Teachers' Use of Instructional Practices
Teachers' SEC	1	.624*
Teachers' Use of Instructional Practices	.624*	1

Note: * Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2tailed)

Table 8

Correlation between components of teachers' SEC and their use of social and instructional practices that promote SEL

SEC Components	Teachers' Use of Social Practices	Teachers' Use of Instructional Practices
Self-awareness	.483*	.490*
Self-management	.540*	.470*
Social awareness	.561*	.492*
Relationship skills	.640*	.576*
Responsible decision-making	.618*	.569*

Note: * Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2tailed)

Qualitative Results

The following qualitative categories correspond with the finding that SEC is positively correlated with teachers' use of practices that promote positive social and instructional interactions:

Manage yourself in order to manage your class. The teachers related that a teacher cannot manage his/her classroom if he/she cannot manage himself/herself. "You have to be an actor (or actress). Especially in grade school, you have to always smile. Students can easily *sense* what is going on." Some of them also mentioned "compartmentalizing," having "different personalities" at work and at home, or being "strong enough to handle your own battles." One teacher expressed an awareness of how his emotions affected his behavior in the classroom, "I noticed a second later, that if I were okay then, I wouldn't have said those words to the student. If I were okay during that time, I would have responded differently in class."

The teachers also claimed that with good classroom management, consisting of positive relationship sustained throughout the school year and skillful handling of difficult situations, academic achievement is not hampered.

Empathy and student-centered approach to teaching. The teachers who were interviewed connected their ability to *empathize* to: having or maintaining a good relationship with their students; making the lessons relevant to them; and having a more personalized or student-centered approach to discipline and teaching. For example, a teacher remarked, "When I was a new teacher, I was very strict because I thought that's the way to deal with students. But now I know that you need to get to know them and be patient with them." Another teacher shared a related comment, "Now that I am more matured as a teacher, I learned to not be quick to judge. I have to understand where this student is coming from." Another teacher-participant, a pre-school teacher, said something about "pagkapa," or sensing what works best for her particular group of preschoolers.

Many of the teachers shared their observations of how students tend to *reciprocate* the empathy extended to them. Some of the related statements were, "When you are open to the students, they also open up to you," "A student of mine once sent me a message of encouragement, apparently the student knew that we teachers were going through a tough time then," and "When you show genuine care for the students, support them and not judge them, and let them take charge of their own learning, they will perform well to show that they care about you also."

Discussion

The teachers in this study who reported having higher SEC also reported using more SEL-related practices in their classrooms. As suggested in the qualitative data, the various SEL competencies (CASEL, 2020) enable the teachers to perform their job well and thrive in the profession. For example, they pointed out that high self-awareness and self-management enable them to "compartmentalize." In literature, *problem compartmentalization* refers to one's capacity to separate personal feelings from issues at work (Go et al., 2020; Ditzfeld & Showers, 2014). The teachers also demonstrated understanding of teaching as "emotional labor," i.e., the expression of appropriate emotions is a job requirement (Kariou et al., 2021). Teacher emotions have been proven to affect student outcomes such as their motivation, discipline, and academic performance (Frenzel et al., 2021). Such positive student outcomes, in turn, have "recursive effects" on the teacher, prompting the teacher to continue having positive emotions (Frenzel et al., 2021), which forms something of a positive feedback loop. Aside from compartmentalization and emotion management, qualitative data also suggest that the teachers' ability to empathize, i.e., understand the perspective of others and be attuned to their feelings (Lishner et al., 2017), as well as their relationship skills, allow them to make learning more student-centered and personalized.

Quantitative findings on teacher characteristics reveal that those who have higher amounts of training and knowledge on SEL had significantly higher SEC scores and more frequent use of SEL-related teaching practices. This implies the importance of teacher training and professional development initiatives on SEC. This also supports the literature that social and emotional skills can be taught, and can be developed regardless of one's background and characteristics (Durlak et al., 2011, 2015). Findings from the qualitative data, however, provide some insights on how the impact of trainings can be maximized. They should be experiential, consistently practiced, and adapted to the needs of the teachers. These can enhance the teachers' receptiveness of the information presented to them. Findings of the study also point to the importance of a combination of training and years of experience in the consistent implementation of SEL practices. For adults, such as teachers, moving from incompetence to competence in SEL-related skills requires four stages of competence according to Howell (1982, cited in Brackett et al., 2019). Teachers start at the earliest stage called the *unconscious incompetence* stage, i.e., they still cannot apply SEC skills to teaching and learning and are also unaware of this deficit. Others may be at the *conscious incompetence* stage, where they still do not have the requisite SEC but already begin to recognize this lack and the corresponding value of being able to acquire such competence. With proper training and support, teachers may advance to the *conscious competence* stage where they now possess the necessary social and emotional competencies and skills and are consciously processing their thoughts and behavior. Over years of exposure and experience, teachers may reach the level of *unconscious competence*. This is when SEC has been internalized and becomes a natural part of who they are as individuals, and that they are able to also influence their school environment and culture (Brackett et al., 2019).

