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**DO THI DUNG**

**Primary teachers' perspectives and understanding  
of social and emotional learning  
in Vietnam**

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## **Abstract**

The study aims to understand the perspectives of primary school teachers on social and emotional learning (SEL), which could be a fundamental process in promoting primary school students' social and emotional competence in Vietnam. The study investigates four aspects of SEL from teachers' experiences, including SEL conceptualisation, roles, teaching approaches, and influential factors to the process. The constructivist approach of grounded theory is chosen as the methodology and the method of the study. Through the reflectivity during data collection and analysis, this grounded theory research facilitates understanding the complexity of teachers' beliefs, understanding, and attitudes expressed through their own stories and voices. Thirteen primary school teachers in public schools are recruited during purposeful and theoretical sampling as the participants. The participants represent three different school settings (village, district, and city centre) and have participated in the last three summer professional development programs for new general education curriculum implementation. The main data collection method is the intensive semi-structured interview. With 17 meeting times during more than 20-hour interviewing, the study reaches saturation, and a substantive theory is generated as the finding of the study. The theory indicates that SEL is a part of life skill education in Vietnam; it benefits not only individual students but every relevant stakeholder. The theory also explains the integration of SEL into every teaching and educational activity for students inside and outside of school, and school, family, and community, with their different elements influencing the integration of SEL. The findings provide insights into SEL implementation in primary school education and the innovation of teacher education in Vietnam in life skills education and SEL.

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## Chapter I - Introduction

Social and emotional elements in education have been a concern for educators across the annals of education. In the West, a famous adage “educating the mind without educating the heart is no education at all” is often attributed to Aristotle who lived as far as 2400 years ago. In the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, education reformers such as Rousseau and Pestalozzi advocated for including emotional and social development in the curriculum (Lilley & Heafford, 1967; Smith, 2010). The early 20th century observed the establishment of Waldorf pedagogy by Rudolf Steiner who was convinced that education should focus on developing the whole person, including their social and emotional capacities. Maria Montessori underscored the importance of developing independence, self-discipline, self-esteem, a sense of social responsibility and empathy for others in students (Duckworth, 2006).

Eastern philosophers, particularly in ancient India and China, also strongly value social and emotional skills. The ancient philosophy of Buddhism, which dates back to the sixth century BC accentuated the formation of moral character and emphasized self-awareness, self-control, and compassion (Sarvepalli, 1956). In the fifth century BC, Confucianism gave prominence of education goal to values like compassion, filial piety, and respect for others alongside interpersonal connections which include skills like empathy, communication, and conflict resolution (Berling, 1982). In the modern age, from the late twentieth century, researchers like Howard Gardner and Daniel Goleman further popularized the concept of emotional intelligence and its significance for success in life (Gardner, 1983; Goleman, 1998).

The significance of social and emotional elements in education, therefore, is proven throughout the long history of society and education. However, the actual practice of educating the matter in school is still a contemporary concern. Social and emotional competence as a scientific term together with it independent research field has been an interest for just a few decades now in the world and is a new concept adopted in Vietnam in recent years. This field of study develops as the acknowledgement of its significance recognised in effective learning and development which traditionally concerned merely the domains of knowledge and academic skills (Zysberg, 2018). Social and emotional learning (SEL) is a process to promote SEC, which is the foundation competence for every child to be successful in a complex and competitive world (Hoang, 2016). For primary school students who experience a significant transfer from early childhood

education to general compulsory one, SEL helps them understand themselves and regulate their emotions. SEL particularly fosters primary students' ability to deal with a number of learning and social challenges that they the first time meet in life, set life goals and find ways to achieve them, respect and sympathize with others, build and sustain meaningful relationships, and make responsible decisions (CASEL, 2012; Greenberg et al., 2003; Weissberg et al., 2007).

Vietnam is a country located in Southeast Asia, known for its rich cultural and historical heritage. The country is heavily influenced by collectivist values, traditionally impacted by Eastern philosophies, particularly Buddhism, Confucianism, and Taoism. The collectivist culture emphasizes the value of the group over the individual. This is demonstrated in many aspects of day-to-day life, such as the importance of family, community, and the belief that everything is interconnected. These schools of thought promote living in harmony with nature and the development of values like compassion, respect, and humility.

While the traditional Eastern philosophical teachings have helped to cultivate strong values and morals in Vietnamese culture, there is a growing concern that the current education system does not adequately address the holistic needs of students. Schools and students invest much time and resources in acquiring intellectual knowledge and preparing for academic exams. Schools normally spare little time for developing social and emotional skills, giving less expectation to achieve attainment (Van Poortvliet et al., 2013). Particularly, social and emotional education was designed as a core area in the curriculum of Early Childhood Education in Vietnam more than a decade ago (Ministry of Education and Training, 2009) while it has not been a compulsory requirement in the primary or higher educational phases. Therefore, it is not uncommon when the teaching in practice is often skipped out. Moreover, not many teachers are aided in improving social and emotional skills in their classroom practice. At any level, students primarily develop and practice their social and emotional skills by involving themselves in challenging circumstances in which they may or may not be able to handle and solve problems efficiently (Hoang, 2016).

Recently, educational stakeholders and the general public in Vietnam are aware of and support a developing educational agenda that emphasizes students' life skills by integrating social and emotional skill domains. Vietnamese teachers' perspectives and understanding of SEL, therefore, have drawn some research attention, however, both the



number and focus of studies are limited. Currently, to the best of my knowledge, there is only one such quantitative study (Huynh et al., 2018) testing primary school teachers' perceptions of SEL. Although the study was successfully conducted with a good size of research sampling (250 teachers) and well-designed survey questionnaires; it was limited by a lack of deep understanding of teachers' views on and daily practice in integrating SEL in their teaching. The research status necessitates much more attention to teachers' views on SEL in primary schools.

SEL has not been officially implemented in Vietnamese public primary schools, however, the numerous proven benefits of SEL make its implementation a highly anticipated development in the country. This study is timely in terms of raising awareness of SEL among teachers, researchers, educational policymakers, and other relevant stakeholders. This study aims to understand the perspectives and understanding of primary school teachers on SEL which are fundamental in promoting primary students' SEC in Vietnam.

### **Research questions**

The purpose of this study is to explore public primary school teachers' perspectives and understanding of social and emotional learning for their students. For the research purpose, the study is guided by the following questions:

*In the primary education context, and in teachers' perspectives and understanding:*

- 1. *What is social and emotional learning for primary students?*** The question aims to reveal the SEL concept adopted by the participant teachers. Their understanding of SEL domains could result from a number of sufficient or insufficient supports they have received, including sufficient or insufficient information (Esen-Aygun & Salim-Tasking, 2017). The understanding could also affect teachers' perspectives on SEL roles in teaching and learning and other relevant issues such as teaching approaches and the perceptions of factors influencing the SEL implementation in primary schools.
- 2. *What are the roles of social and emotional learning for primary students?*** Together with teachers' conceptualization of SEL, their belief in the SEL benefits might impact their motivations to learn SEL for themselves, their willingness to,

and the decision on methods to implement SEL in their teaching (Collie et al., 2015; Jennings & Greenberg, 2009; Schonert-Reichl & Zakrzewski, 2014).

3. ***How to integrate social and emotional learning for students in primary schools?*** The ultimate indicator of a successful SEL program is when its domains are implemented and used all over time within an appropriate, intentional setting (Elias et al., 1997). When teachers see SEL as an add-on responsibility or fail to recognize the inextricable connection between social and emotional skills with academic achievement (Zins et al., 2004), they tend to squeeze out the training or implement it without fidelity (Schonert-Reichl, 2017). Understanding this issue helps shed light on teachers' beliefs, attitudes, feelings of self-efficacy, their needs for adequate support, and their own SEL competence (Schonert-Reichl et al., 2017).
4. ***What factors influence the integration of social and emotional learning for students in primary schools?*** As a nature of social and emotional development, any effective SEL should be delivered by a competent and confident instructor, and in a supportive environment in which teachers and students are not the only stakeholders. Therefore, teachers' own SEL competence and confidence in SEL delivery, directly relevant to their training before and during their teaching career, might explain the effectiveness of SEL integration. Moreover, a favourable learning context for SEL is affected by a variety of factors including classroom-school structures and climate regulations, administrative commitment, local policies, and parental and community involvement (Schonert-Reichl, 2017). While students' academic achievement is still one of the main performance focuses in schools, integrating and championing SEL is a big challenge to teachers which necessitates various support from every educational stakeholder.

### **Definitions of terms**

Definitions relating to the terms that represent psychological and educational key concepts throughout this study will be presented. The interdisciplinary approach of psychology and education will be beneficial for the focus on primary teachers' perspectives and views on SEL. Currently, in Vietnam, non-academic skills are included in life skills education. The concept of life skills education, therefore, will be employed during the investigation of teachers' perspectives on SEL. Other key terms to be defined,

include social and emotional competence, social and emotional learning, teachers' perspectives and understanding, and public primary schools in Vietnam.

### ***Life skills education***

The Ministry of Education and Training of Vietnam has adopted the life skills education concept developed by the World Health Organization (WHO) and the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF). Accordingly, life skills have been defined as the “abilities for adaptive and positive behaviour that enable individuals to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life” (WHO, 1997, p.1), “refer to a large group of psychosocial and interpersonal skills which can help people make informed decisions, communicate effectively, and develop coping and self-management skills that may help lead a healthy and productive life” (WHO, 2003; UNICEF, 2011; cited in UNICEF, 2017, p.26).

### ***Social and emotional competence***

There is a lack of consensus within the field regarding the definition of social and emotional competence. Perhaps the most influential definition is that of Elias and his colleagues (1997) who describe it as:

“The ability to understand, manage, and express the social and emotional aspects of one’s life in ways that enable the successful management of life tasks such as learning, forming relationships, solving everyday problems, and adapting to the complex demands of growth and development” (p.2).

The detailed arguments regarding the definition will be discussed further in this dissertation.

### ***Social and emotional learning***

Social and emotional learning (SEL) is developed by the Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL). CASEL defines SEL as learning activities through which individuals “acquire and effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions” (CASEL, 2003).

### ***Perspective, teacher’s perspective, and understanding***

According to Niederhoff (2009), perspective in a narrative is defined as “the way the representation of the story is influenced by the position, personality and values of the narrator, the characters and, possibly, other, more hypothetical entities in the story world. In Anglo-American criticism, perspective is equivalent to “point of view”” (p.384).

Teachers’ perspective is “the thoughts or mental images which teachers have about their professional activities and their students, which are shaped by their background knowledge and life experiences and influence their professional behaviour.” (Papadakis & Kalogiannakis, 2020).

In this study, I expect to recognize teachers’ own voices telling their experiences about implementing SEL in their teaching. Every point of view taken by teachers is respected including being a subject teacher, extra-curriculum instructor, school educational staff under a principal’s management, or a learner during their professional development programs. Teachers’ views contribute to strengthening teachers’ perspectives. In this study, teachers serve as participants and narrators of their own stories within the context of primary school education and on the topic of social and emotional learning.

### ***Primary education and public primary school***

Since the research was conducted in Vietnam, the terms primary education and public primary school in Vietnam are defined. As defined by Law on Universal Primary Education (Vietnam) (Luật Giáo Dục [Law on Education], 2019), primary education in Vietnam is compulsory, from grade 1 to grade 5 for every child aged from 6 to 14. A primary school in Vietnam is an educational institution of the elementary level for foundation education of the national education system. Types of schools include public, half-private, and private schools. The current study is carried out in the context of public schools which are established, invested in, built and maintained all business charges for recurrent spending missions by the State (Ministry of Education and Training, 2017b).

### **Theoretical framework**

The research aims to understand teachers’ perspectives on social and emotional learning. The social and emotional learning (SEL) program developed by the Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL) is then employed to guide the study. The reasoning for the choice is as follows:

Firstly, SEL designed by CASEL is a well-established framework. Since its founding in 1994, SEL has been developed with rigorous research and evidence. The

CASEL offers a comprehensive and evidence-based approach to social and emotional learning. Studies and evidence produced by SEL CASEL demonstrate the beneficial effects of SEL on academic performance, behaviour, and mental health. There is a growing body of research on the effectiveness of SEL programs and interventions, many based on the CASEL framework (CASEL, n.d.-a; Clarke et al., 2021). After three decades of its establishment, the framework has been embraced by many American schools and organizations, and widely adopted by schools, districts, and organizations worldwide.

Secondly, SEL by CASEL is applicable to a wide range of settings and populations. It is appropriate for children and adults of all ages and socioeconomic backgrounds, and it can be used in schools, after-school programs, and community-based groups. Research on the effectiveness of SEL CASEL has been conducted in multiple countries and contexts, providing evidence that the framework is applicable and effective in diverse settings. Meanwhile, CASEL has been a leader in advocating for the importance of SEL in education and beyond. They have developed resources, tools, and training programs to help educators, policymakers, and others understand and implement SEL practices. Their advocacy and awareness-raising efforts have likely contributed to the global influence of the framework.

Lastly, SEL CASEL has expanded advocacy, collaborations and partnerships. The SEL structure of CASEL aligns with the policies and programs currently in place that support social and emotional learning in classrooms and beyond. CASEL has collaborated with numerous organizations, foundations, and governments worldwide to promote SEL and the CASEL framework. For example, they have partnered with the World Economic Forum to develop a global framework for measuring and promoting social-emotional skills; with the World Bank to promote social and emotional competence for children and teens (ages from 6 through 17). According to CASEL, their framework has been implemented in over 40 countries, reaching more than 16 million students worldwide. This suggests that the framework has had a significant impact and influence beyond the United States, where CASEL is based (CASEL, n.d.-a).

The concepts related to the core domains of SEL are used to design research questions as well as to collect and analyse data. As defined by CASEL:

“SEL is a process through which children and adults acquire and effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others,

establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions” (CASEL, 2003).

The SEL program is focused on the requirement of creating a positive learning environment for every student where they find learning an interesting, meaningful and challenging experience (Zins et al., 2004). There are five core competencies categorized in the SEL model, according to CASEL including “self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship management, and responsible decision-making” (CASEL, n.d.-a). Together with those five elements, there are four popular approaches to promoting students’ SEL including a free-standing course, integrating SEL in other academic subjects, integrating SEL in daily teaching-learning practice, and integrating SEL into an organisational setting in which SEL is adopted school-widely (CASEL, n.d.-a). These five core domains and four teaching approaches of SEL guide the current study in analysing what SEL elements, teaching methods, relevant requirements and challenges are reflected as teachers discuss SEL practice in their primary schools.

### **Research paradigm**

This research explores SEL practice in Vietnam to deeply understand teachers’ views on SEL from their lived experience; the interpretivism-constructivism paradigm with a qualitative approach is considered the most appropriate approach.

A paradigm describes a researcher’s worldview (Mertens, 2005). It encompasses the researchers' experiences, thinking, school of thought, values, concepts, and methods that navigate the way they perceive, view, and interact with the world (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017). As such, a paradigm is essential as it identifies the researchers’ standpoint, their philosophical orientation; it directs the research actions, including the methodological component of selecting data collection and analysis methods (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017). Regarding subjectivist epistemology, interpretivism assumes that data generated from the researcher-the researched interaction facilitates the researcher’s thinking process. This then states that all meaning of the researched is made from the researcher’s own thinking and interpretation ability (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017). Interpretivists also adopt relativist ontology which views the real reality as a product of intersubjective construction of the meanings and understandings that emerged during social and experiential actions (Cohen & Crabtree, n.d.). Naturalist methodology is another aspect of interpretivism according to Kivunja and Kuyini (2017). As such, they believe that to investigate a phenomenon, the researcher can make the most use of data gathered from interviews, observations, and

descriptive texts from the position of “participant observer” (Carr & Kemmis, 1986, cited by Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017, p33). From the interpretivism-constructivism assumption, therefore, there could be several realities existing in a phenomenon. In other words, one phenomenon might be interpreted differently by different researchers, in different investigating contexts rather than a determined truth processed from a certain measurement (Lan, 2018). Having taken the viewpoint of interpretivism-constructivism, grounded theory was chosen as the methodology as well as the product of this research. The theory emerged from processes of iteratively collecting and analysing data from teachers’ experiences through their own expressions to help understand teachers’ perspectives and views on the SEL phenomenon in their teaching practice. The theory, which is the product of the study, also reflects the researcher’s value as the balanced axiology aspect of the interpretive-constructivist paradigm (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017).

In summary, this dissertation presents research on social and emotional learning topics in Vietnamese primary education, and from teachers’ perspectives and understanding. From a viewpoint of a constructivist, the researcher recognises the significance and contribution of a theory generated as the product of the research to the literature. Especially, in the context of Vietnamese education, this research might be the first to shed light on the understanding of SEL from teachers, the primary deliverers of SEL. Understanding is the fundamental resource to produce practical recommendations in SEL implementation, particularly in teachers’ support and training. The dissertation includes six chapters. Chapter one Introduction presents the rationale, research questions, term definitions, theoretical framework, and research paradigm. Chapter two Preliminary literature review discusses existing knowledge in relevance to the research topic to provide the researcher with foundation and sensitivity for further investigation. Chapter three Methodology describes the grounded theory as the methodology and method of this study and reports the research design in detail. Chapter four Findings presents a product of this grounded theory in four different themes, respectively with four research questions. Chapter five Discussion discusses the meaning of the findings and their connection to the existing literature through a secondary literature review. Chapter six Implications, Recommendations and Conclusions provides possible applications of the findings to the current educational practice, research considerations for further investigation in SEL topics, and conclusive statements of the study.

## **Chapter II - Preliminary Review of Literature**

There is a prevalence of investigation on SEL worldwide, especially in the United States of America and European countries since SEL was first officially defined by CASEL, almost three decades ago. However, most investigations focus on students' SEL, there is scant attention on research on teachers' perceptions of their competence and roles in implementing SEL (Schonert-Reichl, 2017). This study aims to investigate primary teachers' perspectives and views on SEL in Vietnam to fill the huge gap of the almost absence of SEL research, especially on teachers' views.

In Vietnam's educational context, it has been recognized in schools that SEL elements are included in life skills education (Hoang, 2016). Life skills education literature therefore will be included to support the study. Due to the almost absence of SEL on teachers' views in the study, the literature review is performed rather than to identify a research gap but to provide the theoretical foundation as an orientation to the research. The literature review includes the following:

- (1) The conceptualization of Social and emotional competence (SEC)
- (2) Social and emotional learning (SEL), and Social and emotional education (SEE)
- (3) The general importance of SEC, SEL
- (4) The development of children and the importance of SEL at primary school ages
- (5) The approaches to implementing SEL in schools: 4 approaches (CASEL)
- (6) The importance of SEL to teachers' life, career, and the implementation of SEL
- (7) Teacher training and professional development in SEL
- (8) Teacher's perspectives and views on SEL
- (9) Support teachers in integrating SEL
- (10) The implementation of SEL worldwide
- (11) SEL and life skills education in the context of Vietnam

### **The conceptualization of social and emotional competence**

Social and emotional competence (SEC) has its root in social competence and emotional competence.

In terms of social competence, nearly four decades ago, Waters & Sroufe (1983), Dodge (1985) and many other researchers recognized different definitions. Kemple (2004) also posits that the number of definitions of social competence nearly approaches the number of investigators gathering data about the topic. However, the more definitions



are suggested, the more divergent the ways which lead researchers to measure competence and develop fruitful interventions come (Dodge, 1985).

Waters and Sroufe (1983) develop the definition of social competence from Socrates' developmental views. As such, a competent individual is "able to make use of the environment and personal resources to achieve a good developmental outcome" (p.81). The aspect of resources within the environment refers to the matter of taking advantage of environmental resources. It requires abilities to coordinate affection, cognition and behaviour in the way one engages in a certain environment. This aspect also relates to the needs of individuals as major determinants of their own environments. This developmental construct focuses on what a person does, and it helps to consider which capacities can be assessed, taught and fostered while looking for responses to concrete moments (Varnon-Hughes, 2018).

Dodge (1985) first recognizes the central aspect of social competence as the effectiveness of interaction. He develops a social information processing model which comprises five steps namely encoding of social cues, the mental representation and interpretation of those cues, a search for possible behavioural responses to the cues, an evaluation of the responses including the selection of an optimal response, and the enactment of the chosen response. The model emphasizes the role of "online processing" as a series of decisions made to guide the following action (Cooke, 2017, p.50). This 1985 model later is reformulated by Crick and Dodge (1994) which pays more attention to multiple simultaneous paths occurring through information processing. The model is a powerful mechanism in the social encounter; however, the possible lacks could be emotion and affection aspects and the regulations of one's own affect (Halberstadt et al., 2001; Zsolnai, 2015).

Rose-Krasnor's (1997) "prism model" defines social competence as "effectiveness interaction" (p. 119). Rose-Krasnor agrees with Dodge's definitions relating to effectiveness in interaction as a central aspect that emerged in social competence literature. As such, the topmost level of the three-level prism metaphor is the theoretical level which emphasizes the effectiveness of action. The two other distinct levels of the model which serve further for social competence analysis are the index level and the motivation/skills level. The index level consists of real-life summary indices of social competence relating to both self and other domains. This level reflects qualities of interaction sequences, relationships, group status, and social self-efficacy (Rose-Krasnor,

1997; Yager & Iarocci, 2013). The skills level contains elements as “building blocks” of social interaction residing within the individual (Rose-Krasnor, 1997, p.115). The elements include the social, emotional and cognitive abilities and motivations together with the more overt, observable social behaviours (Yager & Iarocci, 2013).

To combine disparate views of social competence, Cavell (1990) offers a tri-component model of social competence which includes social adjustment, social performance, and social skills. Social adjustment is at the top of the hierarchy and refers to the whole of judgments about a person’s behaviour within the framework of the norms held by other members of the society. Meanwhile, social performance or social functioning is regarded as the degree of an individual’s response to meet socially valid criteria. The functioning is best assessed by a task-specific criterion (Cavell, 1990). The model is followed with a number of profitable assessment implications by which it is considered to be easy to use and closely relevant to clinical practice.

Emotion-related capacities are believed to play a major role in the development of social competence (Eisenberg et al., 1998; Hubbard et al., 1994; Saarni, 1990). Peter Salovey and John Mayer originally view emotional intelligence as part of social intelligence (1990, p.189, cited by Bar-on, 2006). These competencies are apparently intertwined with each other, as such, to properly understand social competence, researchers and others must carefully analyze the construct of emotional competence and how its elements work together with social elements (Halberstadt et al., 2003).

From a developmental perspective, Saarni (1999) takes the notion of emotional competence as a building block of self-efficacy. In Saarni’s view, emotional competence refers to how people respond emotionally meanwhile apply simultaneously, strategically their knowledge about emotions and their emotional expressiveness in the interaction with others. As such, skills that constitute emotional competence should be learned and understood in certain social contexts, represent certain cultural beliefs. The eight skills posited include awareness of one’s own emotions, ability to discern and understand other’s emotions, ability to use the vocabulary of emotion and expression, capacity for empathic involvement, ability to differentiate the subjective emotional experience from external emotional expression, adaptive coping with aversive emotions and distressing circumstances, awareness of emotional communication within relationships, and capacity for emotional self-efficacy. Attainment of these interrelated emotional and social skills is crucial to self-efficacy (Bar-On, 2006; Halberstadt et al., 2001).

Halberstadt, Denham, and Dunsmore (2001) create a model of affective social competence (ASC) which comprises many important aspects of emotion-related competence, and a step forward in integrating different aspects of social and emotional competence. Three integrated and dynamic components of the model are sending affective messages, receiving affective messages, and experiencing affection. Central and interconnected abilities within each component include awareness and identification of the effect of self and others, using the skills within display rules; management/regulation of the receipt of messages, the sending of messages, or the experience of emotions. However, Eisenberg (2001) posits that the component “experiencing emotion” should be considered the heart of affective social competence and plays a central role in all three of ASC’s components. Managing one’s own emotions probably contributes substantially to competence in both the ability to receive and send messages, as well as to social behaviour (Eisenberg, 2001).

Denham and her colleagues (2016) employ an emotional competence definition as “the ability to purposefully and fully express a variety of emotions, regulate emotional expressiveness and experiences when necessary, and understand the emotions of self and others” (p.303). Developed from the definition, the three main aspects of emotional competence include emotional expression, emotional regulation, and emotional knowledge. Emotional expression is the first and central aspect involving method, intensity, and timing to express diverse emotions with different people and in multiple contexts (Brackett & Rivers, 2014; Denham et al., 2016). The second aspect, emotional knowledge, refers to the ability to understand the causes and consequences of different emotions of self and others. The third vital aspect of emotional competence is emotion regulation which relates the judgment on “too much” or “too little” experience and expression of emotion to reach the child’s desired appropriateness (Denham et al., 2003). Besides, emotion regulation might consist of the extrinsic and intrinsic factors which are responsible for monitoring, evaluating, and modifying emotional reactions (Thompson, 1994), and young children need external support to be skilled in this competent aspect.

The two competence fields are interdependent. On the one hand, the interpersonal function of emotion is central to other aspects of emotional competence (Denham et al., 2002). On the other hand, social interactions and relationships are regulated by emotional processes (Halberstadt et al., 2001). As such, the two competencies are intimately intertwined (Denham et al., 2002; Halberstadt et al., 2001).

For the divergence in social competence and emotional competence themselves, it is assumed that there is still controversy on the definition of social–emotion competence as a combined structure. Considering the main characteristics of these individual competencies, however, SEC could be defined as:

the ability to understand, manage, and express the social and emotional aspects of one’s life in ways that enable the successful management of life tasks such as learning, forming relationships, solving everyday problems, and adapting to the complex demands of growth and development (Elias et al., 1997, p.2)

The above definition emphasizes self-regulation and interpersonal connection. The emotional factor here refers to self-awareness, focusing primarily on emotions and feelings, but also incorporating emotions-related thoughts and perceptions. The social factor, on the other hand, refers to the different dimensions of interpersonal relationships (Hoang, 2016). Despite the different definitions relating to social and emotional aspects which arise from divergent approaches, social and emotional competence at least includes the following characteristics: (a) a multifaceted and ever-changing system instead of individual abilities or skills (Zsolnai, 2015); (b) the development outcomes as effectiveness in interaction and adjustment to the norm, social expectation, conviction to the social moral and value; (c) cognitive process, affection/emotion, and behaviour are three main core components; (d) the demonstration of self-efficacy.

### **Social and emotional learning (SEL) and Social and emotional education (SEE)**

Social and emotional competencies help us to navigate the world of relationships, whereas emotional competency guides us to regulate our feelings and behaviours evoked by social interactions, to obtain positive and desired outcomes (Hoang, 2016) and these competencies should be embedded in the curriculum (CASEL, 2012).

Various terms have described social and emotional processes in education. One of the most used terms is “social and emotional learning” (SEL) developed by the Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL). The SEL program is based on the requirement of building a learning context of supportive relationships that make learning challenging, engaging, and meaningful (Zins et al., 2004). Five core elements associated with SEL are self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship management, and responsible decision-making (CASEL, 2012; Zins et al., 2004). Through the process, children and adults acquire and effectively

apply the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions (CASEL, 2003).

In European countries, several terms are closely used alongside SEL such as social and emotional skills, life skills, personal and social education or development, citizenship education, character education, health education and promotion (Cefai et al., 2018).

Personal and social education/development usually includes areas such as self-awareness, emotional regulation, communication skills, decision-making, social responsibility, character development, family life, and social issues such as gender, equity, and human rights. In other countries, the term might cover other aspects of children's development such as health, personal, social, health and economics, and careers...(Cefai et al., 2018). The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2015) uses the term "social and emotional skills" as "non-cognitive skills", "soft skills", or "character skills" to describe "the kind of skills involved in achieving goals, working with others, and managing emotions" (p.34). Meanwhile "life skills" is a commonly used term to describe "the abilities for adaptive and positive behaviour that enable humans to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life" (World Health Organization, 1997).

To embed social and emotional learning in a core curriculum across European countries, the Network of Experts working on the Social dimension of Education and Training (NESET) lists down a variety of social and emotional related terms and approaches respectively used in the education system of the 27 European Union's members. The review demonstrates the divergent approaches in different countries, the social and emotional issues, however, are their common concern. As a result, NESET uses the term "social and emotional education" (SEE) as a shift into a wider insight into social and emotional matters in school. SEE refers to the educational process by which an individual develops social and emotional competence for personal, social, and academic growth and development through curricular, embedded, relational and contextual approaches (Cefai et al., 2018). The concept, on the one hand, encapsulates CASEL's social and emotional learning, on the other hand, employs more recent development in the field such as positive psychology, positive education, resilience, and mindfulness. The new concept is also expected to bring a broader perspective on teaching and learning, inclusive of classroom climate, whole-school ecology, parental

involvement, and teacher.

Due to the conceptualization shift of social and emotional issues for students to SEE as a broad whole-school approach, the education and literature have observed several changes in their insights and practices. Social and emotional programs nowadays are required to be designated and integrated into the curriculum (Cefai et al., 2018). There exist critiques of schools where SEL or SEE is not seen as a core part of the educational mission and, therefore there is little effort to apply the skills learned during SEL or SEE programming (Jones et al., 2017). In this concern, a strategy named SAFE (Sequence, Active, Focused and Explicit) has been widely applied, and its effectiveness in the social and emotional promotion to students is evident (Cefai et al., 2015; Durlak & Weissberg, 2011; S. M. Jones & Bouffard, 2012). Also, in alignment with the SEE concept, a concept “Climate: taught and caught approach” is employed (Cefai et al., 2018, p.59). The primary suggestion here is to create a whole-school positive and favourable environment where children are explicitly taught certain social and emotional skills in the classroom, and practice, experience, assess, and get constructive feedback (Elias, 2019; Jones et al., 2015). Besides, SEE is recognized as powerfully beneficial with early and targeted intervention. SEE is needed for people from every range of age, however, early intervention is more effective than the one made in the later phase of individual life (S. M. Jones & Bouffard, 2012; Blewitt et al., 2020; Housman, 2017). Also, there is evidence that SEE brings tremendous support to children at risk either in their physical, and mental development or in their socio-economic context (Domitrovich et al., 2017; Elliott et al., 2018). Such interventions have been employed by hundreds of available effectively well-known programs worldwide like Head Start and the Chicago Child-Parent Centers (CPC) (Hayakawa et al., 2016). Student voices as the key stakeholders in any teaching-learning process are particularly emphasized in the current SEE. Students, especially the older ones, apart from being active learners and lively actors, are capable and necessary to take part in the design and establishment of SEE activities. Their active role in preparing their own SEE programs is believed to provide adequate tools to support students from diverse backgrounds (Cefai et al., 2015; Hutzler et al., 2010). Teachers, educators, and staff inside and outside school are reckoned as the primary deliverer of SEE programs, therefore, it is crucial to prepare them for the best social and emotional competences and well-being before implementing any SEE activities. The literature has proven that it is difficult, even impossible that teachers to help students build skills that they themselves do not possess

(Jones et al., 2014). Teachers with high social and emotional competence can maintain their well mental and physical health, have better teaching performance, and all of these in turn have a positive influence on their students' social and emotional development, and their general achievement in school (Brackett et al., 2012; Flook et al., 2013). In addition, parental collaboration and education are decisive factors in SEE success (Cefai & Cavioni, 2014; Downes & Cefai, 2016). A challenging mission in SEE practice currently is how to build a dynamic, effective and culturally appropriate partnership between school, parents, and community (Azar, 2017; Dinallo, 2016). Lastly, the fidelity of the designated plan or curriculum is highly emphasized in SEE. There is a strong agreement that whatever steps, procedures, and elements have been studied and included in SEE, they are not unlikely to be effective without a high degree of fidelity (Jones et al., 2017; Schonert-Reichl & Lawlor, 2010; Van Loan et al., 2019; Zins & Elias, 2007). In general, the concept of schoolwide SEE has been widely recognized and supported by educational research and practices.

### **The importance of social and emotional competence and social and emotional learning**

It is often suggested that the goals of education go beyond transferring knowledge to preparing young people to become well-adapted individuals in a world that is more diverse, dynamic, and challenging than ever (Cefai & Cavioni, 2014). SEC contributes to the development of an individual's characteristics like responsibility, accountability, altruism, honesty, self-regulation, and cooperation which are qualities required to establish an active life and flourish in a complex and competitive world (Hoang & Vu, 2016).

Schools and school-aged students today are encountering a number of challenges of their own generations. These challenges may have been observed throughout the history such as crowded classrooms with the diversity in cultures, ethnic groups, learning capacity (Greenberg et al., 2003), however the pace and scale of change in society and technology are unprecedented. Besides, students today are growing up in a world that is vastly different from that of previous generations, with new challenges such as social media, online bullying, and rapid technological change (OECD, 2023). As such, school-aged students and adolescents are expected to work harder to perform better and to achieve the increased demands and expectations for them in a competitive world. Dealing with these challenges without well-trained and sufficient skills, however,

unavoidably put children in more troublesome situations which hinder either their learning achievement or their long-life satisfaction (OECD, 2023).

Social and emotional competence is recognized as important and teachable characteristics of any individuals, and it should be acquired by both children and adults (Greenberg et al., 2017; W. G. Huitt & Dawson, 2018; Inna, 2017; Schonert-Reichl et al., 2017). SEL is the process of promoting SEC, therefore, SEL skills and SEC in a more broaden focus could be indicators or predictors of one's adjustment through their life course, either for short-term or long-term concerns (Farrington et al., 2012; Greenberg et al., 2017). In the short term, SEC enhances children's ability to conduct favourable behaviours, establish and sustain healthy peer and adult relationships and have better school performance (Elias, 2019; Greenberg et al., 2017; Schonert-Reichl, 2019a). In the long term, SEC plays a significant role in preventing risk behaviors, and possibly the consequences of being exposed to risk factors (Domitrovich et al., 2017b; Elias & Haynes, 2008). Several studies indicate the significant links between social and emotional skills in early young ages and key young adult outcomes in a variety of areas, including schooling, jobs, illegal engagement, drug use, and mental health (D. E. Jones et al., 2015b). The outcomes are also especially applicable to vulnerable children regardless of socioeconomic background (Elias & Haynes, 2008; Greenberg et al., 2017).

Social and emotional competence is needed to deal with the impact of the coronavirus pandemic (COVID-19). Apart from the long-term existing burdens and stresses with schooling matter, during the pandemic, while the whole world suffers, students especially and critically have to deal with new stresses from social distancing and distance learning. Academic concerns refer to learning difficulties, lack of attention from teachers, and increasing workload that have restricted students' ability to concentrate during online classes. Several authors around the world have researched students' academic concerns caused by COVID-19. Recent research has shown that the pandemic would pose a huge loss to students' academic achievement a few months back (Kuhfeld et al., 2020). The abrupt transition to an online learning platform unprecedentedly with more workload firstly increases students' intellectual fatigue and overall decreases students' academic performance (Al-Salman & Haider, 2021; Aristovnik et al., 2020; Realyvásquez-Vargas et al., 2020). Besides, according to Ali (2020), not every student learns properly online since many of them fail to receive guidance, response, and timely consultation from their teachers. Therefore, apparently, students are likely to be



demotivated and lose interest in classes and learning (Sullivan et al., 2018). In addition, the pandemic affects every walk of life since it is a combination of the public health crisis, social isolation, and economic recession (Al-Maskari et al., 2022). As such, the pandemic tremendously affects the mental health of everyone, especially young students. According to Al-Maskari et al. (2022), the pandemic first worsens existing mental health concerns. Young students may experience escalating depression and anxiety dealing with issues relating to the pandemic, particularly loneliness and overloaded schoolwork (Ellis et al., 2020; Orgiles et al., 2021; Xie et al., 2020). Besides, researches also show that during the pandemic, students suffer from school absenteeism which not only diminishes academic advancement but also has a bidirectional relationship with mental health (Duong et al., 2021; Lawrence et al., 2019). Therefore, during the pandemic, and when students are to come back their school, there are a lot of jobs to be done to support them in recovery. And, according to Reynolds (2022), an SEL program is ideal for supporting students. As such, with SEC improved, students are expected to be able to manage their overwhelming stress and any other mental burdens as the impact of Covid19, and consequently, they are likely to successfully readjust to normal school life.

### **The development of children and the importance of SEL at primary school ages**

Primary school ages are usually referred to as middle childhood, or the period from 6-7 to 10-11 years. At this age, students have a rapid development and change in bodybuilding and cognitive skills (Del Giudice, 2017; Eccles, 1999; Ghetti & Bunge, 2012). The biological change not only motivates students to act to explore and to be ready for challenging experiences, but also to join groups to enrich their active experiences. Advanced neurophysiological activity has improved dramatically (Ghetti & Bunge, 2012). Students' reasoning gradually becomes more logical, even still limited but express and reflect their own experiences in the environment of their age activities, in the community, and society. Biological development is accompanied by two interlocking social functions: social learning and social integration (Del Giudice, 2017). Students often pay attention and their observations to the relationships around life, to the evolution of things and phenomena in social reality. As a result of constantly perceiving social phenomena, students learn to perceive the world around them through practical activities, personal experiences, and participation in diverse social activities. Questions about students' surroundings are gradually clarified by social observations and their experiences. Therefore, the education of observation skills and social awareness through

practical activities and experiences in real social environments is an effective way for students to become social people, belonging to society. Meanwhile, social integration is happening. In this process, communication is a basic need. Students communicate not only to make simple requests to satisfy their needs but also to experience themselves complex relationships with speech patterns aimed at different speaking purposes. They have quite developed spoken language, with a rich vocabulary, proficiently used speech etiquette, and different sentence patterns. Language either verbal or non-verbal becomes not only a thinking tool but also a means of communication, helping to establish social relationships as desired by children, and to solve social problems, preparing for social integration. The entry of primary school requires students to get used to a completely new social environment, both in terms of relationships, form and content of activities, with working and behaving rules. Together with older relatives at home as the main sources of knowledge, primary school students are strongly affected by the adaptation to their teachers and peers at school (Del Giudice, 2017). However, the relationship between students and their teachers becomes dominant, and it defines other relationships (Del Giudice, 2017; Yee et al., 2020). All social norms and rules are held under teachers' standards. Therefore, students, especially in grades 1 and 2, very soon start primary school by copying teachers' behaviour and acting toward their peers in the manners and attitudes expected by the teachers' introduced requirements. Leading activity is a learning activity that determines the relationship between the child and the teacher, and between the child and his peers. Entering primary school also marks the significant development of the emotional sphere of children. The outcomes of educational activities and the attitudes of those around them have a big impact on a younger student's emotional development (O'Conner et al., 2011). Yet, during the primary school period, students are not always able to control the manifestation of certain emotions. Nevertheless, very soon they become able to control themselves and show or not show their feelings and experiences in a particular situation (McClelland et al., 2017). It is assumed that by the end of this period, primary school students will learn to distinguish their own and other people's emotions, to express them in more stable, meaningful and appropriate manners, to adequately interpret them, and be able to show some certain level empathy (Del Giudice, 2017; Eccles, 1999).

In addition to the mentioned roles of SEL in general, to primary school students, SEL could play critical roles in engaging, motivating, and facilitating their landmark

transfer from early childhood to general education where they start learning intensively foundation knowledge and life skills. Having SEL training, students develop abilities to understand and control their thinking, their feelings, and acting manners by which they are likely to attain optimal pre-determined goals. Importantly, SEL fosters students' respect and sympathy for others, form and keep good relationships, and make decisions with fully ethical and responsible considerations (CASEL, n.d.-a; Greenberg et al., 2003; Weissberg et al., 2007).

### **The approaches to implementing SEL in schools**

According to CASEL (n.d.-a), there are 4 popular approaches to promoting SEC for students. Firstly, free-standing lessons designed to enhance students' SEC explicitly could be the optimal choice for SEC improvement goals. This kind of independent course provides explicit SEL instruction in which students are instructed to promote their own SEC and experience themselves as learners. The second approach is integrating SEL into other courses or subjects as elements added in. The third way is the integration of SEL in teaching and learning activities to create a favourable classroom climate. Given the comprehensive understanding of classroom climate significance, throughout teaching-learning processes, teachers are able to enhance their students' SEC naturally by ensuring learning authority. By that, the learners have a chance to choose the learning content and manage their own learning with the specific goals set. In addition, in this approach, students are suggested to create cooperative, interactive, and project-based learning with practical implications, associated with cultural and social characteristics, attached to real life. According to the collaborative learning theories of Vygotsky and Bruners, every single step in this approach could navigate to the accumulation of SEL skills (Hagaman, 1990). The last possible approach is to use an organizational setting to support SEL as a school-wide program that develops a learning-friendly environment and community. For a strong will of SEL implementation and enhancing SEC for every stakeholder, the matter could be taken more serious attention to avoid any unexpectedly deconstructive events occurring in the school-wide setting. Besides, extra curriculum activities inside or outside school such as charity or community projects also need more careful consideration for their positive and actual effectiveness. These activities importantly create chances for students to expose themselves with school-wide, social actual circumstances where they experience, assess and adjust their own competences, including SEC.

## **The importance of SEL to teachers' life, career, and the implementation of SEL**

When teachers acknowledge the importance of social and emotional competence of themselves in their teaching performance, and in promoting students' SEL abilities as a result, they are likely to pay more attention to developing competence. Therefore, it is suggested that in many needed supports for teachers' competency confidence, teachers' own SEC seems to be a crucial factor (Elias et al., 1997; Inna, 2017; Loinaz, 2019; Schonert-Reichl, 2017). Firstly, social and emotional competence maintains teachers' well-being and their career motivation. Teaching is listed in the "caring profession" group in which the actors mainly demonstrate their caring to others (Tu Anh et al., 2017, p.25). As such, teachers are always expected to be experts in every aspect of their schools from teaching, lifelong learning, administration, assessment, and even psychology. As a result, the teaching profession is one of the most challenging professionals alongside medical staff (Bailey, 2013; Milburn, 2011; Schonert-Reichl, 2017). Particularly, according to Darling-Hammond (2001), stress and poor emotion management diminish teachers' intrinsic motives and reduce feelings of self-efficacy, and they are the most common causes of teacher dissatisfaction and resignation. The effects of SEL to teachers could be illustrated by positive outcomes from several intervention programs built on the SEL concept such as CARE (Cultivation Awareness and resilience in Education), Emotionally Intelligent Teacher Training or TRUST (Test of Regulation in and Understanding of Social Situations in Teaching) (Aldrup et al., 2020; Brackett & Katulak, 2007; Jennings et al., 2011, 2017; Schonert-Reichl & Lawlor, 2010). Having participated in these programs, teachers report fewer symptoms of depersonalization, more feelings of efficacy, and appraise their teaching as meaningful, joyful and satisfying, ready to devote themselves to teaching and supporting students (Johnson et al., 2005; Schonert-Reichl, 2017; Schussler et al., 2016). Secondly, social and emotional competence influences the positive teacher-student relationship. It is a matter of fact that teachers' wellbeing has a direct link to students' well-being. In empirical research, Oberle & Schonert-Reichl (2016) remark that cortisol levels in the morning in students can be related to teacher burnout. The researchers also comment that students will normally perceive teachers' negative emotions and their manifestation, and the negative emotions are contagious which could pose harm to a teacher-student healthy relationship (Schonert-Reichl, 2017). In contrast, teachers with high SEC are those who recognize an individual student's emotions and understand the cognitive appraisals behind that. These teachers in turn can make sense of their student's emotionally motivated reasons and the sequence of

behaviours (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009; Roffey, 2012). When teachers are able to understand their students' emotional expression and the respective appraisals, they have more feelings of their meaningful roles on their students' sides, are likely to get closer to students' circumstances, understand them more and find the best way to support students overcoming their daily difficulties either physical and psychological ones. The third, social and emotional competence impacts general successful classroom management. Effective classroom management is built on constructive and healthy teacher-student relationships in the classroom (Marzano, 2003). Teachers with stronger SEC have more productive relationships with their students, participate in more skilled and efficient classroom management, and more efficiently adopt the SEL curriculum (Jones et al., 2014). Moreover, they are more likely to be constructive in the classroom, skilful in expressing their emotions, use sufficient language to create motivation and enjoyment of learning, as well as to direct and control student actions (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). Teachers' own social-emotional learning skills help students directly deal with their occurring problems through teachers' consultancy or demonstration. As such, employing their own SEC, teachers not only likely to manage the classroom well but also tend to apply SEL skills effectively in their other teaching activities (Esen-Aygun & Salim-Tasking, 2017).

Social and emotional competence plays significant roles in teachers' performance in SEL implementation. Several studies claim that when teachers are successful in classroom management and building positive relationships with their students, they are on the right track to implementing SEL (Brackett et al., 2012; Hamre & Pianta, 2006; Schonert-Reichl, 2017). In school contexts, more than any other stakeholders, teachers serve as excellent role models for positive social and emotional activity. Being the direct and primary SEL deliverer, teachers with higher SEC are likely more confident of themselves in not only demonstrating the skills animatedly but also helping others to develop the skills. As the result, competent teachers are expected to implement social and emotional curricula more effectively (Jennings et al., 2017; Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). Besides, teachers with high SEC also possess high self-awareness. They are first and foremost fully aware of their strengths and weaknesses regarding emotional management skills. As such, teachers develop their strategies to identify and decide on how to use their own emotions to motivate and encourage students to learn. This competence is especially beneficial for SEL operation. Moreover, teachers who are socially and emotionally knowledgeable are assumed to be culturally sensitive. Their awareness that others'

viewpoints may vary from their own aids them in negotiating constructive conflict management (Schonert-Reichl, 2017). This creates the favourable conditions to build up a school-wide SEE context where every school's social capital is supportive of their students' SEL exposure (Roffey, 2012).

Social and emotional competence plays undeniably significant roles in teachers' performance. Among many of them, SEC tremendously affects teachers' well-being, teacher-student relationships, classroom management and the success of SEL implementation. These above impacts, however, are not isolated; they interact in significant ways (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). When teachers are in physically and mentally healthy states, they are willing, energetic and capable to perform best in every single responsibility either subject teaching or other educational activities. Both teacher-student relationships and positive classroom climate contribute to students' social, emotional, and academic outcomes which in turn impact teachers' career satisfaction, happiness, and later on well-being and motivation. Finally, with sufficient competence in SEL, healthy class climates and relationships, teachers who are enthusiastic about SEL are supposed to implement the best SEL to promote their students' SEC, create better conditions for a further positive learning environment and better educational activity outcomes.

### **Teacher's perspectives and views on social and emotional learning**

The literature shows that teachers' perspectives of SEL with belief as a core domain are associated with teaching outcomes and commitment to SEL programs.

Foremost, teachers' opinions of the importance of SEL to their students' success have been investigated (Buchanan et al., 2009; Ee & Cheng, 2013; Jennings & Greenberg, 2009; Schonert-Reichl, 2017). According to Forrester (2020) and Schonert-Reichl (2017), SEL is perceived as a crucial factor for students either inside or outside the school context by the majority of teachers. A similar statement is found in a 2013 national survey in the United State (Bridgeland et al., 2013), a 2017 study in Turkey (Esen-Aygün & Salim-Tasking, 2017), a 2019 investigation in New Zealand or Singapore (Dyson et al., 2019; Ee & Cheng, 2013). Teachers who value SEL as important as other knowledge subjects in the curriculum are likely to be willing to adopt the SEL programs and devote their time and effort to SEL in their teaching practice (Brackett et al., 2012; Pajares, 1992).

Secondly, the literature records the feeling of teachers about their school cultural support for SEL. Without strong leadership, a well-designed program and implementation

fidelity, educational programs, including SEL could turn out to be an obstacle and burden than a beneficial occasion (Greenberg et al., 2003). Teachers state that the effectiveness of SEL the in the classroom and other contexts is strongly dependent on school leadership and other district supports (Ransford et al., 2009; Schonert-Reichl, 2017). An international investigation of teachers' views on social and emotional education reports that the majority of respondents in four participating countries are dissatisfied with the social and emotional provisions given by policymakers (Loinaz, 2019). These teachers feel that the program is incorporated in a meaningless way. Especially, the lack of time is considered a the disappointment of teachers in their effort to practice appropriately social and emotional training (Loinaz, 2019). According to Brackett and his colleagues (2012), the principal support is one of the core elements of school climate, strengthening SEL the most together with a purposed and well-designed implementation. It is suggested that championing SEL to successfully educate whole-child students, requires a collaborative effort of a whole-school ecology (Cefai et al., 2018; Durlak & Weissberg, 2011).

The third variable that contributes to teachers' perception is teachers' own SEC. It is difficult, even impossible that teachers to assist students in developing skills that they may not have (S. M. Jones et al., 2014). Studies also state that teachers' confidence and feeling of efficacy result from their SEC (Elias et al., 1997; Inna, 2017; Loinaz, 2019; Schonert-Reichl, 2017). Teachers who are socially and emotionally competent can maintain their well mental and physical health, have better teaching performance, and all of these in turn have a positive influence on their students' social and emotional skill practice, and their general success in school (Flook et al., 2013). In a study, Brackett and colleagues also emphasize that when teachers are assigned to deliver an SEL lesson or program, without a belief in the effectiveness of the program, or without illustrating their own SEL competence, their students' SEL competence seemingly decreases instead of being improved (Brackett et al., 2012). Wanless & Domitrovich (2015) while discussing the implementation of a school-based social and emotional program post the question "Does this teacher, and this school, have the capacity to take on this intervention?" to emphasize teachers' readiness to begin any SEL program, which is seen as particularly important (p.1041). As such, the authors state that when teachers possess SEC, they tend to implement the SEL program wholeheartedly and with full of enthusiasm and the learning will bring more positive outcomes to the learners.

In SEL implementation, teachers are the primary implementers, and their own beliefs, attitudes, skills and appropriate practice in SEL play a decisive role in their students' SEL development (Brackett et al., 2012; Inna, 2017; Jennings & Greenberg, 2009; Schonert-Reichl, 2017). The literature proves this major impact. An SEL program is not likely to be successful without the meaningful value of SEL acknowledged by teachers. Besides, the sense of support from senior leaders and policymakers to SEL often concerns teachers to fully perform the SEL desired practice. Moreover, the efficacy and commitment feelings of teachers in SEL are strongly influenced by teachers' own SEC. Through the literature, it is strongly suggested that before any SEL implementation, teachers' SEC is pre-requisite information for the school readiness for the successful SEL program. The issue of teacher training in SEL will be reviewed in the next part.

### **Teacher training in social and emotional learning**

Discussing teachers' SEC, Schonert-Reichl (2017) expresses her concern about how little research and programs are related to improving SEC for teachers. In one of her investigations involving 3,916 compulsory courses available in teacher training programs in the United States remarks that in the country, the fatherland of SEL with prevalent SEL research and training programs, SEL theory and functional practice have started to be adopted into teacher training programs in just a few programs (Schonert-Reichl et al., 2017). Loinaz (2019) investigating SEL in Greece, Spain, Sweden and the United Kingdom states that social and emotional education are available to only a minority of teachers. Being the primary SEL deliverers, if teachers' well-being and the awareness of how they influence student's SEL are ignored, how to fully promote SEL in the classroom for students is likely to never be perceived (Schonert-Reichl, 2017). One study by the Yale University research group reveals that more training and experience in SEL teaching recognized in teachers result in a more positive performance of their students. In that project, low-quality implementers (who were not willing to and implemented the program ineffectively at the beginning) showed more lack of efficacy compared to high-quality implementers (who were willing to and implemented the program effectively in teaching regular basis) in modifying their teaching activities for students' engagement (Reyes et al., 2012). A case grounded theory study also reports the positive impacts of SEL training courses offered for twelve student teachers (Waajid et al., 2013). From three emerging themes of the study, teachers report their great amount of SEL knowledge attained, the



perception of the shift from a teacher-centred and student-centred teaching-learning approach, and their desire to learn more about SEL.

Alongside with the concern of preparing teachers to support students' SEL, teachers' own SEC also needs more attention. Studies investigating teachers' own SEC indicate its favourable impacts on maintaining teachers' well-being and career motivation, developing positive teacher-student relationship, successfully classroom management, and modelling SEL in education process (Brackett et al., 2012; Esen-Aygun & Salim-Tasking, 2017; S. M. Jones et al., 2014; Roffey, 2012; Sieberer-Nagler, 2015; Wiseman & Hunt, 2008). Equipping teachers and school leaders with social and emotional skills is a prerequisite for the success of any SEL program (Wanless & Domitrovich, 2015). Schonert-Reichl and her colleagues (2017), however, emphasize that SEL is beneficial to both in-service and pre-service teachers. As evidence, there are a number of nations that include the SEC as one of the standards for teacher competence assessment criteria (Schonert-Reichl et al., 2017).

### **Support teachers in integrating social and emotional learning**

The literature supports the favourable impact of teachers' SEC with which they could stay in a well mental state to utilize appropriate energy, and capabilities to become the most responsive, helpful to their students' ever-changing needs. It is untrue to believe that all teachers have SEC, and their SEC is all the same (Jones, et al., 2013). Having participated in SEC intervention programs, teachers report less fewers of depersonalization, more feelings of their efficacy, and appraise their teaching as meaningful, joyful, and satisfying, ready to dedicate themselves to the teaching and supporting students (Johnson et al., 2005; Schonert-Reichl, 2017; Schussler et al., 2016). Teachers need this support to be socially and emotionally competent, and ready for SEL implementation for their students.

In addition, an effective SEL needs several essential components including strong leadership, well-designed program, and fidelity in program implementation (Greenberg et al., 2003). The lack of proper leadership often leads to a nuisance in SEL implementation, and results in the ineffectiveness of other implementing components (Greenberg et al., 2003). Besides, while society heavily relies on school and its teaching staff for delivery of SEL (Forrester, 2020), studies, however, emphasize the all-part, the school-wide collaboration for students' learning attainment (Cefai et al., 2018; Elias, 2019; S. M. Jones et al., 2013). School leadership, particularly the principal is a key factor

to connect and organize all other collaborative factors, they foster a culture of continuous improvement within which every aspect of the school supports the integration of SEL (S. M. Jones et al., 2013; Zins & Elias, 2007). The support could involve policymakers, curriculum developers, parents or any other possible adults inside and outside the school context (Bridgeland et al., 2013; Jone et al., 2017; S. M. Jones et al., 2013).

### **The implementation of SEL in schools worldwide**

Social and emotional learning has gained interest all over the world. A brief review of the inception and the earlier stage of SEL implementation in several high-profile educational countries illuminates the high demand for SEL in schools in general.

In the United States of America, efforts and programs to promote students' SEL are widespread for the fact that SEL has first pioneered and led by American researchers since the late 1960s (e.g., James Comer, Roger P. Weissberg, Timothy Shriver, Maurice Elias, and Marc Brackett). Particularly with the critically important establishment of SEL concepts with five main competencies by CASEL in 1994, SEL development and implementation have gained continuous momentum nationwide with uncountable studies about the effectiveness of different SEL programs. There are a number of SEL programs launching currently in the country such as Second Step (Committee for Children, 2002); Steps to Respect (Committee for Children, 2001); Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies (PATHS) (Kusché & Greenberg, 1994); Responsive Classroom (Rimm-Kaufman et al., 2012); School Climate (The National School Climate Council, 2007); RULE (Brackett & Rivers, 2014). According to CASEL, today, with the engagement of policymakers and the promotion of relevant legislation, most states acknowledge the role of schools in students' social and emotional development and include SEL in their curriculum. SEL standards have expanded throughout school systems in the US for decades, allowing educators and parents to see positive change in their students.

In the United Kingdom, interest in SEL is rapidly expanding in both England and Wales, as well as Scotland regardless of their separate educational systems. SEL has been promoted across most areas of the UK with a variety of learning subjects such as emotional intelligence, emotional literacy, emotional health and wellbeing, personal and social development, and mental health. The Department for Education and Skills has developed a program namely "Social and emotional aspects of learning (SEAL)" that explicitly provides social and emotional learning for every student range of age. About half of the primary schools in England have implemented SEAL while more than 10% of

secondary schools supporting the program. SEAL in England implemented on a large scale has promoted socially and emotionally literate learning ethos and relationships among students, staff, and parents as a “whole school” framework (Weare, 2010).

In Israel, educators have implemented social and emotional learning in connection with the concept of “wisdom of the heart” (Northampton Centre for Learning Behaviour, 2008). It involves finding and nurturing children’s strengths, their potential and bringing into their everyday school life the opportunity for them to develop and express their own unique abilities. This approach, according to the Ministry of Education’s Psychological Services and Counseling unit, plays critical roles in engaging students, reducing school violence, and increasing the motivation for learning and school activities (Ministry of Aliyah and Integration, 2019).

In Singapore, in response to the demand for effective graduates who are capable to work in multi-racial working groups, from their global business growth, Singapore sent their first delegation from the Ministry of Education to CASEL in 2004 (Northampton Centre for Learning Behaviour, 2008). Even though Singapore students are famous for their leading rank in cross-national academic comparisons, graduates still face a number of actual job requirements which involve problem-solving skills and other un-technical solutions. As a result, the SEL model (CASEL) has been adopted but with more emphasis on cultivating basic moral values such as respect, social responsibility, integrity, and harmony in the Social and Emotional Competence framework. The framework is believed to gather concerted effort to achieve desired educational outcomes (Liem et al., 2017).

In the Latin America area, Colombia is an exceptional example. By implementing a policy on national citizenship competencies, the country has taken a bold and innovative step toward peaceful conflict resolution, promoting understanding of differences, involving young people in mutual decision-making, and encouraging youth and adults to collaborate on need-based community projects that foster and promote effective citizenship. In fact, this expanding understanding of the role of education in the development of responsible, active, and peaceful people is part of a cultural revolution in Colombia that favours peace. Colombia embraces this educational endeavour as a critical step toward reducing violence and fostering cultural values that support peaceful coexistence (Global Partnership for Children & Youth in Peace building, 2015). In Colombia, this approach is being applied in 36,000 schools nationwide. Colombian

educators are guided in the implementation of programs and practices by standards and assessments of citizenship competencies (Patti & Espinosa, 2007).

In the Canadian context, the demand for and the opportunity to improve core competencies in SEL is being met with passion (Northampton Centre for Learning Behaviour, 2008). The 2012 Mental Health Strategy for Canada resulted in a number of significant changes, including the appointment of School Mental Health Professionals, Mental Health Literacy programs, and Caring and Safe School activities. These developments, when combined with formal SEL training, are extremely successful in improving students' self-awareness and self-management (Shanker, 2014).