While previous studies show that the age group of children being taught—for example, if

one is teaching preschool vs. high school students— influences teachers' use and confidence in implementing SEL (Luo et al., 2021), no significant differences were observed in this study when teachers were grouped according to grade-level taught. The qualitative data taken from a combination of pre-school, grade school, and high school teachers equally point to the importance of implementing SEL-related practices. The strategies however should vary depending on the developmental needs of the learner (Denham, 2018). For example, the pre-school teacher stated in the interviews that she concentrated on teaching students to follow rules and establish routines. A high school Science teacher, on the other hand, focused on developing the adolescents' social awareness through community-based performance tasks.

As the span of this study coincided with school's transitions from fully-online to limited face-to-face to full face-to-face modalities, the COVID-19 pandemic can be considered a huge factor in the teachers' perceptions and report of their SEC. While most studies document the negative effects of the pandemic on teachers (Carreon, et al., 2021; Westphal et al., 2022), these findings imply an opportunity post-pandemic. Despite the challenges, the teachers were reminded and were able to express a renewed commitment to their role as formators of the "whole person"—that the students' social and emotional welfare should not be compromised in the pursuit of academic excellence. The positive experience of the teachers, in terms of fulfillment, passion, and relationships built, despite the stress of the pandemic, was also observed in a phenomenological study of public-school teachers in the Philippines (Robosa et al., 2021).

In summary, this study found a positive correlation between teachers' SEC and their use of teaching practices that promote students' SEL. Quality SEL training and years of meaningful teaching experience were also found to contribute to teachers' SEC and SEL practices. These findings support previous studies conducted in other contexts.

In Zinsser et al.'s (2018) model of *social and emotional teaching*, “being a socially and emotionally competent teacher” is one of the essential components. Teachers’ SEC is necessary because when promoting SEL among children, teachers not only focus on using specific SEL curricula, they also support students’ learning process by modeling the desired SEL skills and by creating and maintaining a positive emotional climate (Zinsser et al., 2018).

Implications and Recommendations

While these findings are valuable in the field of SEL in the Philippines, the study is not without limitations. Sample size may be increased and further randomized to improve the generalizability of the results. Also, results of the quantitative study came from a single self-report questionnaire and may have thus suffered from social desirability bias. Evidence of validation among larger samples may be done. The use of more objective assessments may also be considered. Other qualitative data sources, such as classroom observation and documents such as student evaluation of teachers, may be used to triangulate the data and increase their credibility. The study only looked into individual teacher characteristics in comparing the teachers’ ratings of SEC and SEL teaching practices, and may also explore school-level factors (e.g., type of school, average class size, school leadership, etc.) and community-related factors (e.g., policies, characteristics of stakeholders in the community such as parents, local officials, etc.). Finally, more sophisticated statistical analyses and research methods may be employed to establish causality and directionality in the relationships among the variables.

Despite these limitations, the findings have several important implications for educational programs and policies, teachers’ professional development, and preservice teacher education in the Philippines.

The pandemic has presented an opportunity for schools and education policy-makers to prioritize initiatives related to SEC and SEL. This study has

provided some evidence that this has benefited teachers and students as far as this aspect is concerned—teachers reported high levels of SEC and use of SEL-related teaching practices. However, as educational institutions start to return to pre-pandemic conditions and focus on academic/learning recovery, these SEC-related initiatives should be sustained and further improved. Teachers’ capacity for SEC and resilience should be matched with adequate institutional support. Qualitative findings from this study suggest that there are still no structured programs related to SEL in schools and that its integration in the curricula can still be made more explicit. It is recommended that before a structured SEL program for students be introduced, the program for teachers’ SEC should first be put in place. The success of any SEL-related initiative in schools requires an accurate understanding of teachers’ *own* social-emotional competence and wellbeing (Schonert-Reichl, 2017).

The study also highlighted the difference that adequate training and knowledge on SEL can make on teachers’ SEC and SEL practices. This has implications on how teacher trainings should be done. SEL trainings and interventions should not only equip the teachers on how to teach SEC to their students (Oliveira et al., 2021); there is a need to balance such trainings with ones that also target the development of teachers’ *own* interpersonal (relationship skills, social awareness) and intrapersonal (self-awareness, self-management) SEC. Another factor that is important in the promotion of SEL practices is teachers’ years of teaching experience. The rich and extensive experience of teachers in dealing with everyday social and emotional issues that happen in the classroom and the school should be valued and appropriately tapped. Success stories in SEL programming often mention the need for teachers’ and staff’s dedication and buy-in if a program is to be sustainable. Identifying teachers or leaders within the school who will act as “innovators” or resident experts at intentionally modeling SEL practices can help build the momentum and grow awareness of SEL to other stakeholders of the school (Brackett et al., 2019).

Novice teachers, who may still lack both training and experience, also require particular attention. While schools can provide initiatives for new teachers by way of training or mentoring/ buddy system, it will be best to build a good foundation of SEC during pre-service teacher education. This means that SEC should also be taught and modeled in pre-service training. A holistic and effective way to do this is to embed them in the pre-service teachers' academic practices, course designs and curricula, assessment, and student organization activities (Baik et al., 2019).

Findings of the study also demonstrated that teachers with high SEC use more SEL-related teaching strategies. These strategies, in turn, can lead to productive educational outcomes (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009; Yoder, 2014b). This implies that teachers' SEC is an important component of educational quality, and should be given priority in national and school-based programs. Improving teachers' SEC also has implications on teachers' everyday resilience, wellbeing, and job satisfaction (Schonert-Reichl, 2017), which can potentially solve issues on teacher attrition.

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