The Australian Government's Department of Health and Ageing funds a number of national programmes promoting social and emotional development and well-being. KidsMatters and MindMatters are two extraordinarily well-known examples. KidsMatters is specially designed for primary schools. It is a comprehensive online resource for mental health promotion, prevention and early intervention initiative (Australian Government Department of Health, 2015). The program aims to promote the mental health and well-being of primary school students, educators, families, and community workers. More than 100 schools in Australia have been implementing the program with 4 key components including a positive school community; Social and emotional learning; Parenting education and support; and Early intervention for students at risk of or experiencing mental health difficulties. Meanwhile, MindMatters is designed for secondary schools and professional development purposes (Australian Government Department of Health/Beyond Blue, 2015). Currently, most secondary schools have had their staff trained in the free program. The program has been proven to promote a holistic, whole-school approach to promoting and protecting the mental health and well-being of all students. The Australian government is still investigating to advance the best program for their aim of developing social and emotional learning.

### **Social and emotional learning and life skills education in the context of Vietnam**

Social-emotional competence is one of the relatively new issues in Vietnam. Vietnamese education has been based heavily on academic standards. In the individual aspect, schools pay attention to teaching intellectual knowledge (Hoang, 2016; Huynh, 2019). It is a common situation that schools spend relatively little time on developing non-academic skills, given the pressure to improve attainment. It is considered as a shortcoming of education that focuses mainly on students' academic competencies but

ignores other development aspects. However, in the country, recently a broader educational agenda that involves life skills education and integrates social and emotional skill domains increasingly interests educational stakeholders.

The general target of life skills training in Vietnam is to provide students necessary knowledge, values, attitudes and skills as the foundation for students to establish healthy and positive behaviours, and habits; and simultaneously eliminate the negative ones in their daily social relationships, daily situations and activities (Ministry of Education and Training, 2014). These also aim to create favorable conditions for students to comply with their rights and responsibilities, and develop the physically, mentally and morally (Ministry of Education and Training, 2017b). In order to achieve the educational aims, there is a number of non-academic skills have been trained for students. For example, for primary students, these skills focus on basic skills, mainly psychological and social skills corresponding to their very young ages. These include self-awareness, identifying values, decision-making and problem-solving skills, dealing with distress, emotional control, communication skills, proactive listening, consistency skills, setting goals, seeking for help, time management, and coordinating skills (Ministry of Education and Training, 2017b).

Identifying the functions of life skills education in Vietnam, it is clear to see some certain overlapping between life skills training and SEL while SEL seems to have a broader impact (Elias et al., 1997). According to Elias and his colleagues, everyone wants to improve schooling, however, regardless of different approaches, all perceive school as the mainstay of “preparing our children to become knowledgeable, responsible, caring adults”, and “each element of this challenge can be enhanced by thoughtful, sustained, and systematic attention to children's social and emotional learning” (Elias et al., 1997).

It is also apparent to recognize that in the Vietnam context, life skills education aims at either emotional intelligence or responsible behaviours. In the country, despite being one of the key tasks in schools, life skill education has not been introduced with any rigorous and compulsory educational programs by the Ministry of Education and Training. With the increasing concern of educators, schools, students and parents about implementing life skills education, in 2012, for the first time, the Ministry released training material and training program for teachers, however, every element of the program is general and optional which leads to negligence or less effective practice. Meanwhile, SEL with its well-defined components explicitly promotes active and

practical learning skills and techniques, also general, interrelating and interchangeable skills. Especially, SEL places a strong focus on social communication, social decision-making and problem-solving to help children effectively respond increasing development demanding of ever-changing 21<sup>st</sup> century. Therefore, SEL is a comprehensive concept for learning the necessary skills to adapt to any learning and living context. Besides, in a narrower scope, SEL is stated to help develop the whole competent child with all three basic competent domains, namely cognition, attitudes and behaviours (Elias et al., 1997). This target is also the core target of the national education system. It, as a result, calls more attention to SEL in schools in Vietnam.

Meanwhile, social and emotional education is listed in the curriculum of Early Childhood Education in Vietnam as one of five core educational goals (Ministry of Education and Training, 2017a). SEC has been recognized as a beneficial domain; nevertheless, it has not been a compulsory requirement in any other higher educational phases. In primary, secondary and high schools, students mainly acquire social and emotional skills by themselves through the problematic situation (Hoang, 2016). Moreover, few teachers are assisted in promoting social and emotional skills in their classrooms. The situation apparently requires a well-designed SEL implementation in primary school education and higher-level phases.

In conclusion, there are several crucial points identified in this preliminary literature review. Firstly, SEC which is promoted by SEL or SEE is a crucial competence since it provides students with the foundation to survive and succeed in this ever-changing and competitive world. After having been developed and implemented effectively worldwide for almost three decades, SEL is proven to be broadly beneficial once promoted explicitly rather than being overlapped and integrated unintentionally into other programs, including life skills education. Secondly, in Vietnam's educational context, several elements of SEL have been integrated into life skills education which recently draws the great attention of educational stakeholders nationwide. Meanwhile, SEL is officially a core area in the Early Childhood Education curriculum of Vietnam education, the continuity of education to higher phases, first and foremost in primary school is necessary to maintain and promote the benefits earned earlier. In addition, any educational programs require the competence and commitment of teachers, as does a successful SEL program. Therefore, teaching staff should be one of the first consideration issues prior to SEL implementation. Having acknowledged the scarce research on SEL in

Vietnam, on teachers' perspectives and views particularly, and with the ambition of adopting SEL into the nation's education, teachers' views on SEL turn out to be an exclusively important and timely topic to study.

## Chapter III - Methodology

This grounded theory study aims to investigate primary teachers' perceptions and views on social and emotional learning (SEL). Among a number of different models of grounded theory method, constructivist grounded theory was chosen as the methodology and method of this study in which through intensive interviews with participants, and following rigorous steps of a grounded theory method, researchers and participants together constructed an abstract understanding or reliable explanation of SEL phenomenon in Vietnamese primary schools. This chapter presents general knowledge of the grounded theory method, followed by the choice of constructivist approach for this study. It further describes the research participants, sampling procedure, data collection and analysis, and finally the trustworthiness, reliability of the study, and ethical considerations.

### Description of grounded theory method

It's a crucial decision which philosophical position a researcher takes amongst the available models so that research questions could be answered properly in accordance with the researcher's beliefs and knowledge. The following section presents the different models, basic characteristics of GT, and reasoning behind the researcher's choice of methodology for the current project.

After almost six decades of its establishment, GT has faced a number of critiques from other approaches and from its advancement. GT has changed through a number of its methodological models. These models consist of several critical elements which indicate them to be a GT approach, however, there are a number of differences between them, particularly in philosophical positions, the employment of pre-perception knowledge, and terminology used in different stages of collecting and analyzing data to generate a theory (Chun Tie et al. 2019). Nevertheless, each model has emerged and advanced from the traditional GT introduced by Glaser and Strauss, the GT originators (*The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research* (1967)). Therefore, together with the increasing interest and attention, the choice of a GT model as a research method is still a challenge for any researchers. Apart from acknowledging the appropriate reason to choose GT, a researcher needs to decide on a certain approach to GT which serves effectively to answer their research questions and also aligns with their scientific philosophical stand. In this research project, the researcher tended to apply GT in the most integrative way, expecting to achieve the best resultant product. Therefore,



an explanation of a chosen methodology is given after having reviews on the available GT approaches. Three main approaches are presented as the most used in the literature.

Classic Grounded theory is the original model developed by its original authors Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss (1967) as mentioned in the seminal book before. The goal of the model as acknowledged by Glaser is to generate a conceptual theory that accounts for a pattern of behavior that is relevant and problematic for those involved (Chun Tie et al., 2019). This model takes positivism as its ontology where the authors believe that all is data and a theory should be proposed and it should work to predict social phenomenon in the future. However, the classic has been criticized, especially due to the lack of rigor or rules regarding data collection procedures.

Evolved grounded theory developed by Strauss and Corbin (2015) in contrast to the classic model presents a very detailed outline of data analysis and emphasizes ongoing validation and a combination of induction and deduction. This model contributes to the impression that there is a step-by-step formula that must be painstakingly followed in order to produce a good GT. From the view of objectivism, these researchers believe that an understanding of objective reality can be discovered and reported by the researcher. However, in a new version of their book, edited mainly by Corbin, they emphasize more strongly the role of researchers in terms of reflecting on their own thinking and perspectives when they come to investigating social phenomena. This approach has been getting the acceptance of more researchers since it is an undeniable element of happening when an individual perceives the world.

Constructivist grounded theory is the third model developed by Kathy Charmaz (2006). As a student of Strauss, Charmaz was influenced by his perspective in which GT developed from an interactionist stance and iterative research (Groen et al., 2017). In Charmaz's constructivism model, GT maintains the core elements of the traditional approach including thematic emergence, constant comparison, inductive approach, and open-ended inquiry (Groen et al., 2017). However, Charmaz believes that the data and theories are constructed, not discovered. She assumes that the process of theorizing includes the researcher's interpretation together with data collection (Uri, 2015). As a continuation of attaching the subjective elements in social research, in this model, Charmaz posits that both participants and researchers have certain roles in constructing new knowledge, generating theories, and integrating it into the actual practice. From this stance, this constructivism model defines the importance of literature review as it

provides the researcher with an overall understanding of the researched. This view also marks the significant turn of GT as it goes oppositely to the classic model in which literature review is to be avoided until a theme has emerged or a theory is generated. The timing and position of the literature review will be discussed later in this chapter.

Given the evolution of GT throughout a few different models, it is believed that there are several elements shared by all. Identifying these elements is necessary for every study which claims to use a grounded theory approach.

**Table 1. Core elements of a grounded theory study**

01	GT remains open throughout the study and expects findings “grounded” from data	GT study is not to test a hypothesis or a theory but to develop a new one. GT employs an inductive approach in which the study proceeds from the particular to the general, and the emphasis of the study emerges as codes and concepts are grounded in data. Open, mostly unstructured interviewing questions, observation protocol, or any other flexible data generation formats are employed in a GT study (Bryant & Charmaz, 2019; Charmaz, 2001; Sbaraini et al., 2011, Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Researchers remain open to the emergence of data, and avoid forcing their data into a priori concept or knowledge otherwise “put into dialogue” (Timonen et al, 2018, p.6).
02	Data collection and analysis are conducted parallelly and iteratively	The researcher starts data analysis as soon as possible, for instance, right after receiving the first and second interview transcripts, not wait until the completion of data collection, data collection and analysis are interlinked (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007; Charmaz, 2006; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Hennink et al., 2011). The researcher moves forward and backward to each stage depending on the development of emergent concepts. Theoretical sampling will be defined in which the emphasis of the study evolves, and the researcher approaches closer to an understanding of “what is going on here?” of the researched (Timonen et al, 2018, p.6).
03	The connection	Constant comparison between data with data, code with code, the incident with incident, and case with case is a key element to

	between data is obtained through constant comparison and memo writing	interpret data and evaluate any emergent concepts. Through this practice, codes are either combined to generate more abstract concepts or categories; or contrasted to facilitate further investigation into the researched. This allows effective analysis, re-analysis, and re-interpretation of data and the whole process in general to ensure valid research findings. During these stages, the researcher records their thinking in plenty of memos which may include all analytical and methodological steps. Together with coding as a core characteristic of qualitative research, continuing comparison and memo writing are essential to record the whole track of theory development in a GT study (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Hennink et al., 2011).
04	Theoretical sampling and saturation are central requirements in a GT design	The researcher resumes the sampling based on the emergent themes from an earlier stage of data analysis in which data is collected with purposeful sampling mainly. With the new sampling and new or modified data collection questions, the researcher conducts a deeper investigation into the researched whereby all the knowledge gaps, confusion, and uncertainties of previous interpretations are clarified or tested. The process is to focus on a smaller and more distinctive population or a very particular set of concepts (Timonen et al, 2014) until there are no significant themes or concepts emerged from the data set. At this point, the study reaches the saturation of the theoretical construct which is sufficient to claim the complexity and interactions in the phenomenon is captured, and ready to build a final theory.
05	A substantive theory is the production of a GT study	GT has evolved through different forms since its creation, particularly with the philosophical shift from objectivism (positivism) to constructivism (interpretivism) (Charmaz, 2006). Objectivism GT theorists aim at generality and decontextualization in their study results. They believe that data already exists and awaits a discovery. The discovered theory is likely to be decontextualized, generalizable, and modifiable; and, it fits and

		works in any random contexts (Charmaz, 2006, p.134; Glaser and Strauss, 2010, p.3, 5). However, constructivist GT authors assert that “theorizing is an activity”, and the product of it “reflects how researchers act on” their method and the problems as well as their interests in the researched (Charmaz, p.134). Therefore, researchers from the constructivism approach believe that a GT study’s result is a substantive theory that consists of the interpretation and explanation of all crucial “aspects, stages, consequences, or a process” of the researched phenomenon (Timonen et al., p.4). As so, a substantive theory as a GT study’s result is considered transferable rather than generalizable.
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Finally, the timing and position of a literature review are to be discussed. As mentioned earlier in the constructivist approach of GT, GT finding is expected to be grounded on data. To avoid research biases or lack of credibility in which researchers might impose their pre-knowledge, or employ pre-conception, existing experience in constructing a theory, the timing of the literature review has risen as a controversial issue. The issue mainly comes from two perspectives: (1) delay literature review until data collection and analysis or until themes have emerged, (2) search for a preliminary literature review before conducting a study, and proceed with a secondary literature review during data analysis (Giles et al., 2013). The former is mainly advised by Glaser and Strauss, however, evidence shows that their advice is ambiguous and quite often they do not follow in their projects (Covan, 2007). Meanwhile, many experts nowadays reckon that it is not possible that a researcher approaches a research area without any pre-knowledge of it (Giles et al., 2013). Otherwise, Lampert (2007) even encourages a preliminary review to improve our theory sensibility, avoid unnecessary duplication of other work and link the study with current scientific conversation. Charmaz (2006) supports this perspective by positing that a preliminary review could help to identify research problems, while a secondary literature review strengthens the researcher’s argument, and also strengthens credibility.

The fundamental principle of GT is to minimize pre-conception involvement in solving research problems. With this awareness, the researcher of this study decided to review the literature either before and after data collection and analysis. Though it was a real challenge to a novice researcher, the rigorous approach of GT, particularly the

reflexivity would assess the researchers' pre-conception involvement if it existed during the study, and would employ the literature reviews as a tool to validate the emergent theory of the study (Charmaz, 2001; Giles et al., 2013).

However, as a nature of any research approach, there were numerous points that could be figured out as strengths and weaknesses of a GT study. These points illustrate the researcher's full awareness of their research methodology, and their attempts to conduct rigorous research.

### **Strengths of a grounded theory study**

There are strengths in using GT for the advantages of the methodology as well as the research product itself. Some of the significant strengths will be presented as a part of the reasoning for the selection of the current study methodology.

Firstly, the ultimate product of conducting a GT is a new theory generated from data (Charmaz, 2006). As a distinctive feature of a GT, the researcher develops their understanding of social phenomena without any prior assumptions or pre-defined theories (Engward, 2013). As such, the participants' actions will be captured from a more neutral viewpoint in the nature of practice and social context (Simmons, 2006). Grounded theory, therefore is considered an exploratory method that is suitable to explore social processes which are new emergences or lack in-depth investigations (Milliken, 2010).

More importantly, as stated by Charmaz (2001), a key constructivist developer of GT, GT presents significant advances compared to other qualitative methods because it provides logical and coherent means of analyzing data. These include logical steps of simultaneously collecting, analyzing, and comparing data, correcting errors, and checking and refining analytic theoretical properties (Charmaz, 2001). When GT is employed, mainly with the interview method, the data which is directly from the participants' perspectives are recorded, analyzed, and compared between emerging themes to new incidence so that the researcher is less likely to misinterpret or misunderstand the meaning of the phenomenon representation. The iterative processes of collecting and analyzing data also provide thick and efficient data to fill the gaps or answer the research questions.

### **Weaknesses of a grounded theory study**

The first concern of using GT is about the abstinence of a priori assumptions to ensure the researcher's creativity and acknowledgement of emergent theories from empirical data. However, it is a subject of long-term debates among grounded theorists

regarding how to define a research scope, research gaps, and questions, and to synthesize the ongoing research into the literature without learning about its relevant substantive area (Dunne, 2011). A number of discussions, arguments, and alternative suggestions have also been presented in the methodology literature. It is a challenge, however, for novice grounded theory researchers to understand these viewpoints deeply so that they can equip themselves with an appropriate approach for their research.

Moreover, even though there is a logical procedure to construct a theory from data in a grounded theory study, a number of concepts in the methodology guide are uneasy to distinguish such as concept and category (X. N. Nguyen, 2010). In addition, in order to successfully identify a middle-range theory from the collected data, the researcher needs to follow all the rigorous steps in the procedure; especially they need to have strong skills and sensitivity to the theoretical emergence.

Finally, GT processes produce huge volumes of data which possibly poses a difficulty for a novice researcher to manage, especially with time constraints such as within a doctoral research project. However, in this project, the researcher did not limit themselves to the view of obtaining conceptual clarity of the phenomenon in which she constructed categories and integrated the links between them as the result of GT research (Timonen et al., 2018).

Having considered all the above-mentioned factors, constructivist grounded theory is believed to be the most suitable approach for this current study. The researcher expected to follow every necessary step of this GT model, including efforts to ameliorate its strengths and eliminate its weaknesses to generate the most reliable and valuable theory as the research result.

### **Constructivist grounded theory method for the current study**

Qualitative research is usually chosen to investigate the complexity of a subject and explore relationships underpinning social and cultural phenomena by describing, interpreting, and explaining their own lived experiences, perspectives, emotions, and feelings (Creswell, 2013; Strauss & Corbin, 2015). The focus of the study is on primary teachers' perspectives, a qualitative approach is a suitable choice. Through the triangulation of data collection and analysis, a qualitative design facilitated an understanding of the complexity of teachers' beliefs, understanding, attitudes expressed through their own stories, and own voices (Corbin and Strauss, 2015, Creswell, 2013).

As a popular type of qualitative inquiry, grounded theory provides a framework that reveals teachers' actual experience in the SEL process. In utilizing the grounded theory method, the study sought to answer the following research questions:

*From primary teachers' perspectives and understanding:*

- 1) *What is social and emotional learning for primary school students?*
- 2) *What are the roles of social and emotional learning for primary school students?*
- 3) *How to integrate social and emotional learning for students in primary schools?*
- 4) *What factors influence the integration of social and emotional learning for students in primary schools?*

This GT study was based on data collected with a broad range of semi-structured interview questions, a main part was open-ending questions developed from various social aspects which are influential factors of behaviours, interactions, and interpretation patterns (Tweed & Charmaz, 2012). The employment of GT was the most suitable to construct a theory of the researched when one was still not existing or less well-defined, not sufficient to explain the process or phenomena (Henwood & Pidgeon, 2003). It was also a good approach in case theories were grounded on participant samples and populations other than on the researcher's interest or emphasis (Creswell & Cheryl, 2018). In broader literature, the understanding of teachers' perspectives on SEL internationally was tremendously limited to the dominance of quantitative tests. More importantly, there was no relevant theory explaining primary school teachers' perspectives and views of SEL in the Vietnamese context. Existing literature, however, suggested that SEL domains had been unofficially integrated somehow throughout the primary education curriculum. Studies had been conducted to reveal the acknowledgement of SEL importance among teachers, but a gap still existed in teachers' understanding of the actual roles of SEL skills in their student's development, and the awareness of barriers to implementing SEL effectively. Previous studies also suggested that teachers strongly wanted to integrate SEL in school, but barriers had not been recognized which impacted their desire, expectation, and teaching effectiveness regarding SEL. By following the constructivist GT procedure, teachers' experiences and perspectives were collected and described (Creswell, 2013). The interpretivist and constructivist viewpoints facilitated identifying, explaining, and clarifying any new theories that emerged from the collected data. By doing that, the researcher tried to construct concepts and theories from how participants described their own experiences of

SEL in their schools (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). A purposeful sample was taken from three different public primary schools, in different regions. The difference of schools with different social settings and influencing factors provided a sufficient amount of information in order to reveal the underpinning theories of teachers' understanding and perspectives of SEL.

The next part reports the significant stages of this grounded theory research.

The chart below illustrates the procedure of the study graphically adapted from Tweed and Charmaz (2012) and Cho and Lee (2014). The process goes through choosing participants, data collection, data analysis, and finally generating conceptual categories.

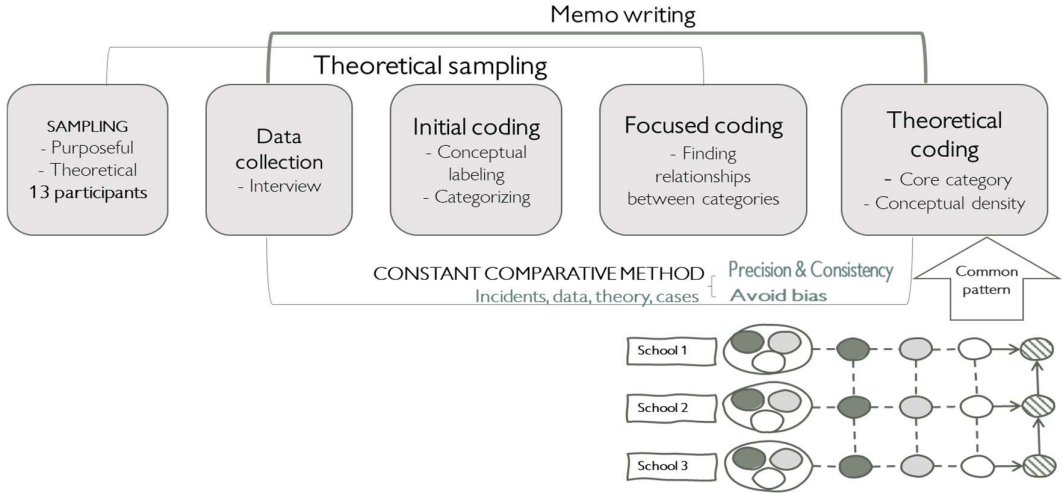


Figure 1. Grounded Theory Process

**Participants**

In grounded theory, selecting specific study participants means identifying the unit of analysis that is primarily significant to deeply understand the core purpose of the research (K. Y. Jones, 2016). In this study, participant selection related to individual teachers, their schools and their teaching experience. Similar and different characteristics among the participants were to be related, compared and recognized during the emergence of theory as the study outcomes. Meanwhile, the distinctively common elements of the participants were fully perceived which were their common teacher education program, primary educational curriculum, and under the management of the Education Department (provincial unit of the Ministry of Education and Training). The participants for this study were teachers in primary public schools in Vietnam.



To understand primary school teachers' perspectives and views, other school figures (principals, vice principals, counselors, students...) could have been potential and applicable, this study, however, aimed at achieving rich and intensive information from the participants, it was focused on the single participant unit which was teachers (Table 2).

**Table 2. Participants**

<b>Participants (T)</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Years teaching</b>	<b>Position</b>	<b>Current grade (G)</b>	<b>School (S)</b>
T1	41	16	Homeroom teacher	G1	S1
T2	43	18	Homeroom teacher	G2	S1
T3	36	7	English teacher	G3-5	S1
T4	36	13	Homeroom teacher	G4	S1
T5	41	15	Homeroom teacher	G2	S2
T6	34	12	Homeroom teacher	G3	S2
T7	39	15	Homeroom teacher	G5	S2
T8	35	12	Music teacher	G1-5	S2
T9	37	13	Homeroom teacher	G1	S3
T10	49	24	Homeroom teacher	G1	S3
T11	30	7	PE teacher	G1-5	S3
T12	37	11	Homeroom teacher	G4	S3
T13	32	10	Homeroom teacher	G3	S2

## **Sampling**

### **Purposeful sampling.**

A purposeful sample was employed first as a strategy to select a study unit which was aligned with responding to the research questions (Patton, 2015). Nine homeroom teachers representing three different school settings (village, district and city centre) who participated in the last three summer professional development programs for new general education curriculum implementation (2019, 2020, 2021) were selected.

Firstly, schools were selected according to the diversity of demographics. The choice relating to schools in different areas was made from rich data expectations. The

rich-information data emerging from different settings facilitated appropriate comparing and contrasting processes between the incidents and helped to reveal the common and different views of teachers in SEL.

Pre-selected schools were chosen from the public primary school list offered by the Provincial Department of Education in Thanh Hoa province, an average developing province in the North-Centre area of the country. These schools meet National Quality Standards, level 1 or upper which relates to their teacher-student ratios and other educational infrastructure and facility issues.

Six schools were selected to deliver pre-screening questions. These pre-screening questions served to determine whether social and emotional elements had been infused and whether their teachers were aware of social and emotional elements in their schools. The following pre-screening questions were sent to teachers: *1) Have you participated in Teacher training for the new general education program? 2) Have you ever heard/known/learned about SEL? 3) Do you think SEL implementation is necessary for primary schools? 4) Have you been promoting these skills for primary students in your daily teaching practice?* (see Appendix D). Three schools where all surveyed teachers answer “Yes” to all four questions, and they were located in different areas were selected. Teachers at these selected schools were invited to participate in the study. These participants were purposefully selected further. There are 5 grades in a primary school in which grade the development and educational impact of students are significant differences, therefore, in each school, I chose 3 homeroom teachers (who were in charge of general teaching and educational activities of a class, and to be distinguished from classroom teachers who taught some separate subjects such as music, art, and physical education) from different grades, for an instant, from grade 1(or 2), grade 3(or 4), and grade 4 (or 5). Furthermore, since in general, primary school teachers are due to change their teaching grade once every few years, I decided to choose teachers with more than 10-year working experience so that they could share experiences in different teaching grades of themselves. After that, the principals’ permission was reached to conduct in-depth, face-to-face interviews. All participants selected their pseudonyms to protect their identity throughout the study.

### **Theoretical sampling.**

Theoretical sampling is a further sampling process when participants interviewed are theoretically chosen to provide the best information source for theory construction (Creswell & Cheryl, 2018). In this study, data were first collected focusing on teachers' general views on SEL. The initial data analysis was carried out to establish preliminary categories in which new or amended questions might be added (K. Y. Jones, 2016). These new evolving questions and additional data collection relating to theoretical sampling allowed the researcher to better investigate the new aspects of the topic emerging from the initial data collection (Charmaz, 2011). As a result, one homeroom teacher and three classroom teachers were further recruited as theoretical sampling.

### **Data collection**

In qualitative research in general and grounded theory research in particular, interviews are often used as the primary data collection method (Creswell & Cheryl, 2018; Fraenkel et al., 2012). The general premise behind grounded theory is to read a descriptive dataset and define or label characteristics as well as their interactions. In an interview, the researcher and participant co-construct the understanding of the researched through their lived conversations which are considered social interactions (Creswell & Cheryl, 2018). The current grounded theory study focused on teachers' perspectives and views on social and emotional learning, hence semi-structured interview was the main method employed to construct the emergent theories of the researched.

After having been granted ethical permission to conduct the research in Vietnam, I started the very first interview in April 2022. The data collection was conducted in two phases. The phases were not based on chronological order but based on the data collection sample. Phase one was for purposeful sampling of participants and delivering the first designed question list. Phase two was for theoretical sampling participants, being asked additional questions arising from Phase one data analysis. Consequently, nine homeroom teachers were interviewed in both phases either to collect new data or to clarify the existing data collected from previous interviewing. One homeroom teacher and three classroom teachers were interviewed in phase 2 only. However, it is important to emphasize that the title Phase 1 and Phase 2 do not accurately represent the complex process of data collection which parallelly happened with data collection. For example, in Phase 1, even working with purposeful sampling, the second, third, and fourth parts of an interview question list which were written in the planned interviewing protocol were

not employed until the researcher had recognized clearly from the first part of interview questions that teachers did have SEL elements covered in their daily teaching activities.

The researcher is aware that the most effective and comfortable way to conduct an intensive interview is in-person setting. However, the data collection process was commenced when the Covid19 pandemic was still under precaution in Vietnam (April 2022), and the tight schedule of teachers at the end of the school year (2022) to compensate for the missing and not-effective online classes during the pandemic quarantine. Furthermore, the distance between the researcher's location and the participants' when the researcher had to come back to Eotvos Lorand University (ELTE) after her mobility permission. Interviews with 6 teachers were conducted in convenient places to them such as their classrooms, teachers' waiting rooms, and meeting rooms in their own schools in in-person meetings; seven others were conducted online via Zoom and Zalo (a popular virtual meeting platform in Vietnam). Interviews were semi-structured and developed based on the research questions. Interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed. In total, did almost 21.4 hours of interviewing, at 17 different meeting times, and with 13 teachers.

### **Memo writing**

The researcher wrote memos throughout the interview period (during or after each interview) which reflected on what they learned from that interview. The memos recorded the interviewer's observations and reflections on the participants' experiences; they were used to systematically review certain a priori discourses connecting to what was mentioned during the interview. Also, memos were used as field notes recording the researcher's observations, either the phenomena occurring in the school setting or interviewees' non-verbal expressions including movement, gestures, and facial expressions. These observations normally are argued as not helpful in actual discourse (Creswell & Cheryl, 2018), but they nevertheless have the potential to enrich information during analysis. The field notes offered the researcher opportunity to closely approach the researched contexts, initial feelings, and thoughts which helped them comprehend the incidents throughout the phenomena (Birks & Mills, 2011).

***Table 3. Case-based memo example***

<b>Case-based memo</b>
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It was quite a surprising interview and a lot of things to learn. In the beginning, regardless of saying Yes to pre-screen questions indicating that the teacher knew about SEL, she said she got no ideas about SEL, when I probed her by mentioning teaching her own children about social skills, emotional skills, emotional intelligence, she instantly commented that technically, there were many terms in the literature about some certain subject, but we can understand and investigate from many different aspects. Then I suddenly noticed that SEL in Vietnam is not necessarily similar to others' context, and SEL as understood somewhere else in the world could be something else in the Vietnam context. I learnt to approach the subject in various aspects, for example emotional skills, social skills, competence, abilities, adaptation, life skills, soft skills, non-academic skills,...

When the teacher recognized what SEL I was talking about, she instantly commented on the principle of Vietnamese education: "Educating a person first, teaching words after", it means academic learning all go after learning how to behave as a good person in a social context. It instantly impresses me that SEL or non-academic is the priority (at least in theory and in education history). This makes much sense when right after that the teacher gave me a number of examples of how SEL has been integrated into school activities. SEL appears or is implemented in any educational activities in school, it is normal, obviously and should be expected. However, even though it is normal, I ask myself, if something is very obvious, something implemented everywhere, every time, kind of "taking for granted", does that mean it works effectively? This case is about SEL. I wonder, if SEL nowadays is attracting more attention worldwide, there must be a reason. Vietnamese education has not paid this attention yet. I need to think about this, either Vietnamese teachers have done very well in non-academic education, not necessarily with explicit SEL, and they still equip students well with important social and emotional competence for their lives, or Vietnamese teachers have done this in their traditional way which may have lasted a century, and they have not recognized there something needed to change. I need to investigate these matters.

Moreover, conceptual memos were also taken as the recording of the researcher's thinking during and after certain data analysis about the appropriateness, connection between, possible change, and consequence of group codes or categories. In other words, conceptual memos were instrumental in constant comparison taken to data with data,

codes with codes, and cases with cases to identify the potential relationship between themes or emergent concepts, and to identify the similarities and differences. As a result, conceptual memos were sources to generate further theoretical questions for coming interviews. An example is illustrated in Table 4 below.

**Table 4. Conceptual memo example**

<b>Self-awareness + Emotional management + Empathy = Positive attitude?</b>
<p>Teachers expect their students to bear in mind the concept of love for everyone, and everything. This perspective is from the self-awareness concept in which students recognize what they like and do not like. However, from the teachers' explanation, students are expected to look for and look at good aspects of everything around. Students need to find love for things in their life. A significant task of students is to learn to see the beauty of everything, to recognize it, and to act on their positive perceptions respectively. Particularly, students feel good and value the kind of person they are, feel safe physically and emotionally in any social context they are in. In addition, with Empathy, students are likely to understand more actual life situations, to understand and respect others. Moreover, when students are able to control their overwhelming emotions, students are not to engage in anti-social and self-harming behaviors. In primary school education, there are a number of attitudes or actions that considered as taboo such as over-confident, over competitive, arrogant, bragging, jealousy or taking revenge. When students have self-awareness, empathy to others and capable of managing their emotion, they think, consider and remember of good and appropriate things to follow in accordance with existing regulations and societal norms. Also, students are willing to have acts of goodness, kindness, pleasantness, helpfulness together with forgiveness and generosity. According to the teachers, these insights and capabilities are indications of positive attitudes and behaviours.</p>

### **Data analysis**

The researchers applied the visual display developed by Harry et al. (2004) to present phases of data analysis. These phases followed Charmaz's steps (Charmaz, 2006), however several testing techniques were added. Presenting these phases clearly, not only to clarify how the research results which would be a theory were grounded from collected data but also to help the researcher in testing the process of data analysis in which we were able to stop to check the appropriateness of codes, categories, themes; make a

modification, and most importantly to recognize the interrelation between sets of data with each other.

Below is the form that the researcher used during the process which also would be the carrier of research results for the first research question (What is SEL?) as an example.

**Table 5. Data analysis map**

<p>Theory</p>	<p>SEL is a part of life skill education in which students learn and develop self-awareness, emotional management, empathy, cooperation and problem-solving competences to develop positive attitudes, social attachment, happiness, and contribute to community development</p>
<p>Interrelating explanations (between each theme, themes with themes)</p>	
<p>Testing themes (interviews, cross cases-3 schools in 3 areas)</p>	
<p>Themes (Theoretical coding)</p>	<p>Self-awareness, Emotional management, Empathy, Cooperation, Problem-solving, Positive attitude, Attachment, Happiness, Community development.</p>
<p>Focused codes (Categories)</p>	<p>Self-awareness, problem-solving, social awareness, diversity/difference awareness, respect self/other, positive behaviour, emotion is love and affection, self-confidence/effectiveness, responsibility, kindness, self-management, cooperation,</p>

	positive/healthy relationship, establishing and maintaining attachment, aiming to the appropriateness, aiming to happiness.
Initial codes	Based on initial interviews

The model is meant to be read from bottom to top which visually reflects the inductive process of data analysis (Harry et. al 2004). Throughout the bottom-up model, the grounded theory analytic process of this study is explained.

I spent two initial months (April and May 2022) conducting intensive interviews in person with 6 primary teachers in three different schools. During these months and interviews, I also commenced transcribing data and analysing any available data source. After that, I devoted 4 months including the whole summer and September 2022 to finishing transcripts for these interviews, conducted interviews with 7 other teachers, analysed data and resumed data collection iteratively. In total, there were 17 transcripts in accordance with 17 meetings with 13 participants, and a lot of memos written along with interviewing, transcription, and field observation, were prepared and analyzed in this study.

**Initial coding.** It is the first and essential step in grounded theory research (Charmaz, 2006). The data was divided into segments and then scrutinized for similar and different points (Charmaz, 2011). In initial coding, every idea generated from the initial interview data was recorded inductively (Sbaraini et al., 2011). In this phase, line by line, not every single line was read and coded since I actively sought relevant comments, remarks, and explanations relating to SEL. Though many sentences, lines first sight not relevant were coded. Since SEL could relate to every aspect and activity of students, teachers and school life, there were many incidents, stories told during the interviewing. According to Charmaz, in the initial coding phase, researchers try to code everything, however, to save time, and get more needed, sufficient data, I did filter from this phase. However, since the study went through testing processes of codes and themes (these processes would be explained in detail in the later part of this thesis), there were a number of opportunities for me to re-examine the text and to create any new codes where needed. Data will be analyzed using handwritten, colour-coded techniques and following every standard step often seen in grounded theory research. Initially, all transcripts were printed out in A4 paper format with one-third of the paper sheets inked. The two other thirds were used to write down codes and categories. These steps could have been done on MS files, but I preferred to have transcripts by transcripts laid down physically so it would be



convenient to compare incidents with incidents, cases with cases or codes with codes, and categories with categories. Despite keeping in mind the importance of filtering out some irrelevant sentences, there were more than 300 phrases put down in which I was aware that many were simple summaries of sentences, and bore no relevant meaning to SEL or did not actually contain meaningful concepts. To select significant codes, I read through the transcripts and initial codes once to twice then put them down again in A3 size papers. This allowed me to check the previous coding, and to have a clearer presentation which helped the next step analysis visually and theoretically. Particularly, initial coding was processed directly in the Vietnamese version of transcripts. Since the data collection and analysis processes happened iteratively and through many stages, the original language data sets were maintained until the results would have found to avoid language interpretation differences, and to ensure the best comprehension and consistency. Several examples of initial coding (translated into English) are presented in Table 6 below.

**Table 6. Initial coding process**

Initial coding example	Narratives
<p>[SEL is a] part of life skill education</p> <p>[Social skills are] important [for students] in or outside school</p> <p>[Students] control [their] emotions to control behaviours</p> <p>[Students must] know themselves</p> <p>[Aim at] comfortable and positive life, building a responsible, happy life.</p>	<p>When being asked if she knew SEL, a teacher with 17-year experience said: “Actually, I think SEL is a part of life skills education, it includes many contents, and is taught in a whole lesson. Emotional skills I don't know, social skills I know, are basic skills that students need to have when going to school as well as going out in life.”</p> <p>In my opinion, a student with SEL knows how to control emotions, control emotions when happy, sad, or angry, then from that emotion will control its behaviour. I think controlling emotions is very important because then we will control and control our behaviour.</p> <p>I simply tell students that they need to be able to understand themselves, what they need, what they want, and their strengths and weaknesses, thereby promoting and overcoming them to have a good and comfortable life”. The teacher had a little struggle to explain what she thought of SEL.</p>

Furthermore, during focused coding, the focus will be shifted to a more directed, selective, and conceptual set which enables the synthesis and explanation of the central categories within the entire dataset (Charmaz, 2011; Sbaraini et al., 2011).

**Focused coding.** It requires the researcher's interpretation and is the beginning of meaning abstraction which contributes greatly to the analysis. The commonalities identified among the focused codes will reflect categories or themes. The analysis is mainly guided using a cross-case analysis and constant comparisons (Creswell & Cheryl, 2018). During the analysis, if a new and meaningful incident emerges; theoretical sampling will be employed to identify any other possible similar or relevant viewpoints. Therefore, during theoretical sampling and constant comparisons, the researcher needs to move back and forth between the data collection and analysis stages (Charmaz, 2011; Creswell & Cheryl, 2018). Finally, constant comparisons result in theoretical codes that adequately capture each incident to create a theory as the answer to the research question. The subject of discourse writing would then be theoretical codes. Besides, throughout the analysis, personal memos and field notes will be used relevantly and appropriately to get more insights into the researched phenomenon. In the current study, in the process of looking for the connection between the codes, to put them into categories, I asked myself "Is this code similar/ opposite to some others?", "What is the common point of these codes?" Even after having named a group of coding, I kept asking "Is there any other possible naming for this group", "Is it possible for this code to be categorised in another group, with a different group name?", normally, at the early stage of initial coding, I could put a code in 2 or three different categories. For example, for codes "Students' lack of motivation", "life support is sufficient", "going to school is parents' order", I put down 2 summaries for them: Lack of motivation, and Life condition. Moreover, codes and categories were then checked by two other doctoral student colleagues of mine, from the same educational program. These colleagues were not doing research in SEL, however, they could help check and give feedback on the interpretation of word meanings, the condensation, and the distribution of properties in each category. For example, there was significant discussion about the arrangement of codes among categories Positive behaviours, Attachment, and Appropriateness in which the code "maintain a relationship" was argued to be put in one but not other categories. We, therefore, checked back the transcript to find out that the code should have accurately coded as "maintain a healthy relationship" from two homeroom teachers' answers. Finally, the code "maintain a

healthy relationship” were mutually agreed to be arranged in “Positive behaviour”. We also wrote up plenty of memos to remind us of theoretical ideas we came up with while working on the text with their actual meaning, and relating it to the context. Besides, to avoid the further possibly inaccurate interpretation or arrangements of codes into different categories, we set aside several files of transcripts with their codes of several coding (early transcripts for an instant) for a month or so while we were working with incoming transcripts or other core codes/categories to figure out any earlier possible interlinks between the core codes/categories, expecting to generate theoretical sensitivity for further stage. After that month or so, we would read again some sample sets of the transcript, and resume coding again. This process allowed to have constant comparison applied for a data sample. The previous set of codes and the new one would then be compared to clarify if certain codes worked, ensuring the consistency of the codes used. As a result, some new codes were generated, and some old codes were re-named and merged into other categories. Especially, thanks to the iterative analysis, each time re-reading texts or codes, the conceptual ideas, the similarities, and the possible contradictions became more coherent and logical. Finally, all processes resulted in a set of 45 categories which covered all information in interviewing about the participants’ perspectives on four aspects of SEL proposed in 4 research questions.

**Table 7. Examples of initial categories and codes**

<b>Initial Categories and Codes</b>
<i>Self-awareness</i> : being aware of one’s needs, recognizing strengths and weaknesses, understanding one’s feelings, and being aware of own negative and positive attitudes (likes/dislikes).
<i>Problem-solving skills</i> : recognizing problems with causes and effects, listing optional solutions, evaluating good/bad choice
<i>Diversity awareness</i> : differences in familial background, occupation, disability, different opinions, different living conditions.
<i>Respect</i> : the differences, others’ opinions, disabled people
<i>Positive behaviours</i> : not offensive language, treasuring what you have, positive attitudes, maintaining a healthy relationship, being friendly, sociable, caring, sharing, promoting good things, eliminating bad things

*Self-confidence*: having own voice, having encouragement to speak up, self-expression, willingness to engage in social activities

*Self-effectiveness*: self motivation, self-service skills, seeking help from more capable people, leading skills, goal setting, open-mindedness to learn, self-discipline

*Responsibility*: compliance with regulations in school, listening to teachers, completing tasks and assignments, keeping promises, bearing in mind moral lessons

*Note*: Italicized expressions are categories, codes follow a category after a colon.

**Theoretical coding (Developing the themes).** There were four research questions posted in this GT which represented the researcher's aims when conducting educational research. This study aimed to understand teachers' perspectives and views on SEL, however, as an educator who was aware of the broadly recognized importance of SEL, and who meant to implement SEL effectively in Vietnam, I purposefully expected to understand how teachers define SEL, how they understand its importance, how they could have implemented SEL, and how they perceive the advantages and hindrance of the implementation. However, it is critically important to note that the three later questions were not brought out until the analysis results obtained from the first questions indicated that SEL elements had been implemented by the participants. As the result, this study was expected to generate a theory that consisted of four sub-theories to describe 4 aspects of teachers' perspectives and views of SEL. Under each sub-theory, the next task of the researcher was to move forward to thematic analysis which aimed at building themes underlying the theoretical categories. All categories under a question were compared to see the commonalities and discrepancies. Further analysis and discussion in a group with other colleagues if needed to identify the most emerging relevance amongst the concepts. The relevance was summarized to build themes.

**Testing the themes.** As stated earlier, this study aimed to generate a theory grounded in data. Nevertheless, the transparency somehow is in doubt since the prolongedly and complexly iterative processes of data collection, and data analysis, particularly the interpretations of all participants' meanings were done from an early stage of data analysis. Particularly, even though a great deal of discussions about confusing or overlapped codes or categories, separate checking among a group of the researcher and colleagues was conducted, due to the huge amount of data collected, the strategy called "member check" by Lincoln & Guba needed to go further (1985). These testing theme

techniques were proposed by Harry (2005). These techniques tested the extent of the themes' connection with data garnered from the interviewing. First, after having all the themes for all questions, I created one PowerPoint file for each question in which each slide displayed one theme, and the last slide displayed a mind map with the interlink of the themes. I then sent them to all participants and asked them to check the themes by noting down "Agree", "Disagree", or "Irrelevant" in each slide. Besides, teachers were encouraged to send me any feedback or comments about the themes, as well as the potential connections I had made amongst the themes. At this point, I recognized that this technique not only helped to test if the coding had properly described teachers' experiences but also clarified what I saw that my participants "might not have seen during the interviewing but might resonate during this testing process" (Charmaz, 2005, p.49). Checking the theme of Self-awareness is an example. It seemed strange to me at first when an element named Love/Affection belonged to Self-awareness. I needed to check every category, particularly Love/Affection. I designed a PowerPoint file with statements describing self-awareness as an element of SEL, and categories that were interpreted as categories of self-awareness (Appendix F for handout Powerpoint example). Teachers turned back to agree with all the statements, however, they had comments on several aspects and requested some minor modifications, for instant "seeing your fault" could be categorized as "recognising your strengths and weaknesses". Teachers believed that if students were confident of their abilities and aware of their shortcomings, they would be brave to accept their mistakes and willing to improve themselves with their other strong abilities. Interestingly, 6 out of 13 teachers admitted that they did not mention Love/affection as an important point in self-awareness or in SEL in general, but reading these statements made them resonate with this point, and they absolutely agreed with the additional insights provided in this testing phase. Participants mainly agreed with the themes, and made a number of additional comments on some themes or suggested slight modifications. Particularly their remarks and comments in the last slides made theoretical connections among the themes more clear and more rational. Another way to test the themes was by applying them against all the data collected during interviews, field notes, and memos. In this technique, I kept asking whether I understood the evidence from the transcripts and my perspectives on these pieces of evidence reflected the researched phenomenon.

**Interrelating the explanations** is the process of explaining any contradictions, comparing the theme with the theme, and comparing the explanations between the themes to see how they relate/interrelate to each other to ground the final general explanations of the phenomenon. In this level, each (sub)theme was compared with others, explaining how they connected with each other, and how they interlinked to describe SEL from the teachers' views. For example, the first and very strong category in SEL conceptualization was self-awareness. There were various properties in this category, including "understanding your strengths and weaknesses". This ability directly related to "respect others", or "awareness of others' difficulties" since when students recognized their problems, they were more likely to recognize similar problems of others. Or, it was easy for students to respect others, particularly others' competencies or performance since everyone had their own strengths and weaknesses. These traits helped students to easily control their negative feelings when working with others. As a result, students involved themselves in working groups more pleasantly and productively, and by themselves or together with others, problem-solving becomes less difficult for students. In this interrelating explanation process, the five elements which teachers included in SEL were integrated with each other, making visible the final result of the SEL process from the participants' perspectives. The interrelation finally helped explain what teachers conceptualized as the results of SEL. These were positive attitudes, happiness, attachment, and contributing to community development.

**Delineating the theory.** As mentioned earlier, instead of generating a formal theory that depicts processes that are possibly generalized in a broad range of similar contexts or substantive fields (Harry et al., 2005), this study aimed at generating a substantive theory that consists of a set of explanations of the specific SEL phenomena in Vietnamese primary schools. Being educational researcher, I purposefully investigated this as an educational phenomenon in which SEL conceptualization, educational significance, educational methods, and influential implementation conditions were fully considered. However, apart from traditional connections of these elements, the rigorous steps of the grounded theory method produced a complex theory in which all major themes were interrelated with each other, the latter themes explained the formers and the formers provided foundational concepts for the latter, and each theme was built upon a complex set of categories with their reliance and interactions.

### **Trustworthiness and Credibility**

The critical step which makes GT to be rigorous and has its certain credibility is “triangular in data analysis”. Even though the main source of data collection in this study was interviewing, during the process of choosing a sample, selecting purposeful, theoretical samplings, and data analysis, the researcher employed techniques that helped instantly collect, analyze, select, and compare data to ensure the value of meaning bearing in collected data. Moreover, using the above visual analysis map (Table 5), it is clear that the theory was grounded in data in which testing themes and the researcher’s interpretation were intensively performed. Particularly, the researcher paid exclusive attention to testing the codes and categories for clarification and reliability since coding was the most significant stage to ensure producing a meaningful and reliable theory (as described earlier in the Focused coding phase, p.53). In addition, extra interviews intentionally acted as a form of validation of the concepts, categories, themes, and interpretations that the researcher developed from the previous interviews (Thomson, 2011). I interviewed one homeroom teacher and one physical education teacher when I recognized the data saturation. The newly recruited participants helped in double-checking the results of the research.

### **Ethical considerations**

Ethical issues were considered foremost before starting the project. A consent document was introduced to collect participants’ signatures as their agreement. The research was permitted by Hong Duc University, the affiliation of the researcher. This permit was needed as the university would represent the researcher to guarantee the rights of participants before the Provincial Department of Education, Schools’ principles, and even local authority actors. Besides, Eotvos Lorand University, in agreement with Hong Duc University also granted the researcher permission to conduct the research in a definite timeframe. Moreover, to protect participant confidentiality, pseudonyms were made both for teachers’ names and school names. All the records relating to the participation in the study including written and voiced responses were kept private, being accessible only to the researcher. The participants were informed fully about these conditions. The electronic documents were kept on the researcher’s laptop with password-required access during the study and after it was completed, and the printed copies were stored in a locked drawer.

## Chapter IV - Findings

As an educational researcher, I purposefully aimed at investigating the SEL phenomenon in the primary school context from teachers' perspectives. The investigation resulted in a set of explanations in four critically educational aspects of SEL, responding to 4 respective questions.

The answers to these questions emerged from the analysis of participants' interviews. The findings of this study were grounded in data collected during interviewing and interaction between the researcher and the participants. The findings of this study present four aspects as four main themes generated in the study of SEL in Vietnamese primary schools. Each theme is presented with its theoretical categories, properties, supporting data, the interlinks between categories in each theme, and the connections between the four themes. The relevance or interactions between the four themes demonstrates how the teachers perceive SEL as a general concept in education, how beneficial they identify from an SEL program, how the current practice reflects the above understanding, and after all what should be done or changed to promote SEL in particular and develop primary education effectiveness in general. Each theme is primarily illustrated in a mindmap that depicts the main subthemes and supporting categories, as well as the links between subthemes, categories, and concepts.

### **Theme 1: Social and Emotional Learning is a part of life skills education**

**SEL is a part of life skills education and consists of five elements: Self-awareness, Empathy, Emotional management, Cooperation, and Problem-solving skill** (Figure 2, page 62)

Before commencing interviewing with teachers, I delivered screening questions about SEL at a glance to survey teachers' familiarity with SEL. Teachers selected to be participants in the study must have declared that they had already known or heard of the term and its elements which were introduced based on the CASEL platform. Regardless of this, it became clear after three first interviews with participants from three different schools in different regions that they were not familiar with the SEL platform developed by CASEL, an America-based organization. This apparently contrasted with the previous survey result with screening questions. However, I recognized that the time between the screening survey and the interviews were three months apart. Previously, for screening surveys, teachers received question files with some description of 5 core elements of SEL proposed by CASEL via email or Zalo application and took time at their own comfort to



answer, and there was a strong contingency in their answers that they knew or heard somewhere of SEL. These teachers even assessed their own SEC by 7 or 8 out of 10 scores after having referred to five detailed SEL elements. Therefore, I saw a problem with the unexpected unfamiliarity of participants with SEL. They might know it, but they were struggling to give us a definition. When I applied modified questions, for example, instead of “What is social and emotional learning”, I asked, “How about teaching your students skills relating to emotion and social skills?” Participants relaxed from making a “proper” definition and started describing these skills and the teaching as a part of life skills education. All nine homeroom teachers claimed that SEL must have been taught in their life skill educational activities.

*“I almost never heard of SEL. But if speaking about social skills, we have been teaching many of them in life skills education. About emotion skills, I don’t know, but for example, emotional control [management], we also teach it on different occasions, either in Literature or in life skill sessions, grade 3, a whole lesson for it in Literature subject”*(T1)

*“I don’t know what SEL is, but during our daily teaching activities, especially in life skill education, students learn to control their feelings, hot temper, negative temptation, etc., quite often so that they can behave well in class, school, with teachers and class or schoolmates”* (T2)

Teachers initially felt uncomfortable and embarrassed when thinking that they did not know about SEL. It turned out that they were trying to give a “proper definition”, which was supposed to be not possible and not necessary. However, with my prompt in the modified questions, they relaxed and described what they thought about social skills, emotional skills, and any connections between the two in their teaching. One teacher surprised herself by making a recognition:

*“Oh, so, SEL could be everything in kids’ lives. Everyone needs to learn basic social skills to participate in social life. In life skills classes, we teach kids everything, yes, we teach kids to recognize their own problems, to know feelings and then control them, solve them to finally maintain the best relationship with other”* (T3)

*“SEL is a life skill, having life skills will have SEC”* (T4)

Therefore, SEL could be related to everything surrounding students’ lives and adhering to life skill education. From teachers’ perspectives, even though SEL could have been

considered as a part of life skills education, it could be defined with five main elements as follows:

***Self-awareness:*** The first emerging theme from teachers' interviews is self-awareness. All nine homeroom teachers identify "knowing yourself" as the first element of being socially and emotional competence. Self-awareness apparently appears to teachers as recognizing your strengths and limitations.

*"You must first see your mistakes, your weak points in that certain circumstance. But you also need to be aware of your capability to fix it"* (T2)

Teachers emphasize being aware of our own strengths as a critical point to act actively, and effectively in our lives, and so do their students. This skill includes knowing what are your "likes" or "dislikes" and "acting on them respectively"

*"It would be a problem when a student does not know which colours they like for her painting task, or what topic she is interested in for her essay assignment. Little by little, students have to know their own preferences, need to choose their own important options in life, such as subjects to study in secondary school, school competition to take part in, or recreation activities for summer camp"* (T10)

Being confident is another trait that students need to learn and possess.

*"Primary students are pretty shy in their first year in school, but they can and need to learn, practice being confident, even be courageous, for an instance, raising your hand during the lesson, telling the class what you know/do not know, confident to admit your mistake, express your upset or cheerful feelings."* (T6)

Particularly, self-awareness is strongly defined in students' character as "value/treasure what you have". It means that students acknowledge, appreciate, and love the good things they have in life. This seems to be an umbrella trait when teachers report that one of the very first lessons students learn in primary school is gratitude. Being grateful for your being, your family, health, schooling opportunity, friends...and love [affection] all these. Regardless of how young primary school students are, they are expected to discover to find "love" [good feelings, affection] in people, nature, learning, family, and community.

*"Students know themselves better when they can see the beauty of all surrounding things since these [elements] build them on to some certain extent."* (T7)

Setting goals was initially mentioned by four teachers, but later it was confirmed by all other teachers as an element of self-awareness. Students are not expected to have far imagination or plan for their future to come, but they need to learn to do so with certain techniques. Setting goals is important to any individual to recognize who they are. The big could always start from the little. For example, a grade 3 student schedules to finish her small essay before the weekend and plans to befriend the newcomer in the class. To make these plans in their daily activities, the student needs to be aware of their capabilities, limitations, and what kind of help is needed, have courage and self-confidence.

*“A very smart boy in my class [grade 4] always promises and completes his writing by a certain time so that I can assign him the extra-curriculum activities of his choice. See, he knows what he likes to do, has capabilities, and is very confident to engage in anything of his choice.” (T4)*

**Sympathy to empathy** is the second element. When addressing self-awareness, teachers emphasize that everyone, including their students, must see themselves in others and see others in themselves. This point of view reasons for the emergence of sympathy and empathy elements. Teachers define sympathy as knowing and understanding, while empathy goes further to feeling for others and acting on others’ problems [difficulties] respectively, appropriately.

*“No one was born to live alone; we need to know [things of] others too. Knowing here [I] mean to recognize what is happening with them, problems? Difficulties? Bad moods? Ask to understand the matter first, try to step on others’ shoes.” (T9)*

Teachers consistently agree that sympathy to empathy involves much in emotional factors. Emotional understanding and feeling them ourselves are highlighted.

*“Oh, I feel emotional even now when recalling this [story]. Many of my students [grade 3] were almost crying or got so much moved when listening to a letter written by a student to his recently deceased grandfather.” (T13)*

In order to learn this skill, students need listening skills, a “no judging attitude” in which students expose their willingness to listen to others, try attentively to understand the stories, thinking, feelings, suffering, struggle behind, and understand either verbal or non-verbal expressions.

*“I know it seems impossible for students but my students [grade 3] have been learning these skills [reading non-verbal language]. You know that kids often cannot put into*

words their thoughts, and their feelings especially when they are overwhelmed by an incident. Occasionally you will see students completely silent or just crying – oh, it is verbal, but actually is non-verbal [teacher appears serious]” (T6)

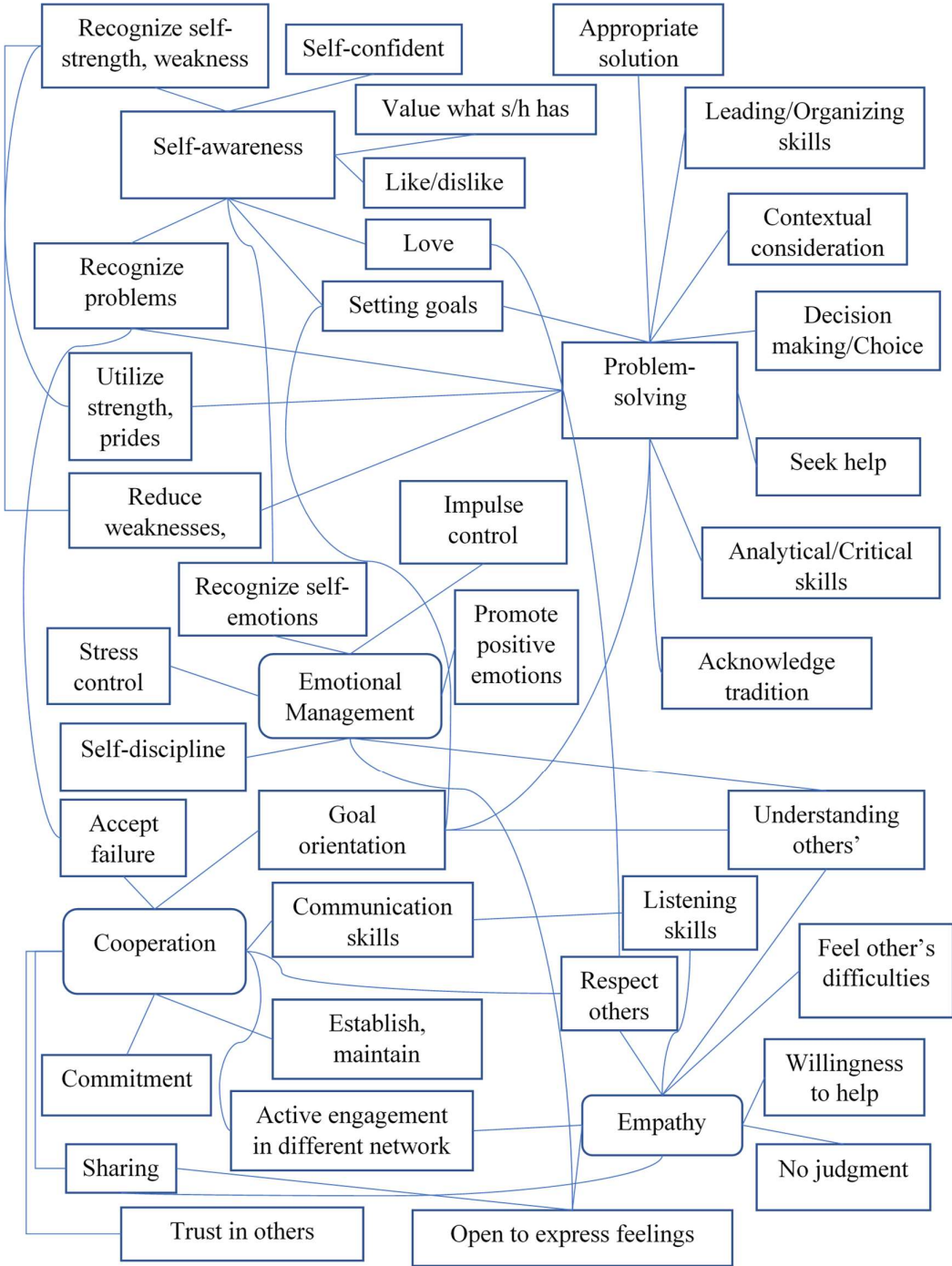


Figure 2. Five elements of Social and Emotional Learning

Being excited to involve in different social networks is a critical condition to promote empathy. This is an effective way for students to acquire “social knowledge” which deliberately helps students to be aware of the existing differences in society.

*“How your kids understand a thing if they never know what it is, let alone sympathy or empathy. Exposing themselves to societal diversity is the first start.” (T10)*

Teachers acknowledge the exposure, acknowledgment, and acceptance of social diversity as an important requirement for children’s skill acquisition. The diversity could be from simple things like dialect, accent, gesture, and lesson answers to more macro issues like familial condition, financial status, individual appearance, and abilities. Students simply, first and foremost need to know and respect. Furthermore, teachers seem to buy into the respect concept.

*“Personally, I reckon that love and respect can drive us to every good thing in life, then I teach my students to accept, respect, and love people first. Things are meant to be different all the time, little ones are likely to be attracted by differences, then it’s good to let them see the differences and respect them at the same time.” (T8)*

During the interviews, teachers provide a number of examples in which respect can be expressed outwardly, not only in thinking. Every single act or attitude can be described as respectful or not, for instance, saying ‘hi’ to each other, not stepping on the new mopping floor [by other cleaning duty group], listening attentively to others during lessons, and commenting politely on others’ mistakes.

Additionally, after all, being empathetic requires primary students to be brave, to be open to expressing themselves, and to share their understanding, feelings, and supporting intentions with others.

*“Many times, this year, my students [grade 2] come to me not knowing how to express their thoughts and support to their classmates [friends], one just some days ago asked me if he could call his best friend to tell how sorry he felt when knew about her loss of her beloved doggy” [Covid19 was still on precaution then students were not likely to come to see in person] (T5)*

**Emotional management** appears in every interview with teachers as a critical element of SEC. Primary school students who are socially and emotionally competent normally avoid an argument or direct confrontation with other classmates, or their friends, not get in a tantrum while dealing with any disappointment or uncomfortable situations.

*“This [throw a tantrum] occurs pretty often in grades 1 and 2, of course, students are small, and just start learning things. They want this and that and expect to be responded to like at home with family members, when not like their expectations, they instantly act out or get angry. Therefore, another key component students need to learn is self-discipline. This is simply understood that students know what is allowed, and not allowed in school, at home, or in any other social context. This directly relates to impulse control skills.” (T1)*

As a result, less socially and emotionally competent students are often seen as angry, upset, or burn-out during the day. Besides, teachers observe many students easily get upset when being chastised or criticized by their parents at home or during their time together at school. Learning to listen to their parents without feeling offended is a way to be socially and emotionally competent.

Stressful management is another element of SEC. The stressful situation could occur with primary students all the time. However, teachers figure out that a problem that comes to the fore in stress management is the difficulty to express or speak out in stressful circumstances.

*“Speak about what is wrong, how they are feeling is tremendously challenging to small students, you know, even we have the problem at times too, but cannot help them any if no idea of what is happening.” (T9)*

The articulation in stress management furthermore is affected by the student’s emotional calm ability. Teachers believe that if students can stay calm, for an instance, when being picked up, dealing with another annoying person, or dealing with a disappointment, then students can spare their thinking on the actual problem and find a way to solve it.

**Cooperation** is the next emerging theme that directly links to all the above-mentioned skills. During the interviews, rather than mentioning these important skills individually, teachers often relate other skills to describe a particular skill. Co-operation skills are built upon the previous skills, particularly as a key component in the social skills of any children, and critically requires much in emotional skill aspect. In general, students have low cooperation skills in primary school, however, they have started learning very basic things such as saying “sorry”, “thank you”, and “please” in conversation with others. Asking for permission when taking others’ stuff many times is mentioned as the first lesson taught in the primary soft skill lesson. An effective conversation is a key tool for

cooperating with work. Students who sound talkative, willingly engage in a different conversation and listen attentively to teachers and other classmates are socially and emotionally competent. Teachers believe that when students communicate well, they are likely to be accepted in different groups, have more productive contributions, and can reach a common agreement in a group. Besides, when students are happy in a group, they parallelly or sequentially establish friendly and healthy relationships with others. Making friends for primary school students can be either easy or difficult, according to the teachers, it depends much on students' ability to take part in a group in class or school.

Another contribution to cooperation comes from the active engagement of students in different networks. Experience always matters. The more groups students are in, the more experience they learn, including knowledge, skills, attitudes, and willingness.

*"Some students just always stick with a certain group, not willing to change at all."* (T9)

When students are in a different network, trust, sharing, and commitment are three highlighted traits students need to possess. Teachers report that having trust is the biggest advantage of young children. They normally trust everything teachers or parents tell them and trust in classmates and friends. However, this could be different for older students.

*"Oh, I see it clearly, it gets harder to tell students in grade 4 or 5 to do something than in grade 1 or 2. My students now [grade 5] seem to question me or other classmates again and again before they commence on an assignment."* (T7)

However, also dealing with a similar issue: *"That is a normal and natural development of children, the older, the wiser, they need to have a sceptical viewpoint, you know, so they can develop critical thinking later on, however, we need to teach them to distinguish good from bad, appropriateness from inappropriateness, and trust what/who can be trusted"* (T7)

**Sharing.** When students have trust in others, they are likely to be open to sharing and being shared.

*"I teach my students to be happy to give away what their friends need if possible. It's necessary to develop [this] from empathy, your friends may need this too, and he/she would be much happy to have it from your sharing"* (T9)

Sharing skill comes into practice when students are willing to share their learning materials, seat or play space, take turns to talk, listen, and avoid cutting off or interrupting

somebody. Sharing is also to confidently, and excitedly share their previous experience, either opinions or feelings and practice. Finally to be mentioned is the commitment to any activity that students are engaged in. Teachers describe this skill as staying active, and effective in their tasks either individually or collectively.

*“When assigning group work, I always try to design them the way that it requires both individual and group work. Students have to be disciplined, determined and dedicate themselves to fulfil either their task or group one to finally achieve the best result”* (T4)

Moreover, giving and keeping promises appear to be important lessons students have been learning in primary school.

*“Saying promises is beautiful, keeping them is much better. So, I do this so that my students can imitate. Everyone, especially young children often live up happily to their expectations and others’ promises”* (T7)

Keeping promises requires students not only to practice their strong willpower, and strict self-discipline but also to have strong empathy for others.

**Problem-solving.** Teachers highly agree that students do not have good skills in problem-solving, therefore this skill is one of the priorities in skill education. Apparently from teachers’ view that students need all the above-mentioned skills to effectively deal with any problematic issues, especially self-awareness and emotional management. Teachers mention that often students try to find a solution for a problem by themselves, but they need to consider their strengths, weaknesses, their possible feelings of pride, or shame.

*“To manage their pride or shame matters, students need to employ their emotional management effectively. Young children have experienced positive comments, appraisals, and compliments almost of their living time until the beginning of their primary education. It takes their time, effort, and skills to accept negative comments if such a thing happens, and to seek solutions. Properly recognizing problems is an important skill”* (T1)

*“A little girl in my class now [grade 2] has cried a few times this year when she gets a score lower than 8 [within a 10-point grading scale]. Getting a low score is not a problem, but mis-recognizing a problem is a problem”* (T2)

Besides, seeking help from capable people is also an effective strategy that teachers observe from SEC students when they face adversity. Either with an actual or imaginative problem, most primary school students turn to teachers, parents, or another adult for help.



Even though this is a typical phenomenon observed in young children, students still acknowledge it as an effective solution. Students are likely to cope with existing problems better when they know to turn to capable, trustable people for advice, support, or timely intervention.

*“The monitor [student as the leader] in my class always tries to be responsible and manage the class well, most of the time she could handle problems in the class when I am not there, but sometimes she waits for me to ask what she should do with friend A, or friend B” (T12)*

*“There is a student, for example, who was very honest telling me that he couldn’t find the correct answer for a math exercise, he asked his older brother for help. During the class tomorrow morning, he told me about that and explained more that “I had tried many ways to solve it, I was distressed then I asked my brother for help, otherwise, I think I couldn’t have slept the whole night”” (T7)*

Leading and organizational skills are also reported as necessary skills in many problematic situations that students have to deal with. There are several cases in their classes teachers observe that a group with a good and skilled leader seems to have fewer problems than others. Teachers assume that probably small issues are solved quickly in their group work before they become big problems observed by the teachers.

Contextual consideration and appropriateness are the next factors in problem-solving skills. Students are expected to be mindful of every element issue around a happening so that they are able to assess and reflect on the situation before deciding on the final solution.

*“I tell my students to put themselves in others’ shoes to understand why he/she reacted like that that time. Or in some lesson scenario, my students reflect that they could’ve not done something since a friend would’ve been hurt or embarrassed about the situation” (T11)*

Teachers especially emphasize the important skills of acknowledging traditions, community habits, and customs.

*“All the time, I infuse students with our positive traditional perspectives and introduce them to local customs though students might not understand I guess that is also a matter of fact of tradition which everyone follows first, try to comprehend later, or even never” (T6)*

Teachers assume that students’ choice and solution are appropriate if they align with their cultural norms. Therefore, cultural factors apparently should be included in SEE.

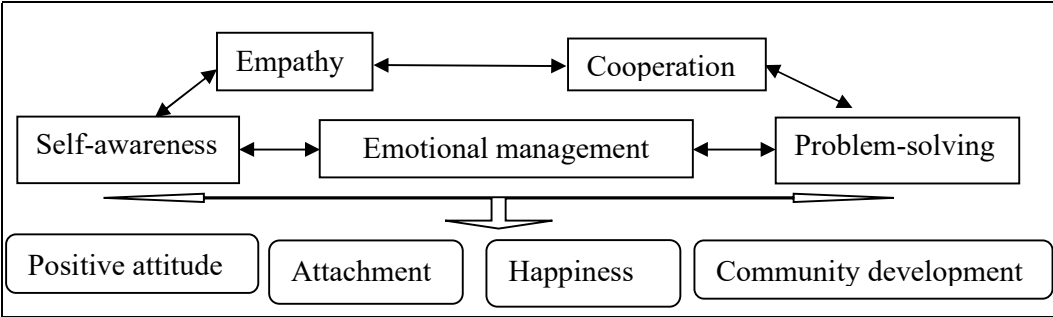
Developing creative thinking to generate multiple choices is mentioned by three teachers out of 9 homeroom teachers, however, later agreed upon by all.

*“Coping with a problem, working on a task or an assignment, I always require as many as possible solutions proposed. I want students to think in different ways, consider different solutions, and dare to propose any ideas they come up with” (T7)*

Teachers expect their students later to develop critical thinking and creative ability. Besides, this technique promotes not only intellectual skills but soft skills such as being confident to raise their voices and being courageous to think differently.

The last element that could contribute to problem-solving skills is the “time out” or “stay away” technique usage. Teachers report that they are often amazed at students’ skills of staying away or avoiding “others’ storm”. When their SEC students confront a classmate or friend in an awkward situation, rather than solving a problem with a fight, they are likely to say “We could stop it here” or “let it go, move on to the next task”. This technique is “super effective”, even for an adult to learn when coping with an uncomfortable and escalating problematic matter. Teachers believe that a “time out” could help students to collect themselves, manage emotions and figure out the best way to deal with them later.

**SEL as a part of life skills education aims at developing students’ positive attitudes, feelings of attachment, and happiness, and making the community better as seen in Figure 3**



*Figure 3. Social and Emotional Learning is a part of life skills education*

Primary school students learn very foundational skills for their current and long-future life. Teachers believe regardless of their young ages, and regardless of the activities students take part in, the aims of primary school education align with general education. In terms of social and emotional skills, firstly it aims at developing young people’s positive attitudes and behaviours. Positive attitudes mean thinking, considering, and remembering good and appropriate things to follow existing regulations and societal norms.

*“Finally, we want all of our children to have positive attitudes to whatever happenings in their life, by that I mean we always consider doing good things, and behave appropriately following laws and social norms” (T7)*

Meanwhile, positive behaviours are all acts of goodness, kindness, pleasantness, and helpfulness together with forgiveness and generosity.

To illustrate this concept, teachers expect their students to bear in mind the concept of love for everyone, and everything. Love here means that everyone, everything has its own nice and beautiful aspects to be appreciated and responded nicely to when it comes to any kind of interaction. A significant task of primary school students is to learn to see the beauty of everything, to recognize it, and to act on their good perceptions respectively. Particularly, students feel good and value the kind of person they are, and feel safe physically and emotionally in any social context they are in. Moreover, students are not to engage in anti-social and self-harming behaviours. In primary school education, there are a number of attitudes or actions that are considered taboo such as being over-confident, over-competitive, arrogant, bragging, jealous, or taking revenge. This learning bring students to the best positive conditions of their living and further learning journey.

Students’ positive attitudes and behaviours are prerequisites for their feeling of attachment and happiness. SEC is observed in students who have good and strong relationships with classmates, teachers, and family members. They are likely to get along and take part in a wide range of activities willingly and joyfully. They also volunteer to initiate, maintain, and develop healthy relationships in any involved social groups so that they can contribute and benefit best while living in harmony with others. Eventually, students have safe, comfortable, and successful life which is also teachers’ definition of a happy life for students who are socially and emotionally competent.

*“We teach our students very necessary things [lessons] so wherever they go, whenever, with whomever, they behave well, be loved, be cared by others, and finally they have very true feelings of attachment and happiness in their lives” (T8)*

The final and rigorous element of SEL mentioned by all teachers is students’ contribution to a good living community.

*“Not only teachers, but their grandparents, their parents want many good things for them [students], however, all in all, high score, good conduct report, successful career...are all to become a good citizen of the society, doing something meaningful for the society” (T5)*

By a good living community, teachers mean any social environment which directly and indirectly affects students' well-being and happiness. Teachers describe an ideal community for students to contribute to benefit from as full of affection, unity, happiness, and mutual and sustainable development.

In a nutshell, even though SEL is a very new concept at the beginning to the participants when they explain their understanding of social skills, emotional skills, and their interrelation with each other in education for primary school students, it turns out to be familiar, however not likely to easily put in a simple and well-covering structure. Nevertheless, SEL from teachers' perspectives can be summarized as follows: SEL is a process in which students apply their knowledge and experiences to recognize the capacity and emotions of themselves and others, manage their emotions, and have empathy for others so that they perform productive cooperation and effective problem-solving in any social activities to develop positive attitudes and behaviours, promote feelings of attachment and happiness, and contribute to a better community.

**Theme 2: Social and emotional learning plays a significant role in a wide range of daily activities of students and other involved people at school, family, and community**

As shown in Figure 4 (page 74), we recognize two categories of SEL benefits namely direct benefits to students and indirect benefits for their families, school, and community. SEL brings a number of benefits to primary school students, from every aspect of school life or general social life.

*First and foremost, as a part of life skill education, SEL develops students' basic and foundation skills for life.* Socially and emotionally competent students are those who possess self-awareness, emotional management, empathy, cooperation, and problem-solving skills at certain levels by their age. These skills provide students with favourable conditions to join their daily activities. In detail, SEL helps students participate effectively and happily in group activities, particularly in class and school activities. In general, SEC students are believed to have good mental and physical health because they have the competence to take care of themselves independently to some extent. For example, once students have self-awareness, they are aware of their strengths, weaknesses, and what they like, not like, and importantly they can in some simple context self-provide or self-protect. As a result, primary students gradually self-serve their own needs, and protect

themselves from risky or harmful situations. Besides, a healthy body and mind together with social and emotional skills help students to be ready and willing to join educational activities provide in primary school. This means that students have the best chance to expose themselves to any available social context. Teachers believe that together with kindergarten ages, primary school ages are golden ages for children's development. Students in these ages absorb and learn new things in every minute of their lives. Particularly, by actively and effectively engaging in social activities, students establish healthy relationships with others. This is a significant landmark as the first opportunity for students to initiate attachment with non-family members. Schools, in general, are designed to be the best healthy, meaningful social environment for young people to learn and develop their basic life competence. Having a healthy relationship in schools plays the most important role in that social context. Teachers believe that it guarantees students not only a happy and meaningful time in school but also long-term benefits in their further education and future life.

***Secondly, SEC helps to improve students' academic learning.*** Even though academic achievement is not much emphasized in primary education, it is the foundation either for constructing academic knowledge or learning competence. Primary school students are in their first years of formal education, and having academic learning skills is a critical requirement. Teachers believe that with SEC, students quickly recognize their learning interests, and they are to adopt and develop the best approaches to achieving their learning goals. Besides, students with positive attitudes to learning, are willing to learn from mistakes, be open to learning from others and have empathy to help others in turn. SEL helps students to be confident, persistent, and well-organized when dealing with difficult learning tasks. When students perceive a task as a challenge and are determined to work it out, they learn the most. Additionally, with a wide range of social and emotional competencies, especially the advancement of language skills and cooperation skills, students' intellectual capacity is promoted significantly. In turn, it provides a cognitive foundation to adapt and develop further SE skills. Therefore, these iterative processes promote students' abilities so they can achieve their best potential.

***Thirdly, the benefit of SEL for students is related to experiential and practical competence inside and outside the school context.***

Teachers report experiential activities as new and important activities in primary school in which students actively engage, learn, practice, and acquire a great deal of non-

academic but practical and meaningful skills including cooking, growing trees, shopping, fixing things, or designing clothes or inner furniture. Teachers observe from these activities that SEC students are keen on a variety of activities, enjoy them, and always try to acquire certain skills throughout their experiential time. These students also tend to be more creative and successfully apply or combine experiences when dealing with new tasks. Therefore, students are believed to perform well and are likely to cope with real challenges better in their actual life outside school.

In general, teachers find benefits of SEL in almost every aspect of the activity of primary school students. Particularly, teachers strongly believe social and emotional skills in each activity of students interact, promote, and complement each other so that students reach their best potential during their primary education and further.

As SEL contributes greatly to developing students' competence, it indirectly benefits other people and systems that students engage in their daily activities. Classroom management is the first highlighted in teachers' views of the SEL in the classroom. Classroom management here relates to every element inside the classroom that directly or indirectly affects the orderedness, supportive and friendly atmosphere of a class. There are several factors in which teachers see the significant impact of SEC. First, competent students present strong compliance with class regulations. Besides, they are likely to volunteer to maintain and help other classmates to follow flexibly and comfortably. Teachers observe this phenomenon, particularly in highly self-disciplined students who not only acknowledge well the existing rules but manage themselves to follow them properly and help the rule maintenance.

*“We can see this [self-discipline] clearly from the second semester of grade 1. Even though they have help from parents, by themselves, they try to be on time and gather quickly in-class activities, for example, form a group. In particular, if you see grade 1 students maintain the quietness, or take turns to speak, listen to other carefully during the lessons, this is amazing” (T10)*

*“Young children have many questions, full of curiosity, so it is important to ask, but it is more important to know when can ask. SEC students can manage this well.” (T4)*

Secondly, students with SEC establish and maintain good relationships with classmates and their teachers, either homeroom teachers or lesson teachers. This significantly contributes to a friendly, comfortable, and supportive classroom atmosphere. Students

have carefree feelings, they want to go to class, want to see friends and teachers in class every day, excited to learn and learn well. This guarantees a happy time at school for everyone. Furthermore, with SEC, in a good class, students feel engaged and ready to have teamwork with others and properly follow teachers' instructions. As a result, students develop stronger friendships or teamwork relationships, eventually promoting every relevant activity.

*“I love to see young students hurry to the group in teams. They literally run to their favourite teammates, start on the assignment as quick as they can as if they have been waiting for long to together thrive and shine” (T2)*

In addition, when students are socially and emotionally competent, it saves much time to organize any activities in class. The spare time could be spent on other necessary and additional instructions.

*“Organize group activities is always a challenge, especially for small children, time-consuming is my biggest concern. However, when there are many good students, it helps a lot” (T1)*

Another benefit is directly on teachers. As an important result of good classroom management, teachers report that they would feel much less stressed when having these students [with SEC].

*“They not only perform well but also help me out to manage others, having few of them I feel like I have more arms to arrange things faster, more legs to run to every corner more quickly” (T6)*

After all, it comes to a big influence on teaching and learning quality.

*“Literature or Maths lesson in my class [grade 2] is just a piece of cake if I have many students with SEC” (T5)*

Even though academic results are not much emphasized, the results are well-presented after an academic year as proof of students' achievement. They may be referred to during the future learning journey of students.

As every student is counted, and students with SEC contribute greatly to their class management, their school sequentially observes a number of advantages. First of all, students with SEC are not only active in their own class but participate in a variety of

activities outside of their classroom. These students, either as individual students or class representatives, help to connect classes in a school, especially classes in the same segment.

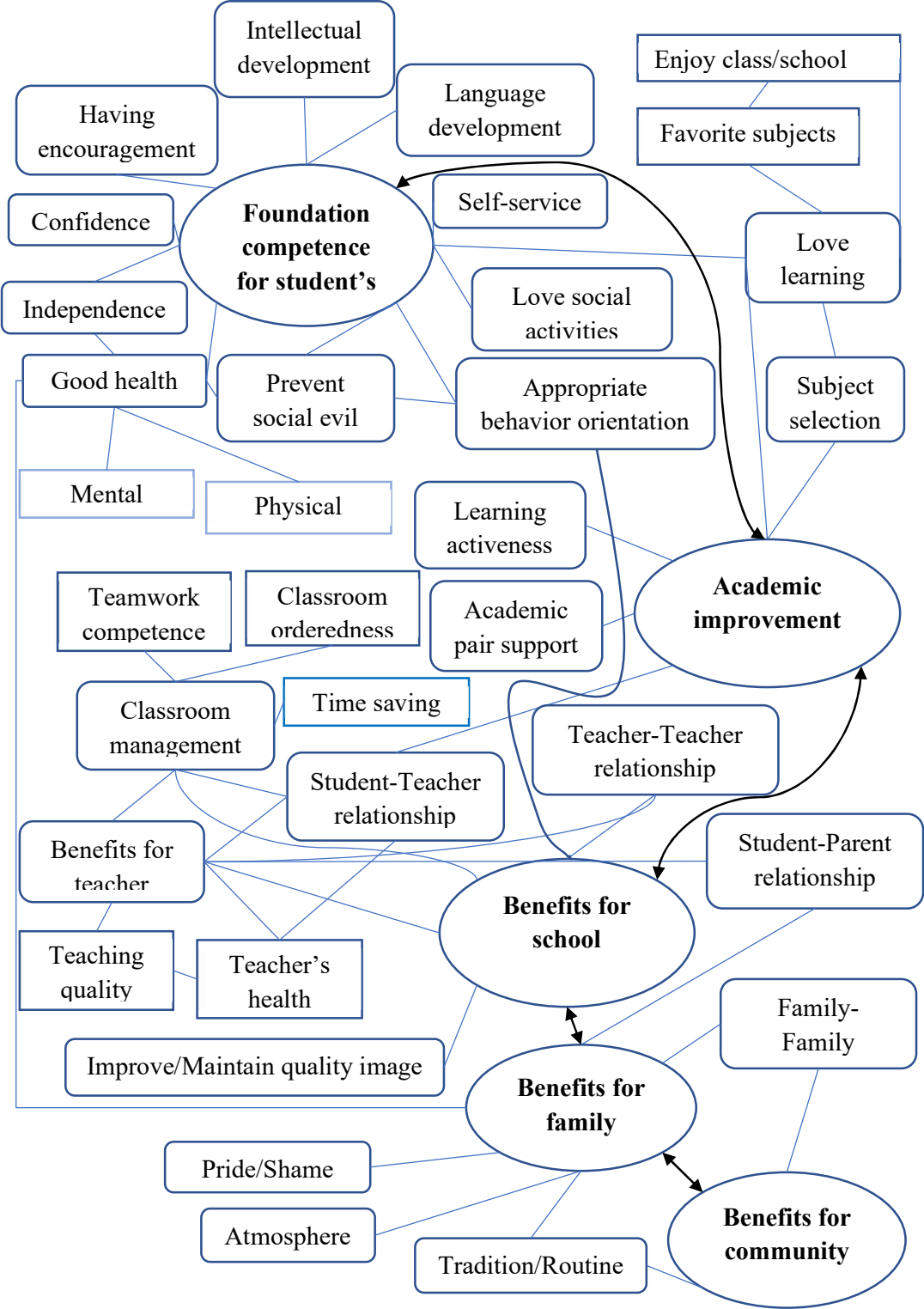


Figure 4. Roles of Social and Emotional Learning



*“My class [grade 2] gathers with other classes in the grading segment and performs the best this year. Students in this segment almost behave well which builds up a very healthy, strong big group” (T2)*

Additionally, teachers from different classes, segments, leadership members, and other school staff are likely to coordinate better in these cases since they acknowledge a suitable and common way to promote students’ competence and they believe that it is possible to co-work for the student’s development in the whole school.

*“I remember I did have one for a while stressful times and unfriendly relationship with other teachers, and even some big disappointment with leadership people. I was much younger, and I had a very hard time managing students in my class, I think they were all stubborn kids to me at that time. I blamed teachers of other classes with well-behaved students, I blamed the principal to appoint me to this class or giving me unhelpful support. Now, I know what the problems were, it is about my students and how I help them to behave well” (T9)*

Teachers are more likely to come to each other to learn how to promote SEC for students in their classes. It means that teachers can easily recognize the difference in class with SEC students. It encourages them to be more persistent in SEL or life skill education in general. This phenomenon generates a common spirit of togetherness for students’ SE well-being and happy school. After all, as a direct result of successful classroom management and achievement, in general, the collective achievement of the school is guaranteed. Schools establish and maintain their published quality image in either educational achievement or environment.

According to teachers, families benefit from their children’s SEC. It is unexpected when teachers discuss the benefits of SEL with their students’ families. Apart from the teaching-learning relationship, teachers believe that they care for and educate their students as their own brothers, sisters, and children at home. As such, they find the relation between the advantages of students with SEC in school and at home.

*“Students with SEC, I can see immediately how well they behave at home too, that is a huge benefit since I also have 2 kids, I know how it is like” (T2)*

With life skills and academic achievement, which are directly impacted by SEC, students bring home either pride or shame. If students behave well and achieve favourable scores in their learning subjects, parents are satisfied and proud. Otherwise, parents are observed

to be disappointed, sad, and angry at times. In both cases, parents would pay more attention to their students' learning and practice, and they contact teachers and other parents more often, exchanging about their students' learning improvement and new attainment. As a result, not only individual parents but the whole group of parents in one class would be influenced.

*“Even though parents state that they don't emphasize academic scores, they are still extremely proud of their children if they do well. They would reply and chat chit in Parent group actively, sharing and advising/consulting teachers and other parents on supporting their children's learning” (T4)*

Students with SEC are self-service capable and independent children at home. Teachers observe these two most important traits tremendously impact the relationship and atmosphere in children's families. Families are more likely to have a joyful time together, everyone enjoys others' presence and is willing to share, listen to, support, and respect each other. Everyone, therefore, finds joy, peace, and value in their family. Consequently, everyone in the family potentially supports students effectively in their learning tasks, either at school or at home.

*“Having well-behaved children at home, grandparents, parents, and siblings always feel good with them, family atmosphere is always cheerful and joyful” (T8)*

*Many parents told us that they can't teach students at home anything since their children are stubborn, not attentive, and not listening, ...His sister even cried twice or more when being assigned to help him with school work” (T1)*

Interestingly, teachers believe that their students' attitudes, skills, and behaviours at their homes contribute strongly to strengthening or diminishing the neighbourhood in their residence. That is the teachers' viewpoint on the impact of students' SEC on their living community. These points of view rise from the instant influence of schools and families as entities of any society. Teachers reckon that schools contribute positively to the community when they accomplish their educational duties. These duties concern much on students' life skills, academic improvement, and experiential abilities. Meanwhile, families in the community play the primary role in how healthy, active, and positive a community is.

*“Always, how schools and resident families act will reflect the image of their community. Indirectly, how a community develops is about our children's behaviours”(T5)*

Accordingly, traditions, social norms, routines, and temporary developments, events are established, maintained, and galvanized by every individual in the community, however, young people with SEC are expected to contribute greatly to them all.

*“Our students, young citizens are always important characters in communal life. As such, if they have high SEC, the benefits would be very apparent” (T10)*

### **Theme 3: Social and Emotional learning is integrated into every activity of students**

SEL is needed for the whole long day of students therefore it is integrated into every activity, in school, at home, and in any other social context. However, teachers spend most of their time with their students at school, and they explicitly explain their views on SEL through school activities mainly, as seen in Figure 5 (page 79).

***Firstly, SEL helps students achieve better in their academic learning, and vice versa, academic subjects are also the means to promote SEL.***

Teachers claim that all elements of SEL are covered in these subjects, especially Literature, Civic Education, and Experiential activities.

The first class of any subject learning is about discipline for the class and for the individual. In primary education, students have 10 compulsory subjects of those Arts, Foreign language, and Physical Education with classroom teachers, and all other six subjects with homeroom teachers. Therefore, the orderliness and general discipline of students are managed by the homeroom teachers.

*“Going to a class, see how students behave, you can tell who the [homeroom] teacher is. We try to discipline students in the best way, but we have our own styles” (T3)*

Most of the primary school classes remain quiet and in good order even with the absence of teachers. Teachers are aware of infusing life skills and SEL, particularly in every subject, however, Literature, Civic Education, Nature, and Society intensively address this goal.

**Literature is named as the Vietnamese language** in primary school aims to help students use Vietnamese fluently to communicate effectively in life and study well in other educational subjects and activities; forming and developing literary capacity, an expression of aesthetic capacity; at the same time, fostering thoughts and feelings for students to develop spiritually and personality. Within the general aims of the subject, teachers explicitly report that by improving vocabulary, students learn how to write and

how to read, and sequentially, students express themselves and understand others better. In this subject, students not only improve their language skills but other supportive communication skills such as non-verbal language, emotion reading, listening, and making choices for appropriate vocabulary. These competencies help students to easily engage in social activities where they further develop other important social skills. Moreover, the main materials of the Vietnamese language are descriptive sentences, short poems, and short stories. These materials normally depict the beauty of nature, people, and their acts. Through these, students identify different subjects, people, and events in life; recognize the good, the bad, the strengths, and the weaknesses. In turn, students reflect on themselves, what are the similarities, what are the differences, and how they act in the same situation. Therefore, apart from being aware of others, and aware of themselves, students learn to have appropriate attitudes, and emotions and respectively react to certain incidents in social events.

**Civic Education is the most important subject at all levels of education.** In primary education, this subject is specifically named Morality. This subject aims to educate students about the value of self, family, homeland, and community to form the basic habits and routines in learning and daily life according to ethical standards and provisions of the law. Therefore, all social and emotional skills, together with many other life skills are covered fully or partly in this subject. Regarding SEL particularly, this subject addresses the most compared to others. For example, in Grade 2, students learn the lesson on “Express your emotions” in which students know about different “colours” of emotion and how to manage negative emotions; or “Seeking for help”, “Admit your mistakes and correct it”; in Grade 3 “Responsible for your actions”, practice responsible decision-making skills; Grade 4 with lessons on “Friendship”, “Regarding the old and loving the young”, helping them to share, help and empathize with others; or a lesson on “Cooperating with people around” in Grade 5 to practice cooperation skills with friends, teachers and people in activities at class, school, family and community. The two first lessons in Grade 1 are “Happy family” and “Regarding and Caring for grandparents and parents” [In Book collection: Horizon of creativity, there are different sets of textbooks to choose from in school, depending on institutional choice]. Importantly, these topics are not singly taught in one grade but mentioned and referred to in every grade so that gradually students have a broader understanding and have a chance to practice skills learned in previous grades.

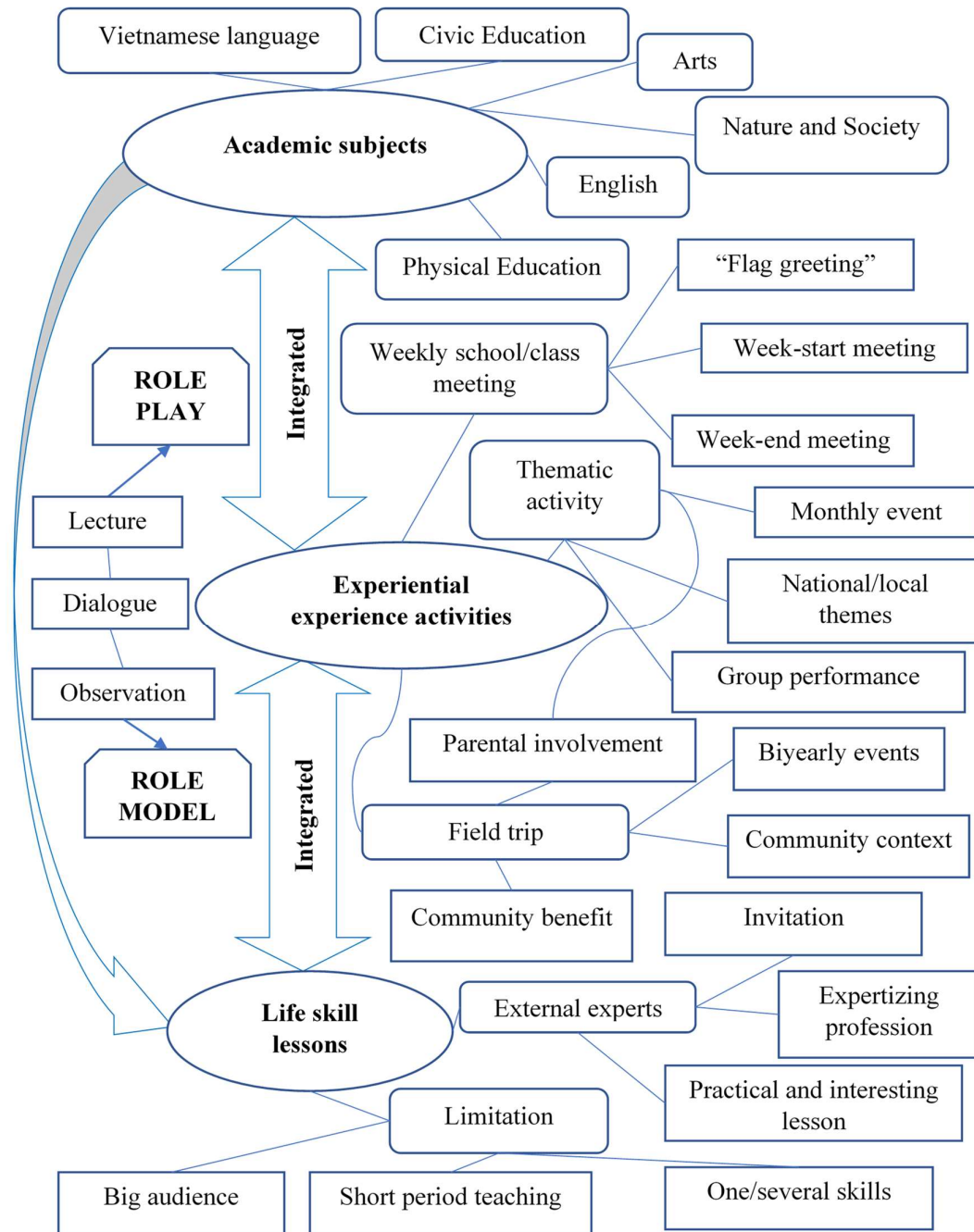


Figure 5. Social and Emotional Learning Integration

**Nature and Society** as one subject in Grades 1, 2, and 3 or History and Geography as two separate subjects in Grades 4, and 5 contribute to several aspects of SEL. These subjects aim at providing students with knowledge of family, school, resident community, human and health, plant and animal, the Earth and skies. Students obtain a basic knowledge of society from their small circle of family to their local community and understand their health, and their living in relation to natural and societal elements.

Therefore, students are believed to learn through every lesson some or several skills of SEL, especially self-awareness, empathy, establishing and maintaining relationships with others, and managing emotions well in any social interaction. From Grade 1, students learn about their health and how to protect and improve their health, for example, in the lesson “I know to self-protect”, students will be aware of a risky situation, and act accordingly to avoid risks or to seek help; in the lesson “Lunar New Year holiday”, students learn traditional customs so they respect the traditions and behave appropriately during the event; or in the lesson “Occupations of my family’s members”, students know and talk about their family members’ different jobs, meanwhile get acquainted with different jobs in society. This is believed a way to teach students about social diversity.

In general, every lesson in three subjects Literature, Civic Education, and Nature and Society could be examples of how students acquire knowledge and practice skills for SEC.

It is also agreed among the teachers that some of SEC are developed in all other subjects. For example, in Physical Education class, students also learn more about how to maintain and improve health as well as protect themselves from physical harm, especially releasing overwhelming emotions with appropriate practice. In Foreign language classes, there are some communication skills taught like in the Vietnamese language, however, students approach further international knowledge and attitudes. For example, students recognize some popular foreign names and are aware of children from different areas of the world with their appearance, their voice, and their lifestyles (Empathy, Cooperation). In Arts, students learn about the beauty in their lives through music or fine arts. Arts teachers recognize the benefit as well as the need in the subject as a condition to express themselves including their characteristics, their interests, and their talents; especially students seem to manage and promote well their emotional control ability.

Through all academic subjects, SEL is included in students’ learning content, however, the learning of Grade 1 and Grade 2 contain more SEL content than Grades 3, 4, and 5. Especially, in Grades 4 and 5, there are more intensive academic knowledge and practical skills that students need to acquire, the learning also requires students to have good basic life skills as well as SEL from Grades 1, 2, and 3 to continue successfully in later grades. Meanwhile, as reported by either homeroom teachers or classroom teachers, the formers have more time, activities, and relevant teaching to teach SEL to students than the latter, however, classroom teachers have many benefits from students’ SEC, which have been

built and promoted by homeroom teachers, and they also pay attention to maintaining their students' SEC.

**SEL integrated into Experiential activities.** Experiential activity is a new and compulsory module in primary school since the academic year 2020-2021. It focuses on self-discovery activities, and self-discipline activities to develop relationships with friends, teachers, and family members. Social activities and learning about some careers close to students are also organized with age-appropriate contents and forms. Even though this is a new module and is turning to the second year of implementation, teachers believe that it replaces life skill education, extra-curriculum, and after-school activities that existed in the previous curriculum; and covers all non-academic learning activities in school. However, it is believed that SEL elements together with many other significant life skills are partly or fully addressed in all three forms of these activities namely Regular school/class meetings; Thematic activities on monthly basis; and Excursions on a particular program or event basis. In Regular meetings, students mainly listen to the weekly report, assessment, and coming week's guidelines for their academic learning and their conduct of discipline. Meanwhile, thematic activities take place on monthly basis with the themes connected to highlighted events of the country, the students' resident community, or the school. During a thematic event, there are a number of different activities to be organized such as talent competitions and performances in academic learning, sports, and arts. Therefore, students have significant chances to learn to express themselves, understand others in certain circumstances, experience actual inter-, and intra-personal skills, develop empathy, and broaden their social network as well as improve existing friendships. Field trips are also taken place once or twice per academic year in which students are taken outside of school, and join their community life, for example visiting historical places, and economical sites, visiting poor or veteran families or performing some for-community-advantage events. All schools acknowledge these field trips as beneficial and meaningful to students, especially in the social skill development aspect. However, schools in urban areas normally have better conditions to organize these trips. All teachers believe that financial conditions and parental support are two important elements to making these trips, and schools in rural areas report having more difficulties in these terms. Compared to the former curriculum, which is still enacted for Grades 3, 4, and 5, the new curriculum with in-detailed textbooks and more time

allotment, teachers perceive them as favourable conditions to implement more effective non-academic skill education and practice for students.

**SEL is integrated into external life skill class.** An external life skill class is defined as a class specifically designed for one or several life skills learning and is delivered by external life skill teachers or experts. Schools partner with a life skill centre in the town so that the centre's teachers could pay several visits to teach students life skills at a particular time during an academic year. During these classes, thanks to well-designed lessons, either of content or presentation, students concentrate on skill learning from theory to practice and how to repeat to establish their daily routines. Teachers particularly report that they also learn a lot from these expert lessons.

*“I am excited to observe or attend the class with my students too, I learn a lot the way they [external teachers] choose skill contents and design the lessons animatedly and visually attractive, as well as the way they communicate with students so that my students don't feel shy, instead they are quickly involved, excited to learn the skills” (T2)*

*“They [external teachers] transfer the lessons for us to teach by ourselves, but I don't feel confident to do so frequently” (T5)*

However, the topics or skills addressed in these classes are limited since the experts just can visit a school a few times per year, and each time, the audience is the whole grade segment, e.g., 3 grade 2 classes altogether. The topics, therefore, are chosen as significantly emergent concerns from school, community, or social needs. Nowadays, popular and repeated topics include “Traffic safety”, “School violence prevention”, “Anti-bullying”, “Self-protection”, and “Emotional management”. These classes benefit students to some major extent, however, there is still a wide range of necessary skills students need to be provided during their primary education. Schools also acknowledge the help from external life skill education experts, they cannot afford to do so often for the financial, and location conditions of the school. Therefore, comparing urban with rural schools, it is clear to see the frequency difference of life skills expert visits. In urban schools, experts can pay three or four visits during an academic year, meanwhile, in rural schools, the number is one or two. It is observed that in private sections, the visit is even much more frequent than in urban public schools.

**Integration methods.** Role models and role play are two core methods of infusing SEL in primary school. Through academic learning, experimental activities, and external life



skill learning, students acquaint themselves with different figures, characters, and people either in legends, in history, or present life who possess good characteristics, personalities, or heroic acts so that students are inspired to follow whom they look up to.

*“In students’ textbooks, there are always different characters with specific names playing different roles in a story or a scenario, students are excited to learn about these characters, and even during maths, students are still able to imitate “bạn Hà” in their book [‘bạn’ is a pronoun used to call a friend, ‘Hà’ is a popular female name]” (T3)*

*“I feel that my students [grade 1] are growing together with a group of friends from their textbooks since they accompany my students in any learning at school, even at home” (T9)*

*“I believe role model is the principal method to infuse SEL to students, as well as any other life skills, and we [teachers themselves] are the first and the most important models at all time” (T8)*

Lecture, dialogue, and observation are three main specific methods that help students approach new role models in their surroundings or their learning materials.

Role play plays an important role in SEL or life skill learning of students since students act to illustrate what and how they learn from other role models. Teachers believe only in this manner; young students can learn and develop their competence; learning by doing. Through all long day activities, students play on roles of others, and their roles as being “good people”, “good students”, and “a good daughter/son” that they wish to be, learn to be and are expected to be by teachers, parents or any other trustworthy adults. Therefore, the activities of learning and playing during school time are activities for becoming competent students. Being “some good/bad one”, and being themselves bring excitement, confidence, and meaningful presentation to students. They perceive clearly how people act in different situations, “to be in someone’s shoes”, how they feel in these circumstances, how are the results and feelings after all of doing good/bad things, and how they can do differently in another scenario or actual life situations. Students also take these chances to recognize their own interests, advantages, disadvantages, and what strategies are effective for them in dealing with various situations. Playing a variety of roles with different characteristics and actions is a practical experience of social knowledge, attitude, and emotion.

*“Textbooks, just like our social life, present to students either righteous or villain characters, students have a chance to play either of them. Especially small students, they*

*decline to play bad ones at times, which means that they have a certain understanding and attitude towards different characters” (T4)*

However, it is reported that regardless of how practically meaningful role playing is in school to students, schools do not schedule the necessary time for these activities, either in rural or urban schools. Two main perceived reasons for the lack are the time allotment for delivery of other academic subjects, and the lack of supportive facilities. However, teachers in urban schools report their problems are less serious than in rural areas, thanks to external financial support, particularly from students’ parents. For example, parents could fund computer system or software purchases, sponsor an activity or a visit to a place outside school, outside their town, therefore students in this area experience more favourable conditions provided for their education activities.

Even though teachers report their perceptions of SEL methods mainly integrated into school activities, they believe that SEL must be experienced, infused, and practiced at home, and in broader social contexts.

*“SEL is needed for every single life activity of children, home and community must play important roles in developing this competence” (T4)*

Teachers also perceive parents as critical partners to support the effectiveness and continuity of SEL.

*“Even the children spend much time in school with us, they still spend more time with their family, exposing themselves to many other social interactions outside schools, we [teachers/schools] is not the only sources of their SEL, we need parents to follow up, to update and fulfil necessary education when students are not in school” (T5)*

*“role models are everyone in children life, especially in primary school age, teachers and family members are instrumental moral models to look up to and copy the appropriate behaviours” (T7)*

However, teachers reckon that parental styles and lifestyles, and their roles to children at home could either promote or hinder their students’ SEL progress.

Together with school and family as the main parties who are responsible for children’s education, the role of the community in SEL is broad. The community provides environmental and educational materials for children’s learning, including its support for school and family functioning, it also tests students’ achievement and competencies.

However, regardless of their expectation, teachers report that community support is not sufficient. Particularly, teachers in the urban area report detrimental effects of modern life in their community more often than teachers in rural areas do. Modern life is not necessary to indicate city life, otherwise, it describes a present life with the utilization of the Internet, modernization, and industrialization processes happening in every corner of the country.

### **Contradiction**

However, during the SEL integration, teachers identify a number of conflicting situations. First of all, most homeroom teachers try to infuse SEL in academic teaching as much as possible, but at times, it causes chaos in class. Students find themselves confused about what they are learning and what to focus on, and sometimes teachers are out of control when students react unexpectedly to interpersonal interaction. That is why teachers do not see the effectiveness of SEL, meanwhile, students and parents complain about the disturbance in academic learning of the students. Teachers reckon that the benefits of soft skill learning or SEL are not easy to be measured, therefore students and parents at times are not patient to accept SEL in class integration.

Second, teachers are fully aware of the importance of social and emotional skills for students' academic achievement and life success, they are willing to implement them, but without expertise in the field, they are not always confident, and apparently, they do not do it well.

*“I did try to give some lessons to develop SEL for students, but I just can lecture them, it is boring and not practical for young children, I know, sometimes with some videos from YouTube, but still not working much” (T5)*

Third, classroom teachers report having a strong willingness to infuse SEL or any other soft skills in their teaching, but they do not have sufficient time and expertise for it. Meanwhile, homeroom teachers assert that classroom teachers, such as Physical Education or English teachers, otherwise have more chances to deliver SEL to students. However, this assumption is not agreed upon by the classroom teachers. They believe that they can help students with their soft skills, but it consumes a lot of time and effort.

*“We do help students develop their SEL in Physical Education classes, but just within designated contents and schedules. Young children are excited about everything, especially outdoor activities, it takes almost half of a unit (half of 35 minutes) to set them in line; monitoring them to a set of movements, to practice them properly is always*

*challenging. For example, in the lesson “Acquaint with basketball”, students are always excited, they run around and play with the ball, we can teach them to discipline themselves, it helps a lot but takes time and effort” (T11)*

Fourth, students in grades 1 and 2 have more time and their academic learning materials provide more opportunities for SEL than in grades 4 and 5. Teachers mention the emphasis on academic learning in the latter as a reason. However, teachers are concerned about the development traits and SEL needs for grades 4 and 5, for them, every student’s age should have respective training for SEL so that they have proper development.

*“I have a feeling that we didn’t pay enough attention to SEL for grades 4, 5. The academic workload in the last grades of primary school seems to be heavy, and students, teachers, and parents are all focusing on how the students complete all with good results.” (T11)*

Fifth, all stakeholders in the school, at home, or outside society are role models and participate in SEL, however, teachers do not see the coherent and well-planned connections between the parties, in all aspects of content, method, and form of education.

*“We observe that at home children are over-indulged, their parents, especially grandparents [in Vietnam, it is typical that primary students are taken care of by both parents and grandparents] always try to do everything for the children, oblige what the children want to do, to eat, to play. At times, at home students do not follow any discipline, and these phenomena diminish the effectiveness of SEL provided in school, students even decline to go to school, especially after long holidays, for example.” (T1)*

#### **Theme 4: Factors that influence Social and Emotional Learning implementation**

Five factors influence SEL integration. These factors either promote or hinder the process of SEL in primary schools. Therefore, the following part presents the advantages and disadvantages of SEL integrations in primary education based on these five factors, namely Students’ psychological development traits, Teachers, Parents (Students’ caregivers), School leaders, Community, and current social happenings (Figure 6, page 88).

##### **Factors from students**

The developmental characteristics of primary school students strongly impact SEL. Primary students aged 6 to 10 are in their first years of actual social life outside of their family house. Most of the students are healthy, active, full of energy, and have a big curiosity about things. Therefore, in primary schools, students are easy to be engaged in physical and outdoor activities. They are excited about new things, including a new

school, classrooms, classmates, teachers, textbooks, and uniforms. They are ready to learn about everything they like in school. Students pay attention and learn fast what they are interested in. Furthermore, students mostly obey and attentively listen to teachers and parents or caregivers at home. In particular, students show strong respect and affection to their homeroom teachers. As a result, primary students always want to comply with all regulations and perform well in any educational activities so that they can please their teachers. Especially, students in “selected classes” (students are selected as having better learning achievement or behaviours compared to the average population of school) present even some certain SEL. They behave well and learn quickly any skills taught at school and home. Teachers find that promoting SEL to “good students” [who already have foundation life skills] has a lot of advantages. This requires students to have certain SEL supports at home and in their preschool education.

However, working with young students in primary school has challenges. Even though students have gone through preschool education, primary school is their first full-time, formal learning with rigorous schedules. Students, especially in grades 1 and 2, are shy, nervous, and even feel sick often to engage in class/school activities. They need a great deal of care emotionally and physically to get on well with academic learning and strict school timelines. Moreover, students cannot express themselves at times since they still lack vocabulary. This causes difficulties for both teachers and students to engage students in supportive or regular school activities.

### **Factors from teachers**

The above-mentioned difficulties from students’ elements relate to difficulties from teachers as the second factor. Firstly, teachers report having little or not at all training in life skills, SEL, and even children’s psychological development.

*“We have a 3-credit course in pedagogical university about children’s psychological development 20 years ago, I think all I know about my student’s development traits now is from my own practical experiences. I don’t have another time to be updated practically about this matter, especially how to apply this understanding to education” (T2)*

*“We actually have kind of Professional continuous development training every summer, but all are in theory. Life skill education has been mentioned every year, but also not much practical knowledge, we almost do know how to bring this to our teaching” (T10)*

“The whole grade section, there only 1-2 teachers go for the training, then personally many of us don’t have chance to the training” (T1)

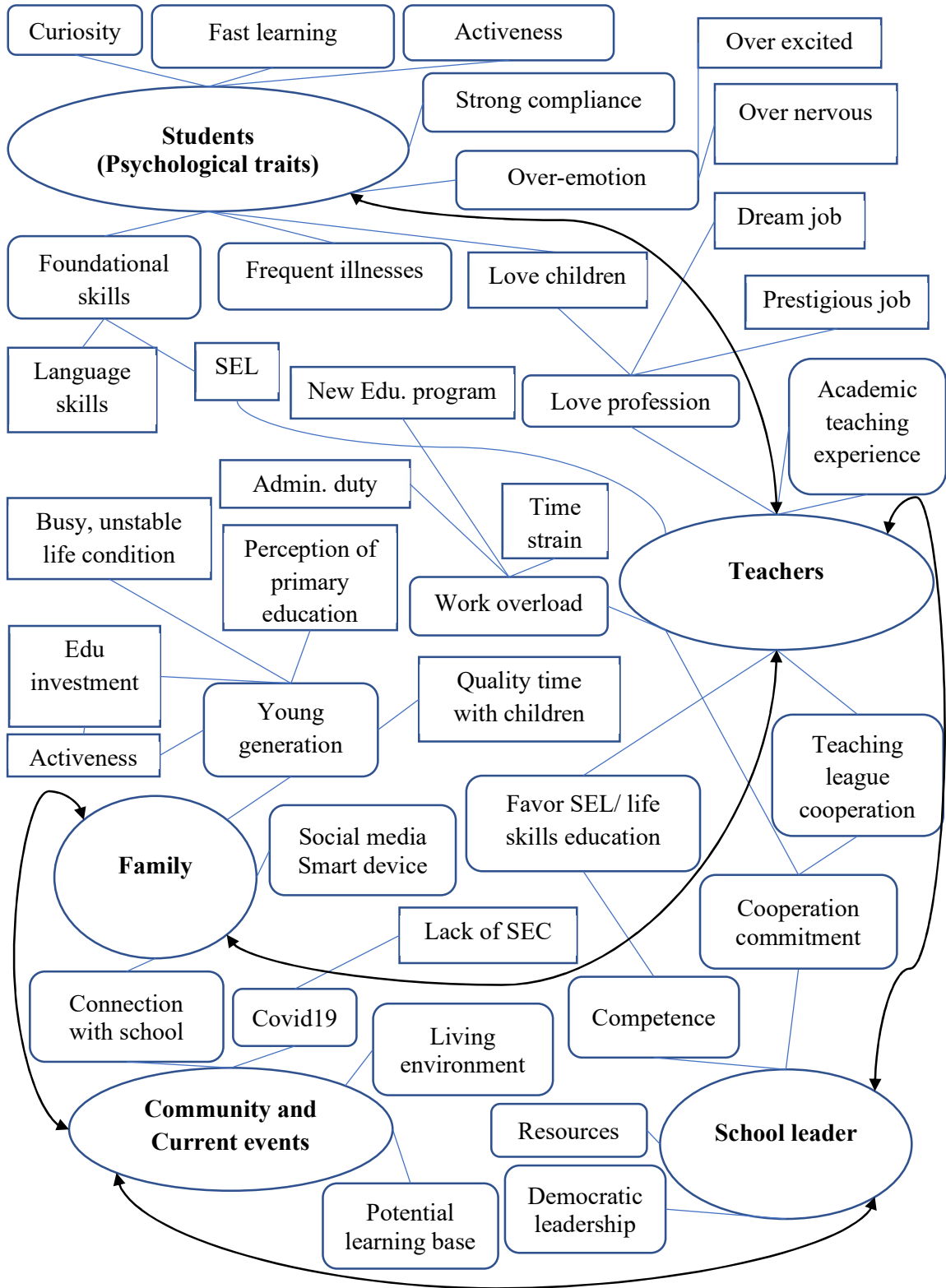


Figure 6. Influential Factors of Social and Emotional Learning Integration

Teachers know about SEL mainly from their own reading, not from any formal training provided by schools or the Ministry of Education and Training.

Secondly, there is a number of school tasks that teachers need to finish in a day. In the case of homeroom teachers, they have to finish all tasks themselves from academic teaching, and education activities, including planning, calling for sponsors, organizing events, preparing and distributing students' assessments or reports, and many other administrative tasks. On a weekday, teachers spend 35 units (35 minutes/unit) with students, they spend any other time left, even on weekends to cover all the tasks. Overall, teachers feel stressed and always lack time to cover all necessary school duties. Particularly, with the enactment of the new general curriculum for the academic year 2020-2021, teachers find themselves in bigger challenges since they are the primary "army" to make the national education aims and requirements into practice. It is all done by teachers from choosing textbooks for every subject or activity among several different sets of them to how to implement the curriculum, how to teach these subjects, and how to organize school activities according to the designated timelines. Currently, (the year 2022) teachers are in the 2<sup>nd</sup> year of adopting and developing their teaching, and they are still in a stressful and difficult time. Teachers believe that it takes five years to complete enacting the new curriculum in primary education, but it would take years to establish things in stable and effective operation. In addition, being aware more of the importance of SEL, teachers reckon that they lack this competence themselves in cases

*"Primary teacher is always in the highest stressful job, we know that we get used to it after more than 10 years, but it does not mean that we feel nothing with the workload. Burnout, depression, anger, we have them all at times, but just try to control as much as we could in front of students or their parents, but we're suffering"* (T4)

*"SEL is needed for students, and for us too. I was in pressure and heavy stress almost throughout a year in the very first years of my position, now, after 12, it is no longer that bad, but I think I still need mine [SEC] to help it on students"* (T6)

Therefore, a lack of understanding of students' psychological development, stressful working schedule, and low SEC all together contribute to teachers' lack of confidence in SEL implementation.

However, teachers perceive some aspects which are their strengths, motivate and strengthen them to overcome the above-mentioned disadvantages. Becoming a primary

school teacher was the first choice of all participants, even though they were aware of the irrespective balance between high requirements of admission (university entrance conditions), long, hard and intensive training, and job performance with job reimbursement/salary. Teachers respect their job and believe in the value of the job itself than their income. Secondly, also an additional reason for the above element, is teachers state that they love “kids”, they would dream of playing, teaching, and caring for young children for the whole of their life.

*“When I was young in my career, my students were my younger sisters and brothers, now I consider them like my son and daughter” (T6)*

*“I just thought they look like myself 25 years earlier, small, healthy, innocent, and wanted to run around, discover everything, and loved being around my homeroom teachers” (T8)*

When they are older, they see students as their own children at home, all yearn to be loved, cared for, and educated to grow up happily, and healthily.

*“With love, care, patience, and tolerance you can turn every kid into a good person” (T4)*

Another aspect that teachers are confident of is their academic teaching skills which consist of knowledge, methods, techniques, and actual teaching experiences. Teachers believe that at least they do not worry much about the academic learning of students, even though currently they are somehow in the difficulty of new curriculum implementation, they could invest more time and effort in SEL or any life skills education when possible.

*“We are worried now, but it is normal and necessary to operate a new curriculum properly and effectively, we do not always have chance to re-educate students, but we can handle it well since we have all needed experience and most importantly, we employ collective effort to handle any difficulties” (T6)*

It means that cooperation among teachers is highly appreciated and utilized frequently. The most important aspect in relation to SEL is teachers’ willingness to any life skills program and SEL. They admit the lack of competence and confidence in SEL, but they look forward to having a well-designed SEL program for their students and with proper SEL-trained teachers.

*“Of course, just like my daughters, their good academic transcripts are needed for certain occasions, soft skills, however, they need every single minute of their life to lead a happy, healthy and productive life. I just hope for them, and for my students too.” (T3)*



### **Factors from Family (Caregiver)**

Parents of primary students are mostly young, active, and have a good education, they provide their children with good foundation skills at home and further support as well as coordinate to promote school education.

*“Parents now are very active and have good education themselves, that is why primary school students nowadays are well prepared for their school education” (T9)*

*“It is easy to communicate with parents these days, I just send a text to the Zalo class group, or individual parent” [Zalo is a Vietnamese social communication platform] (T2)*

Some families who are in good financial conditions are willing to sponsor or provide support to their children’s class activities, especially outdoor or experiential activities. However, schools in urban areas normally receive more financial support from students’ families than in rural ones.

Alongside the above benefits of young parents who are active, healthy, and likely to invest in children’s education, a number of parents are too busy with their young careers, young unstable family life, and cannot spend enough quality time to take care of and educate children at home. In rural areas, many students are cared for by grandparents, meanwhile urban schools observe plenty of students taken care of by either grandparents or housemaids [domestic helpers].

*“Everyone loves and takes care of their children, especially grandparents, but the intimacy and close generations between parents and their children are more highly encouraged” (T12).*

Meanwhile, some parents do not take primary school education as much important, assuming that the kids are still very young, they could learn more seriously later or let them have more years playing around to grow up more. It results in the lack of attention and education at home and less coordination between school and family. Another phenomenon is the abundant exposure of students to digital devices and social media at home. This concerns teachers about the student’s general development and their enthusiasm for learning either at school or at home.

### **Factors from school leaders**

Interestingly, all respondents mention school leaders as the element having only a positive impact on for their SEL practice. They listen to teachers’ opinions and support any

possible ideas for teachers, and facilitate opportunities for teaching staff's coordination. According to teachers, the leading board plays a critical role in curriculum and teaching plan development. They provide democratic leadership and a supportive environment for teachers to discuss professional issues, particularly developing teaching plans for every educational activity in school.

Principals and their deputies are instrumental links between the requirements of the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) and the actual practice in daily schooling. In teachers' opinion, MOET mainly provides core regulations, core curriculum, general guidance, and general training, meanwhile, principals and their deputies would be the main ones in charge people who arrange and facilitate teachers and themselves to work on these requirements, and turn them into practical implementation.

*“MOET issues a number of regulations, conditions, and guidance, etc. every year, but all yes, merely paper [documents in paper], the leadership committee has helped us tremendously to figure out what need to do, and how to do” (T10)*

As a result, life skill education in general and SEL in particular mainly are initiated and enforced by the leaders.

Importantly, teachers reckon that leading board could build up strong and effective connections between schools, families, and the community in general matters.

*“Before Covid, we had quite a few interesting activities outside schools with the great support of parents and community leaders, thanks to our leaders, they were active, and passionate about outside activities for students. But, not much particularly for SEL” (T6)*

According to teachers, school leaders regardless of school location are knowledgeable people, they are fully aware of the significance of life skills to young children, they are determined to involve family and community in these activities, and significantly, they are competent in doing so, or at least, they never stop trying and finding the best opportunity for these events. Nevertheless, comparing schools from different socioeconomic areas, it is clear from teachers' responses that even though leading boards are always active, the opportunities to have children expose to real social contexts in their local and out-of-local communities are different. Teachers in the village school report less time and community events, while respondents in the city school report the most time in actual social interaction for students in SEL or other life skills education. Teachers recognize the stress and strain together with challenges when the leaders have to balance

between multiple requests from MOET, complex conditions to enact a new curriculum, parents' expectations, and the availability of facilities, materials, as well as competent human resources.

### **Factors of community**

The study was conducted during Covid19, teachers strongly emphasize new phenomena in which students experience more than a year at home or in their community in extraordinary conditions. Covid19 safety measures, particularly social distancing, people's panic, and concerns over their health and everything clarify the importance of SEL while everyone lacks these skills at some time during the pandemic.

*"We recognize badly how social, and emotional skills important to our mental health and the way we act during the pandemic" (T3)*

*"If to recall, I think everyone needs to learn these skills properly to cope more effectively with other unprecedented social happenings" (T2)*

Apart from many health concerns and negative impacts on every walk of life, teachers identify how the whole nation or students' local community act upon the pandemic measures has taught students lessons about community unification, communal responsibilities, and outcomes.

*"My students were very sad, frustrated in first few weeks or a month, or two, but later they understand the situation and they know they need act appropriately for themselves, their family and the whole community" (T2)*

*"We're worried that students have missed much time to learn at school as well as from other regular social activities, but from this difficult circumstance, my students also learn much about empathy, responsibilities, and problem-solving, I'm proud of my students when reading their reports of what they and their family did when not coming to school" (T12)*

Teachers particularly emphasize that students' life skills and SEL in particular will help the community cover after the pandemic.

*"We were lucky to be in the Green area [less impacted by Covid19], all of my students experienced meaningful activities of helping people from Orange or Red areas [sending food, medicine,...], and they created online channels to thank medical force, police officers, soldiers,...which I felt very moved by the time, I believe these kids who have a*

*good mind, good heart, good social, emotional skills can help to heal the pain and ease the hardship of others in the community”*(T9)

However, apart from the issues of the pandemic, teachers ascertain the critical role of the community in educating social and emotional skills children in general.

*“Community is the actual environment, actual life we prepare our students to. Therefore, it is the actual and practical educational materials and the environment too”* (T3)

City school teachers report having more opportunities to bring students to different enterprises in the neighbourhood, while rural school teachers report negatively about this. Nevertheless, all teachers agree that regardless of the availability of enterprise in an area, every community where students live has enough places and potential activities to involve students in experiential learning and experience.

*“I heard about this school [a school in the city which interviewer mentioned during the interview], they have very good conditions and chances to go to different enterprises, educational, historical places, students are excited, however, rural community has its own history, its own rhythm of life activities which students need to get to know too”* (T8)

As a result, all teachers agree that every community where students live and go to local schools has the potential to provide socially experiential experiences to students, what is needed is common voices and agreements between the community and school.

Another aspect that attracts teachers’ attention is the controlling of unhealthy and promoting healthy elements in the community. Community is life itself, it reflects and displays either the negative or positive sides of life. All believe that their local community has been doing well in this matter, providing a healthy, meaningful, and moral small-scale society for students in the neighbourhood. However, comparing teachers’ responses in three different socioeconomic areas, it is not surprising to see that school in the city encounters more challenges than school in the village.

*“We are in the city with more sufficient facilities for children, but also more social evils to deal with, we are rather concerned”* (T7)

*“Our school is in the town of the district, hence students expose to more social issues, many are harmful and risky, but other conditions provide privilege for students’ learning and living, we just need to pay more attention to educating students about negative phenomena and navigating them to healthy aspects”* (T10)

Throughout the four aspects of SEL, it is apparent to see that since SEL is investigated as an educational phenomenon directly from teachers' views, the four aspects provide the exploratory understanding of what SEL is, how important it is, how to integrate SEL into daily educational activities, and what the factors influencing SEL. Figure 7 below demonstrates further the connections between the four aspects of SEL.

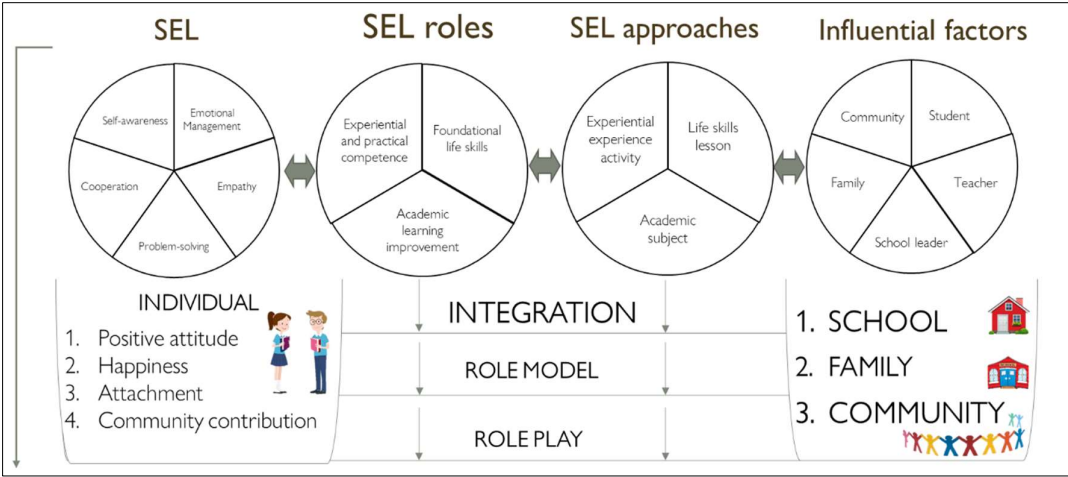


Figure 7. Teachers' perspectives on Social and Emotional Learning

In teachers' views, SEL is a part of life skills education, however, SEL elements are identified to illustrate the position of SEL within life education. As seen in Figure 2 and Figure 7, each of the five elements of SEL plays its particular part in developing students' SEC, they however link, overlap, and compensate each other throughout the process. For example, when students have self-awareness, they can recognize their strengths or weaknesses, so they could utilize their strengths in the cooperation process or problem-solving. Or, students who have sensible self-awareness, love themselves, and value the beauty of other people, objects, events, etc., as a result, students are likely to have respect and positive attitudes toward every happening around them. However, as seen in Figure 3 (page 68), teachers' perceptions of SEL, apart from the five core elements as part of life skill education, reflect its aim is to facilitate students the most foundational competencies for their life-long needs, and later on, students develop their sense of happiness, feelings of attachment, positive attitudes and effective contributions to their living community. Therefore, from teachers' perspectives, SEL directly advances students' competencies and long-term targets are to improve student's quality of life within their interaction with their living environment and facilitate students' effective contribution to their living environment.

Teachers' perceptions of SEL benefits explain further teachers' conceptualization of SEL. Teachers perceive SEL to be beneficial to students with their activities not only inside the school but also at home and in the community. Therefore, SEL strengthens students' foundational competence, academic achievement, and experiential practical skills (Figure 4 & Figure 7). From teachers' understanding of SEL as a part of life skill education, SEL benefits directly cover every student's activity at school and indirectly influence students' life at home or outside their living community. As a result, teachers attempt to integrate SEL into three respective activities of students in school, namely academic learning, experimental experience activities, and life skill lesson. As seen in Figures 5 & 7, these approaches interlink with each other and each integration method would overlap or compensate for other approaches. And through the three above-mentioned methods, SEL is infused into these areas than being delivered in the independent or explicit subject.

Since the integration of SEL involves every stakeholder who has a direct and indirect connection with students in or outside school, role models and role play appear to be the most employed and effective techniques in SEL integration.

In an educational research, it is desirable to investigate the ideal conditions for an education program to be implemented effectively. After sharing their conceptualization of SEL, beliefs of SEL significance, and SEL approaches, it comes to the factors that impact SEL implementation. As seen in Figures 6 & 7, there are five main factors influencing SEL, however, to have a close look at the factors, these could be combined into four main sources, including Student, School, Family, and Community. It demonstrates a strong relevance to the three previous aspects of SEL. SEL, first and foremost, aims at the development of individual students, therefore, the process is strongly dependent on students' traits either physical, mental, or contextual conditions. Students' conditions act not only as attributions but also as the primary cause to include SEL in primary education. SEL brings the ideal developments to students so that they are capable to participate effectively in society, which includes family, school, and community.

## Chapter V - Discussion

This chapter discusses the findings of the research in light of its aims and the secondary literature review. Therefore, also in this chapter, the contribution of the study to the literature on social and emotional learning in general and in the context of Vietnamese primary schools is discussed particularly.

This study is driven by four research questions as follows.

*From primary teachers' perspectives and understanding:*

- 1) *What is social and emotional learning for primary school students?*
- 2) *What are the roles of social and emotional learning for primary school students?*
- 3) *How to integrate social and emotional learning for students in primary school?*
- 4) *What factors influence the integration of social and emotional learning for students in primary school?*

***Question 1: What is social and emotional learning for primary school students?***

**SEL is a part of life skills education and consists of five elements: Self-awareness, Empathy, Emotional management, Cooperation, and Problem-solving skill.**

That is not a disadvantageous circumstance of the long history and proven benefits of good life skills education worldwide (WHO, 1997). According to the World Health Organization, life skills education covers six areas: communication and interpersonal skills, decision-making and problem-solving, creating thinking, self-awareness and empathy, assertiveness and equanimity, or self-control, resilience, and ability to cope with problems (Huynh et al., 2021). Meanwhile, according to CASEL, SEL explicitly consists of five elements: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship management, and responsible decision-making. It would be understandable when one indicates SEL within life skills, especially in the context of Vietnamese education, where life skills education is currently the only term to indicate non-academic skill education.

The five elements which teachers believe are the core elements of SEL are more or less in alignment with the general structure of SEL worldwide. One of the well-known structures is developed by Collaborative Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL). Their SEL model has been most applied worldwide and is also one of the theoretical frameworks used for this study. This framework provides the researcher with the sensitivities of the researched phenomenon and clarifies if SEL is an existing

phenomenon to conduct the study. Therefore, several aspects of SEL identified by the participating teachers are expectedly similar to CASEL's definition. However, it is clear to recognize the difference in the thoroughness of the two. Teachers in this study identify the core elements that they believe contribute the most to SEC of students, as well as the most being taught in schools considering the demands of teaching other life skills. Even though teachers' perspectives are not well elaborated as seen in other well-researched models, they reflect teachers' practical and actual views from their practice. Besides, considering a number of life skills in the request of primary school education in Vietnam, teachers are not expected to cover either in their perception or in practice every aspect of SEL known in the literature. However, particularly, self-awareness is the first and single domain emphasized as a core domain of SEL by CASEL and the participant teachers. However, there are several significant differences, especially in the emotional aspect. For example, CASEL identifies "Identify emotions" as a core element of self-awareness, and Vietnamese teachers navigate directly to "Identify liking/dislike", "Love" and "Value what you have" (Figure 2, page 62).

Empathy is only one property in the Social awareness domain by CASEL, however, it appears to be a core domain to the participants in this study. One explanation for this view is that Vietnamese teachers value the genuine meanings of this certain competence. In "Empathy" domain, as seen in Figure 2 (page 62), includes several similar elements in the "Social awareness" of CASEL, such as Respect for others and Understanding others' emotions. However, teachers seem to require further advancement for their students, not only to be aware of the happenings of others, but importantly to "Listen" skilfully, "Feel others' difficulties", have "No judgment", be "Open to express feelings", and be "Willing to help".

The emotional management domain could be an element in the Self-management domain of CASEL. The participants emphasize it as a core domain as the demand of controlling or suppressing strong emotions, especially negative and unhealthy emotions, meanwhile promoting positive feelings. It probably signifies how much attention or awareness teachers have paid to the emotional aspect. They perceive the emotional aspect as a crucial element in students' SEC. When students master this field, they experience more convenience in the SEL process. However, most importantly, teachers expect their students to experience and employ more positive emotions in their lives, and teachers aim to promote the same type of emotions to the students.



The Cooperation domain according to the teachers' views covers many elements such as Accept failure, Goal orientation, Communication skills, Establishing, and maintaining relationships, Active engagement in different networks, Commitment, Sharing, and Trust in others. Several of these elements are also found in the "Relationship skills" domain or one to two in other domains of CASEL. However, with the density of properties in this domain, teachers strongly highlight the significance of Cooperation competence for their students.

The Problem-solving domain is the last domain in the participants' perspectives of SEL. However, Solving problem is also a requirement in the "Responsible decision making" domain by CASEL. It is apparent to see the narrower scope of this domain from the teachers' views compared to the CASEL (Figure 2, p.62). This narrow scope of view is likely to accentuate teachers' perspectives in terms of promoting a certain practical competence for their students. Students in their long-day studying, playing, making friends, and apparently dealing with a number of problematic situations. With very limited life experience and unlimited exposure to new things, students need this practical competence to fulfil their long day meaningfully.

Even though the core domains of SEL defined by Vietnamese teachers are rather different by CASEL, a number of elements among the domains are similar, overlap, or interlink with each other. As presented in the previous chapter, when teachers are asked each question regarding their understanding of each SEL aspect, the more aspects and elements they share their thoughts about, the more often teachers feel as though they have already mentioned or categorized components of each domain within the others. This proves a normal sense when educating a whole child, SEL aspects certainly overlap one way or another, each element or domain incorporates different skills, also incorporates with each other to promote the whole education for the whole child.

**SEL as a part of life skills education aims at developing students' positive attitudes, feelings of attachment, happiness, and making the community better.**

In the teachers' conception of SEL, teachers allocate five core domains of SEL and also reason the ultimate goals of SEL are to promote positive attitudes, attachment, happiness, and community contribution for students. This is an interesting finding though it is expected since Vietnam has a time-honoured tradition of collectivist culture, and its education system has been serving well for it. It is worth mentioning a collectivism theory

here to make a better sense of the teachers' perceptions. Hofstede (1980) developed different dimensions of culture, among which individualism and its counterpart collectivism have often been used to contrast Western and Asian cultures. According to Hofstede Insights (n.d.), Vietnam is a collectivist nation with several cultural traits (T. Nguyen et al., 2014). Firstly, the self is defined as interdependent by which each individual is in relation to others. Secondly, an alignment of individual aims and those of the community, whereby the individual's decisions take into consideration the needs of the group and what they are contributing to or taking away from it. Thirdly, a preference is taken from social norms rather than personal preferences when making decisions. In addition, together with the influence of Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism philosophy, debate and confrontation are almost always destructive, people emphasize relationships, even if adversaries for individuals (Huong, 2008; McLare, 1998; Nickerson, n.d.). In teachers' perspectives on SEL, they emphasize a number of elements that clearly demonstrates these cultural traits, including valuing whatever one has, finding love in everything in life, restraining emotions, contextual consideration, acknowledging tradition, self-discipline, having trust in others, and appropriateness.

These cultural insights illuminate the deeper reasoning of teachers' perceptions and views on SEL, from the conceptualization of SEL to the influential factors in SEL integration. Within its more than 4000 years of history, the collectivist mindset in Vietnam has been maintained and played as an umbrella concept influencing people's perceptions. The education area is a vivid example. "Tiên học lễ, hậu học văn" [First-learn manners, Then-learn literature] is a motto posted in every K12 school in Vietnam, it is also a mantra, a principle to direct every educational activity in school. Students learn to behave before any further learning. In SEL particularly, through the emphasis of teachers on individual domains of SEL, it is obvious to recognize that SEL aims at promoting individual students, but the consequent goal is to create harmony in the learning environment, students know themselves well to understand others better, having empathy, employ positive and healthy emotions into their cooperation, and generate the most effective and constructive resolutions when encountering any problems. With all these skills and performance at school, students are expected to broaden their positive attitudes, and efficacy to promote their happiness and attaching life outside the school context, and finally, they are likely to contribute positively to their living community.

Therefore, more or less, Vietnamese teachers appear to have a common conception of SEL with the existing popular SEL literature. Regarding their confusion about SEL in the early stage of the interviews, their general understanding of SEL has not had a huge difference from common concepts available in the literature. It could be a further emphasis for the long history existing concept of “educating the heart”. The old teaching of Aristotle “educating the mind without educating the heart is no education at all” has been always around, and Vietnamese teachers are aware of it and have their own certain way to educate their students in the social and emotional aspects of their lives.

***Question 2: What are the roles of social and emotional learning for primary school students?***

**SEL plays a significant role in a wide range of daily activities of students and other involved people.**

According to the teachers, SEL directly benefits students and indirectly benefits every stakeholder who involves in the education of students, schools, families, and the community. Since teachers' opinions are driven by their conception with the strong impact of cultural traits (Collectivism), SEL benefits according to the participants spread not only to different individual students in primary schools but to their families, schools, and their living communities. It is worth reflecting on these viewpoints in the existing literature.

In this study, teachers identify a number of benefits of SEL to students individually, however, they believe that social and emotional skills, practical and experimental skills, and academic skills are interlinked and interdependent, meanwhile, life skills and positive attitude are final targets of any education. Vietnamese education adopts the learning objectives defined by United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in which students' learning aims at developing three elements of competence, namely knowledge, skills, and attitudes (UNESCO, 2015). Following this competence model, the three components are also interdependent, and learning objectives are proposed accordingly, with the attitudes to be the final and consequent component to the two others. Therefore the participants' perspectives of SEL are aligned with the general principle of education.

Firstly, teachers believe that SEL helps students in promoting foundational competencies and academic achievement. These perspectives are consistent with the findings of Buchanan et al.(2009), Elias (2019), Greenberg et al. (2017), Schonert-Reichl

(2019), and Zins & Elias (2007). It indicates that the teachers have full awareness of SEL in terms of facilitating the advancement of students as the whole child. However, there is a contradictory evidence base for these assertions. For example, in the studies of Ee (2013) and Dyson (2019) investigating teachers' perspectives on SEL, teachers share no evidence of the link between SEC with students' academic achievement. Meanwhile, Jones et al. (2017) and Taylor et al. (2017) strongly emphasize the influence of SEL on academic learning rather than other non-academic skills. In addition, Vietnam's education has been criticized for heavy academic learning, and students perform well on OECD assessments as a result (The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), 2019). The explanation for this view could be drawn from the initial SEL conception by which the final aim of SEL is promoting students' competencies and positive attitudes for their short and long-term contribution to the community. Therefore, regardless of how much time has been devoted to academic lessons, the importance of SEL in education is undeniable for students' social, intra-, and interpersonal skills. Moreover, as mentioned earlier, knowledge, skills, and attitudes are interconnected components of students' competence. Teachers realize and utilize the interaction of these components in their teaching, especially employing SEL advantages to improve academic attainment for students.

Secondly, teachers report a number of benefits of students' SEC to other stakeholders who have direct and indirect contact with students. Some parts of this finding overlap or are the effects of students' foundational competence and academic advancement. However, teachers are likely to highlight these as evidence of how SEL serves students in an actual social context, and in actual interaction with others in society.

**Students' SEL influences students' schools, including teachers, school leaders, and staff.**

Teachers' perspectives illustrate how SEC of students could impact their school, particularly their teachers, classroom management, and the school's reputation. This point of view is strongly supported by the understanding of school climate and culture in the literature. School climate is defined as a set of schools' norms, beliefs, and practices (Hemmelgarn et al., 2006; S. M. Jones & Bouffard, 2012), while climate indicates the interpretation of individuals' perceptions of how the psychological environment impacts their well-being. In general, school culture and climate generate the common psychological environment to direct or moderate the relationships and interactions

between individuals, including teachers-students and leaders-staff in school (Gottfredson et al., 2004). It is noticeable that students' SEC directly or indirectly impacts school culture and climate. For example, positive and friendly behaviours are schoolwide expectations, they could powerfully contribute to respectful and nurturing culture in school, and every individual is willing to maintain them. As a result, caring relationships are built, particularly between peers, children, and adults (Thapa et al., 2012). In addition, school norms are believed to be mainly constructed or modified by teachers, however, students also play crucial parts in compliance with and reinforcing the existing norms (Henry, 2008). For example, a student's disruptive behaviour could cause a stressful situation in a class, consequently disturbing the interaction of the teachers with the whole class. As shared by the teachers of this study, misbehaviour may impact greatly teachers' relationships with their colleagues and school leaders. It creates tension among classrooms and schoolwide as a system. Therefore, the SEC of students can actively attribute to the respect and maintenance of positive and meaningful norms in school or the reverse. In Vietnamese schools, as the influence of collectivist culture, everyone in school, and even parents of students at home value security, good social relationships, harmony within ingroups, and personalized relationships in the school (Nickerson, n.d.). This could be an explanation for the emphasis of teachers' views on the influence of students' SEC on their schools.

### **Students' SEL influence on students' families**

Teachers particularly emphasize the importance of students' SEC to their families. Interestingly to notice that reviewing a number of studies about teachers' perspectives of SEL, this is the only study where teachers mention students' SEC influence on their families. This could be a paradox at first sight, however, considering the teachers' conceptualization of SEL, it is understandable when they have broad views on the issue. First, a school to some extent could be a family, the teacher-student relationship could be a parent-child one, and teachers, as shared in their interview, regard their students as their own sisters, brothers, and children at home, and it demonstrates how they treat students, also, how to cast a view on SEL significance on their students' lives at home. In a traditional family in Vietnam, children are always perceived as the "most treasured possession" of parents. According to Hofstede Insights (n.d.), Vietnamese people have low indulgence in general, but it is contradictory regarding the treatment of parents toward their own children, they are likely to equip their children as much as long as

possible, expecting that their children to be happy, healthy, and doing well in school, bringing pride to the family. This perception could either hinder the SEC of students, as discussed in the later part or challenge themselves in dealing with inappropriate demands of students. However, the benefits of students' SEC take place explicitly at home. These insights are not explicitly found in the literature on teachers' perspectives, however, the justification for them is available. Covid19 pandemic or incidents alike is an instance. Covid19 pandemic is unfortunate, but it also brings familial challenges as well as an influence on students' SEC in front. More than ever, parents and other caregivers struggle to provide their children with a sense of stability and security. The routines of daily life have been significantly changed. Stress levels may be high, and finances may be tight. When the new school year began in September 2022, there was an outcry all around the world that what had previously been a simple task—buying school uniforms—could now elicit emotions of fear or even humiliation due to the circumstances. During the virus breakouts, the disruption to the regular school schedule, the medical effects of the virus, the financial ramifications of the subsequent economic downturn, and the social distancing all tragically affect students and their parents (Dastagir, n.d.; Saxena & Saxena, 2020). In connection with this, a study of the American Psychological Association (2020) reports that around 55% of parents observe their children's "acting out" more than before the pandemic, and 71% share their concern about their children's social competence. Unfortunately, in such societal crises, children frequently find it difficult to rely fully on their parents for social and emotional assistance since they have their own mounting obligations and concerns (Garbe et al., 2020; Varghese & Natsuaki, 2021). In addition, in general, students are exposed to a more complex world through the media and have unmediated access to information and social contacts through various technologies. The structures of the family now have changed dramatically, less traditionally nuclear family. Since 20 years ago, Burke (2002) mentioned at least 20 different family structures in America, and it could be more or fewer types emerging in other corners of the world. Therefore, the upbringing of a child at home nowadays could be more challenging, even "everything is better, that is, everything except human morale. Depression and anxiety are rampant" (Seligman et al., 2009, p.294). Therefore, when students have SEC, especially their self-regulation, empathy, and problem-solving skills, it helps them deal with similar adversity. However, these problems also bring to the front the importance of promoting SEL for students' parents, as well as the additional SEL for students themselves at home.

## **Students' SEC influence on students' living community**

The advantages of students' SEC to the community are not mentioned in detail as much as to others, but importantly, in consistence with SEL conceptualization, SEC of individual students ultimately is to contribute effectively to their community or living residences.

One of the biggest benefits of SEL is social evil prevention and prosocial promotion (Greenberg et al., 2003; Zins & Elias, 2007). As a congressman in America addresses, "Social and emotional competencies aren't soft skills. They are fundamental and essential skills. If we want a tolerant society, a compassionate society...we need to teach the skills that create the society-the social and emotional" (Bridgeland et al., 2013, p.8). Then, it is evidence-based to state that the positive development of a society is dependent on the SEC of its citizens. However, there are several explicit challenges in current society now that the importance of SEC could be recognized. According to Schleicher (2018), societies worldwide are changing dramatically, especially in three aspects namely environmental, economic, and social. In the environmental aspect, climate change is highlighted to be an urgent crisis that needs immediate solutions. The economic matter is more complex with the advance in scientific knowledge, innovation, and technology, especially artificial intelligence, which all raise concerns about human value, security, and certainty. The social issues are emphasized with matters of race, immigration, urbanization, and particularly wars and terrorism are escalating. These global issues have already shed an effect on every country in the world. As of the writing of this dissertation, European countries are suffering from winter without a guarantee of gas supply as a result of the Ukraine war (November 2022). To contribute to the UN 2030 Global Goals for Sustainable Development, the OECD Learning Framework 2030 has proposed three significant skills that every individual needs to acquire, one of which is social and emotional skills (Schleicher, 2018, p4). These perspectives are in alignment with other authors' suggestions. SEL starts with individuals, but it puts an end to the whole society of bias and injustice, especially regarding racial and immigrant issues (Brackett et al., 2016). This includes assisting students in confronting bias and injustice in the world, cultivating an appreciation for diversity, and learning how to solve problems effectively. According to Legette et al. (2020) and Rogers (2022), we need SEL to build a society where children and grown-ups feel valued, respected and understood regardless of any existing difference, particularly skin colour and originality. According to Brackett

et al., (2016), this intention requires social awareness, which includes open listening, positive attitudes, showing empathy, and an understanding of how and why others are feeling in a certain incident. It also includes understanding others' perspectives, especially people from diverse backgrounds and cultures. Even though these issues are not serious and urgent to solve in Vietnam, considering the flat world we are sharing, unexpected incidents or problems could occur whenever. It is worth mentioning and proposing an educational approach for any possible prevention or positive intervention.

The last demonstration of this point of view is the recovery of communities after the Covid19 pandemic and preparation for similar adversity. Covid19 pandemic tremendously affects everyone's well-being, either health or social and emotional well-being (American Psychological Association, 2020; Dastagir, n.d.; Garbe et al., 2020). These affected aspects play undeniably critical roles in every other aspect of one's life, including learning, working, socializing, and even being themselves again, therefore every school, family, company, and community needs to consider these aspects in their recovery plan after the Covid (The Wallace Foundation, 2021).

The literature and the fact support the teachers' views that the SEC of students could affect their own well-being and academic attainment, as well as their effective contribution to society as healthy citizens. As such, ultimately, students' SEC plays crucial roles in the development and well-being of their school, family, and society at last.

***Question 3: How to integrate social and emotional learning in primary school education?***

**SEL is integrated into every activity of students: at school, at home, and in the community in which role play and role model are two main teaching methods**

These approaches of teachers are partly supported in the literature. CASEL as the pioneer and the most cited organization working on SEL has proposed and implemented SEL via four main approaches (CASEL, n.d.-a) (1) free-standing lessons designed to enhance students' SEC explicitly could be the optimal choice for SEC improvement goals. This kind of independent course provides explicit SEL instruction in which students are instructed to promote their own SEC, (2) integrate SEL into other academic subjects, and (3) integrate SEL into teaching practices to create a favourable classroom climate. Given the comprehensive understanding of classroom climate significance, throughout teaching-learning processes, teachers can enhance their students' SEC naturally by



ensuring learning authority, (4) using an organizational setting to support SEL as a school-wide program that develops a learning-friendly environment and community. As such, the approaches in Vietnamese primary schools are mainly aligned with the second approach suggested by CASEL. The possible explanations for these perspectives are as follows:

- (1) Due to teachers' perception that SEL is a part of life skills, then SEL should have been delivered in the way of life skills education. However, life skills include a number of different skills. Different organizations define life skills in alignment with their working focus and present different skills. Life skills are defined by UNESCO as personal management and social abilities required for appropriate functioning on an independent basis. This definition is based on Delors' four pillars of learning, which are learning to know, to do, to be, and to live together (Singh, 2003). UNICEF (2012) defines life skills as “personal, interpersonal and cognitive psychosocial skills that enable people to interact appropriately, manage their own emotional states and make decisions and choices for an active, safe and productive life” (p.26). Regardless of different definitions, it is agreed that the concept is elastic and includes numerous skills (Singh, 2003). Vietnamese education adopts life skills as positive and healthy habits, behaviours, and attitudes in dealing with situations of personal life and participating in social life, thereby perfecting their personality and orientation, developing better self-based on the foundation of life values (Ministry of Education and Training, 2014). Currently, at least there 15 skills are taught in primary schools in three domains: cognitive skills, social skills, and self-management skills. However, there are several episodes explicitly designated for life skills, and the chance that SEL skills are included is rare. Nevertheless, the inclusion of SEL elements in life skills education is assessed as positive to SEC promotion, either in the Vietnam context or in other countries (Huynh, 2019; Huynh-Lam et al., 2020; Lolaty et al., 2012).
- (2) Teachers perceive that SEC is beneficial to every stakeholder involved to their students directly or indirectly, therefore, the “everywhere”, “everyone” approach is considered appropriate and enough. Even though this approach is in no way wrong as a famous African proverb says, “it takes a village to raise a child”, and it will be discussed more later, the primary schools seem unaware of the other intensive approaches and their advantages in promoting their students' SEC.

In consistence with the above-mentioned approaches, the two main teaching methods which teachers believe are utilized to promote SEL are role-play and role-model. Unfortunately, these insights are not available from other studies on teachers' perspectives. In teachers' beliefs investigated in other studies, they are more concerned about what to teach and what benefits, but how to deliver these contents in beneficial ways. However, role model and role play are two ideal methods, and techniques for SEL (Hromek & Roffey, 2009). These methods are clearly and strongly supported by either general educational theories or the SEL literature. Role-play and role-model technique applications could be regarded as the effective implementation of the Sociocultural Theory of Lev Vygotsky, the Social Learning Theory of Albert Bandura and Experiential learning by John Dewey. According to Vygotsky, through social interaction, social connectedness, cooperation, and collaboration, students are encouraged to construct and transfer their life experiences. These life experiences, after being shared and learned, facilitate students in promoting cognitive development, well-being, and resilience (Dewey, 1938; Hromek & Roffey, 2009; Vygotsky, 1976). Meanwhile, the Social-cognitive learning theory formulated by Albert Bandura has been the foundation for learning cognitive, social, motor, and self-regulation abilities (Schunk, 2012). As such, learning happens in a social setting while people are observing, modeling, and imitating the behaviours, attitudes, and emotional reactions of others (Bandura, 1986; McLeod, 2016; Schunk, 2012). People can learn if particular behaviours are helpful and suitable in various contexts, as well as what outcomes are likely, through observing social models (Bandura, 1986). In the field of SEL, these theories are applied significantly through role models and role play. CASEL consents that by giving children the chance to play with others, practice social and communication skills, gain autonomy, and occasionally maintain engagement for extended periods with or without adult guidance, role play helps them develop personally, socially, and emotionally (n.d.-b). Children can investigate different points of view and respond to the emotions and desires of others through role play. Children can use play as a tool to examine their life experiences and happy and sad emotions (CASEL, n.d.-b). Zins and Elias state of the requirements for effective SEL instruction is "addressing emotional and social components of learning through engaging and interactive methods." (2007, p.4). Among the role-play different methods, game-based activity is one of the most effective interactive methods in SEL (Lim et al., 2011). Young students, in games, have a chance to expose to and experience could-be-real-world situations, and scenarios without restrictions, otherwise within nurturing and meaningful

educational settings. Learning, therefore, takes place intentionally or unintentionally during the games, with immediate feedback from teachers, other players, and themselves in every aspect of children's development, including intellectual and emotional ones (Lim et al., 2011; Huynh, 2019; Huynh-Lam et al., 2020). Hromek and Roffey also assert that playing games and having fun is crucial to the development and highly motivating in SEL activities (2009). Regarding role-model, CASEL (n.d.-b) has cited this statement in their SEL instruction: "Children have never been very good at listening to their elders, but they have never failed to imitate them." (James Baldwin in "Fifth Avenue, Uptown" published in Esquire, July 1960). The citation supports their chief concept that SEL modelling provides students with positive examples of how to handle stress and frustration and maintain healthy relationships. This is also the reasoning for a consequent application that SEL implementation should involve every potential stakeholder in SEL illustration activities. Hutzel et al., (2010) strengthen this concept through their practical service where eighth-grader students are employed to model social and emotional skills to their preschool partners. Recently, Blyth et al., (2017) provide more explicit requirements for a model in SEL. Accordingly, every model needs to demonstrate the positive dimensions of SEL, particularly in "ways of feeling, ways of relating, and ways of doing" (p.3).

***Question 4: What factors influence the integration of social and emotional learning for students in primary school?***

***There are five factors that influence SEL integration, namely Students' psychological development traits, Teachers, School leader, Family, and Community, and current social happenings***

It is clear to observe a strong alignment in teachers' perspectives from SEL conceptualization, SEC importance, and SEL integration approaches that apart from students themselves as the main active actors, other influential elements fall into three domains: Family, School, and Community. There are a number of research studies in the literature that support this perspective.

Firstly, students' psychological traits are either the advantages or the challenges of SEL. During primary school years of age, spanning roughly 6 to 11, children experience substantial changes in every aspect, including biological, social, cognitive, and emotional development (Eccles, 1999). Children engage in and navigate more complex relationships and social situations, including at home, in school, and the

community (S. M. Jones, Barnes, et al., 2017). Children's social environment and interaction impact more on their well-being. According to Developmental theory, some skills are salient in particular stages of life (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). Therefore, in primary school years, students need a wide range of intra- and interpersonal skills such as making friends, participating in prosocial and nurturing activities, and dealing with problems in daily interactions. Meanwhile, according to Jones et al. (2017), the majority of students enter primary schools without the necessary skills. In Vietnamese education, the goals of preschool education are stated clearly covering every critical aspect of children's development, and SEL is also integrated as one of five core domains (Hoang, 2016). However, as discussed earlier, the effectiveness of SEL depends on a number of elements, and unfortunately, according to teachers of this study, their students have not been prepared well in terms of SEC before entering grade 1.

Secondly, the association between the relationship of students-teachers, students-others in school, students-their parents, students-community and the approaches to improving students' SEC is bidirectional, and students influence these stakeholders as well as the reverse (Burke, 2002). As once stated by Rober Burke (2002), only biological parents and the current classroom teacher are regarded as the only three most important adults to a child. The first and possibly most crucial environment for the development of any life skills is the interaction between parents and children (Burke, 2002). A number of studies indicate that parental styles are under impact by their traditional culture, and the parents' awareness of their socialization practices strongly impacts their children's social and emotional development. For example, Zinsser et al.,(2014), Denham (2006), and Azar (2017) confirm that children learn social and emotional practices from parents as early as their birth. These learnings help them build relationships as well as process the intimate secure attachment. Ultimately, the ways parents experience social and emotional issues significantly influence their children's social and emotional development (Kochanska et al., 2000). In the Vietnam context, Confucianism has a strong influence on Vietnamese parents, they highly emphasize moral values such as social harmony, duty, honour, respect, and active contribution to family and society in their children's upbringing (Hunt, 2002; Nguyen et al., 2014). These values impact either negatively or positively their SEC, as well as their children's SEC as reflected in the participant teachers' views.

Thirdly, as the importance of school climate and culture is discussed earlier, the role of school leaders is significantly important in this matter. That is their authority as well as their responsibility, therefore should be their ability to create and maintain a healthy and nurturing school environment. According to Allensworth and Hart (2018), this duty requires school leaders to establish professional collaboration and continuous development among their staff while promoting and modelling their social and emotional skills. School leaders who are socially and emotionally competent are like to be able to foster constructive and trusting relationships. And according to Patti & Espinosa (2007), a trusting relationship is one of the most crucial elements of a healthy, nurturing, effective school environment. Moreover, SEC leaders powerfully demonstrate and set up a strong voice in prioritizing school time and resources in school to facilitate effective SEL for adults and children in school. In addition, SEL also could be demonstrated in collaborative leadership in which every endeavour and every party is included in decision-making (CASEL, n.d.). As such, everyone in school, every partner of the school, particularly students' parents and community organizations have a sense of common responsibility, trust, and capability to nurture and educate students. As a result, collaborative leadership potentially creates benefits for students learning (Hallinger & Heck, 2010), and for SEL collective plan. In Vietnam's primary schools, leadership committee members are reported to be supportive, cooperative, aware of SEL roles, and interested in promoting students' life skills. However, as similarly reported by some other research studies, principals, and deputy principals are always engaging in multiple tasks, and responsibilities with managing school, teaching, learning, meeting schedules, and numerous different activities inside, and outside school (Schiepe-Tiska et al., 2021, Burgin et al., 2021). Meanwhile, school leaders are reported to lack SEL knowledge, SEL materials, and tools to plan any SEL program in their schools, therefore, regardless of how they perceive SEL importance, they fail to support teachers in this field (K. Y. Jones, 2016).

The fourth factor is about teachers themselves. Teachers' lack of training on SEL, lack of their own SEC, and as the result, lack of confidence in delivering SEL explicitly to their students are the biggest attributions of poor SEL implementation. The literature also reports a paradox that the majority of preschool to high school teachers believe in the positive outcomes of SEL, and believe that SEC is important to learning (Brackett et al., 2012; Buchanan et al., 2009; Collie et al., 2011, 2015; Esen-Aygun & Salim-Tasking, 2017; S. M. Jones & Bouffard, 2012; Schonert-Reichl & Zakrzewski, 2014) they,

nevertheless lack the belief in themselves to be the key deliverer of any program, they need strong support to operate it effectively (Loinaz, 2019; Schonert-Reichl, 2017). Accordingly, it is suggested that in many needed supports for teachers' competency confidence, teachers' own SEC seems to be a crucial factor (Elias et al., 1997; Inna, 2017; Loinaz, 2019; Schonert-Reichl, 2017). In the literature, four emerging viewpoints regarding the significance of teachers' SEC have been investigated. Firstly, SEC helps maintain teachers' well-being and career motivation (Aldrup et al., 2020; Brackett & Katulak, 2007; Jennings et al., 2011, 2017; Schonert-Reichl & Lawlor, 2010). The three others apparently support the opinions of Vietnamese teachers on SEL importance as well as the influential factors to SEL integration, including teachers' SEC influences on teacher-student relationships, general successful classroom management, and teachers' performance in SEL implementation. Together with instructional methods in a class, how a teacher and students connect and interact with each other is a decisive factor to determine a student's academic attainment and social development (Hamre & Pianta, 2007; Mashburn & Pianta, 2006). Teachers' well-being and their skills in dealing with the diverse needs of students could impact strongly the teacher-student relationship. Firstly, it is a matter of fact that teachers' well-being has a direct link to students' well-being. In empirical research, Oberle & Schonert-Reichl (2016) remark that cortisol levels in the morning in students can be related to teacher burnout, which consequently impact negatively on teacher-student interaction and relationship. In contrast, teachers with high SEC are those who recognize an individual student's emotions and understand the cognitive appraisals behind them. These teachers, in turn, can make sense of their students' emotionally motivated reasons and the sequence of behaviours (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009; Roffey, 2012). When teachers are able to understand their students' emotional expression and the respective appraisals, they have more feelings of their meaningful roles on their students' sides, are likely to get closer to students' circumstances, understand them more and find the best way to support students overcoming their daily difficulties either physical or psychological ones. As such, teachers become reliable and effectively supportive sources for students. As a result, both teachers' and students' well-being are ensured, and it warrants the significantly healthy relationship of them which is considered as "two sides of the same coin" (Roffey, 2012, p.8). Effective classroom management is built on the constructive and healthy teacher-student relationships in the classroom (Marzano, 2003). Classroom management is one of the important responsibilities of teachers in school as creating socially and emotionally

healthy classroom climates is a prerequisite for achieving any academic objectives in schools (Brackett et al., 2009). When teachers effectively manage their in-charge classrooms, they arrange students, place, time, and resources in a way that promotes the most efficient learning process (Sieberer-Nagler, 2015). According to Wiseman and Hunt (2008), management involves a number of unplanned situations in which teachers need to demonstrate their abilities to use effective classroom management skills or techniques. It also highly requires teachers successfully discipline students' behaviours because every single behaviour of one student could influence other students' behaviours, classroom safety, the relevant learning activities, and particularly teachers' overwhelming (Wiseman and Hunt, 2008). Sieberer-Nagler (2015) remarks that students' misbehaviour is the main reason for the high rate of disrupted lessons reported by teachers. Today, teachers experience a bigger problem with class discipline than ever before (Sieberer-Nagler, 2015). In Jennings and Greenberg's theoretical model (2009), they propose that when SEL skills are used effectively, they create a cyclical mechanism or "feedback loop" that, when positive, leads to better outcomes for everyone, but when negative, leads to teachers "burnout cascade" (p.492).

Interestingly, teachers accentuate the contributions of each factor to students' SEL but rarely do they mention the need of building partnerships between those. Teachers observe clearly from their teaching and educational practices at school daily that every single development of students is the collective result of a number of attributions coming from three core sources: Family, School, and Community. Teachers, however, fail to see the necessary partnership between them. This insight could be explained as follows (1) Teachers perceive that life skills and SEL are beneficial for everyone, and it is also the responsibility of every stakeholder to promote SEC in students. It is not necessary to coordinate or partner with each other, as long as each party performs their roles well; (2) Teachers receive messages from parents, students, as well as the general society about their expectations of academic achievement more often than about life skills or other non-academic achievements. Therefore teachers believe they could be partners with family, and with the social organization regarding academic issues. However, there are a number of research studies that claim the importance of the partnership between family, school, and community (S. M. Jones & Bouffard, 2012; Nolan, 2016; Patrikakou et al., 2005; Zins & Elias, 2007). In the CASEL framework, recently, they strongly emphasize School-Family-Community partnerships as the foundation for any SEL intervention. CASEL

believes the authentic partnership with families is one of four key settings, including classroom, schoolwide, and communities (CASEL, n.d.-b). During cooperative work between school and family, the current teachers and caregivers together identify advantages, challenges, and common goals, and finally construct a potential working plan which fits everyone to achieve the best promotion. Authentic relationship with community organizations is also important since it provides students with consistent SEL support, and nurturing environments where students can access a vast availability of meaningful SEL resources. Communal channels through their close connections with school and family, potentially could effectively facilitate students in terms of applying, testing, and consolidating their knowledge, skills, and attitudes learned in a different context of living and learning (Doss et al., 2019).



## **Chapter VI - Implication, Limitations, and Conclusion**

The chapter concludes with a discussion of the implication and limitations of the study, and provides recommendations for future research. A general conclusion comes at the end of the dissertation.

### **Implication**

1. Throughout the research, it is appropriate to state that teachers are aware of and have a strong belief in the importance of SEL to their primary school students. Teachers are far more likely to integrate SEL into their educational practices. SEL is highly recommended to be implemented rigorously in Vietnam. The implementation should be with a well-evidence-based design. The literature on SEL has explicitly indicated four approaches to SEL integration. However, three following elements emerge: (1) Vietnamese education has a long history of applying life skill education, and there are more than 15 different major groups of skills to be taught in primary schools; (2) Vietnamese school culture is influenced by the national collectivist culture which group/community needs are more valued than individual needs; (3) Life skills and moral learning for children are concerned and taught by every stakeholder. Considering the three above elements, this study provides insights into what is considered the most effective approach to promoting students' SEC. In agreement with Cefai et al. (2015, 2018), S. M. Jones & Bouffard (2012), and CASEL (n.d.-b) should SEL be implemented officially in primary school education, it has to be a schoolwide approach. In addition, it is necessary to build on the existing achievement of the SEL program in Vietnam as well as the advancement of SEL research worldwide. As proposed by S. M. Jones and Bouffard (2012), SEL programs should be sustained, so that students experience continuity from one year to the next, it is particularly critical in the case of SEL in preschool and primary school. Pre-schools in Vietnam have integrated SEL as one of five core targeted competencies since 2009, and are expected to be revised in the coming new curriculum enacted in 2022 (not yet published as of this writing). The SEL program in preschool had been developed based on CASEL's framework available at the time (2009), considering the national traditional values and educational targets, as well as the available conditions. This study is developed originally from CASEL's knowledge of SEL, and CASEL's SEL work is the most widely cited worldwide as evidence of their valuable research and practice work. It, therefore, is recommended that when SEL is designed for primary school education, CASEL's SEL framework will be the primary reference. Importantly,

the available CASEL's SEL framework is broadly approaching schoolwide and community-wide design. This point is aligned with teachers' perception, which strongly indicates Vietnamese educational principles and values. Besides, Vietnamese teachers' views on SEL also share a number of common aspects with a model of social and emotional education (SEE) developed by The Network of Experts working on the Social Dimension of Education and Training (NESET) (Cefai et al., 2018). In this SEE model, SEL is advanced to the educational approaches that embed relational and contextual curricula to develop SEC for key aspects of individual development, including personal, social, and academic (Cefai et al., 2018). The concept, on the one hand, employs the SEL core module while integrating more recent advanced concepts, including positive education, which is the blend of academic learning with character and well-being, and mindfulness on the other hand (Bott et al., 2017; Cefai et al., 2018). Therefore, there is a shift from SEL to SEE which is intended to include a wider view of teaching and learning, considering classroom environment, entire school ecology, parental engagement, and teacher effectiveness in both SEL illustration and implementation (Cefai et al., 2018). As such, SEE should be implemented from the whole-school approach. Therefore, Vietnamese education has the advantages of advanced knowledge and practices worldwide, there is no better time to design their own SEL program to meet their education requirements.

2. Throughout the study, it is clear to see that regardless of any positive belief, teachers are not confident in their SEL practice and its effectiveness. The main attributions are the absence of SEL training and the partnerships between the three main forces of children's education, namely School-Family-Community. This study provides evidence and discussion about the issue, and it accentuates a strong request to prepare teachers, either in-service or pre-service teachers knowledge, skills, and attitudes to promote their own SEC, and well-designed SEL teaching tools so that they will be confident and effective in SEL delivery. Referring to the current development of SEL research, this study recommends approaches to solve a part of this issue by teaching SEL to pre-service teachers in pedagogical universities.

Teachers must improve their own SEC, understand how to specifically teach social and emotional skills, and possess the expertise, dispositions, and skills necessary to foster a healthy, inclusive, and sensitive school and classroom environment (Schonert-Reichl et al., 2017). According to CASEL (n.d.-b), there are 4 popular approaches to

promoting SEC for students which could be applied to teacher education in the Vietnamese context.

Firstly, free-standing lessons designed to enhance student teachers' SEC explicitly could be the optimal choice for SEC improvement goals. This kind of independent course provides explicit SEL instruction in which teacher students are instructed to promote their own SEC and experience themselves as learners. In this approach, teacher candidates not only promote their own SEC but understand the case for their future students when they become teachers. Being an independent course, SEL should be treated equally to other course works with teaching and learning curriculum, planning, designated schedule, and assessment.

The second approach is integrating SEL into other courses. SEL could be integrated into other courses as elements added in. In the current teacher education program, there are a host of courses available for integration such as General psychology and school psychology, Pedagogical Practices and the Development of Social and Personal Skills, Psychological Counseling in Schools. These courses have their own working functions, but SEL could be added in for more practical application in real practice and terms of SEC concerns. Furthermore, a number of courses that for several reasons have been removed from the original program should be brought back, for instance, Pedagogy Communication, Social Psychology, Psychology Practice. When a course is added on, another course in another area has to be omitted (Schonert-Reichl, 2017), still, it is necessary to take consideration since the matter is providing significant support for teachers for the sake of not only themselves but their many student generations later on. Apart from these directly relevant content courses, it is also possible to interweave SEL elements in any other subject knowledge courses such as Vietnamese and Language Arts, Mathematics, Science, Social Study. By acquiring a great deal of subject knowledge served their teaching later on in the college of education, pre-service teachers expose themselves to SEL, improve the SEL competence for themselves, develop competence to choose which knowledge areas, which lessons, and how to integrate SEL in their teaching. For instance, Vietnamese and Language arts could be one of them. Teacher students learn by themselves how to understand others, events from different perspectives, and how to show empathy to others by analyzing the disposition, and characteristics of the characters in each work of literature. The learning helps them identify the relevant and available content to integrate SEL.

The third way is the integration of SEL into teaching practices to create a favourable classroom climate. Given the comprehensive understanding of classroom climate significance, throughout teaching-learning processes, teacher educators are able to enhance their teacher students' SEC naturally by ensuring learning authority. By that, the learners have a chance to choose the learning content, and manage their own learning with a specific goal set. In addition, in this approach, teacher educators are suggested to create cooperative, interactive, and project-based learning with practical implications, associated with cultural and social characteristics, attached to real life. According to the collaborative learning theories of Vygotsky and Bruners, every single step in this approach could navigate to the accumulation of SEL skills (Hagaman, 1990).

The last possible approach is to use an organizational setting to support SEL as a school-wide program that develops a learning-friendly environment and community. In Vietnamese schools in general, and particularly in pedagogical schools (colleges of education), the practice of rigorous moral values is always ensured, which provides a warm, safe, and supportive environment. However, for the strong will of SEL implementation and enhancing SEC for every stakeholder, the matter could be taken more seriously attention to avoid any unexpectedly deconstructive events occurring in the school-wide setting. Besides, extra curriculum activities inside or outside school, such as the communist Youth Union, charity, or community projects, also need more careful consideration for their positive and actual effectiveness. These activities importantly create chances for teaching students to expose themselves to school-wide, and society-wide actual circumstances where they experience, assess and adjust their own competencies, including SEC.

### **Limitations**

Even though the main aim of this study was to understand teachers' views on SEL from their lived experience, and a qualitative approach was an appropriate choice, the phenomenon would be explored comprehensively if quantitative tools were employed. This could be the future project of the researcher.

Besides, as a typical limitation of qualitative research, a small number of interviews (13 participants) might concern the point of data saturation. However, purposeful sampling, constant comparison between the core defined theoretical categories with emergent incidents, and theoretical sampling to refine, develop and check the theoretical properties allowed the data collection to occur until the stagnation (Charmaz, 2001).

In the future, the researcher expects to broaden their research scope to other important aspects of SEL, such as teachers' own SEC, principals' perspectives on SEL, or SEE approaching school-wide and community-wide implementation.

Besides, the research was limited with time, researcher mobility, and interaction platform used during Covid19 (online with a number of shortcomings).

## **Conclusions**

The study aimed at exploring public primary school teachers' perspectives and understanding of social and emotional learning for their students. For the research purpose, qualitative research with a constructivist grounded theory approach was chosen to investigate the complexity of the subject, and the relationships underpinning social and cultural phenomena. The study was guided by the following questions:

*In the primary education context, and in teachers' perspectives and understanding:*

- 1. What is social and emotional learning for primary students?*
- 2. What are the roles of social and emotional learning for primary students?*
- 3. How to integrate social and emotional learning for students in primary schools?*
- 4. What factors influence the integration of social and emotional learning for students in primary schools?*

The emergent themes of the study indicate that SEL is a part of life skills education in Vietnamese primary schools, and it aims at developing students' positive attitudes, feelings of attachment, happiness and making the community a better place. From teachers' understanding of SEL as a part of life skills education, SEL benefits directly cover every student's activity at school and indirectly influence students' life at home or outside their living community. As a result, teachers attempt to integrate SEL into three respective activities of students in school, namely academic learning, experimental experience activities, and life skill lesson. These approaches interlink with each other and each integration method would overlap or compensate for other approaches. Nevertheless, SEL is infused into every educational area than being delivered in the independent or explicit subject. Since the integration of SEL involves every stakeholder, role models and role play are confirmed to be the most employed and effective techniques in SEL integration. There are four main sources that directly and indirectly impact SEL implementation, including Student, School, Family, and Community. It demonstrates a strong relevance to the three previous aspects of SEL. The explanation of teachers'

perspectives on social and emotional learning humbly contributes to the scholarly literature on teachers' understanding and view of SEL in the Vietnamese primary school context. Together with many other research studies, the implications for practice and further research questions are proposed and discussed. As a teacher educator, the researcher expresses her ambitions of providing pre-service and in-service teachers with SEL knowledge and practice so that they are competent socially and emotionally and have the best equipment to promote competence to their primary students. The researcher also believes the best practice of SEL is in the cooperation of school, family and community, and it should be applied widely, continually from early childhood to higher education.

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# Appendices

## Appendix A. Ethical Permission

**Feladó:** ELTE PPK KEB <[keb@ppk.elte.hu](mailto:keb@ppk.elte.hu)>

**Dátum:** csütörtök, 2022. március 24. 9:58

**Címzett:** Dr. Zsolnai Anikó <[zsolnai.aniko@ppk.elte.hu](mailto:zsolnai.aniko@ppk.elte.hu)>

**Tárgy:** FW: FW: Ethical Application\_Aniko Zsolnai\_Dung

Kedves Anikó,

**A kérelem jóváhagyása március 24-én megtörtént, az engedély száma: 2022/128**

**Az engedély érvényessége:** April 2022 to December 2022

**A KÉRELMET NYOMTATOTT FORMÁBAN BENYÚJTANI NEM KELL.**

Felhívjuk a figyelmet arra, hogy a KEB a kinyomtatott, aláírt hivatalos engedélyt csak a kutatásvezető (kérelmező) részére juttatja el az adott Intézet vagy Tanszék ügyintézőjén keresztül.

Üdvözlettel:



## **Appendix B. Invitation to Participate in the Study**

**To:** [Name of School] Primary School Teachers

**From:** Dr. Zsolnai Aniko and Do Thi Dung, Doctoral School of Education, Faculty of Education and Psychology, Eotvos Lorand University, Budapest, Hungary

We are doing a study of primary school teachers' perspectives and understanding of social and emotional learning during this Summer of 2022. Ms Duong Thu Hoa (a pseudonym used for privacy during publication), the Vice-principal, has agreed to let me invite you to participate in this study as a student researcher. We are interested in how your understanding and perspective of social and emotional learning influence how you implement such subjects and practices into your daily teaching and educational activities. As the results of this study, we expect that we could have a deeper understanding of teachers' implementation and development of social and emotional learning in their primary school classroom and extra-curriculum activities.

In this school, we are looking for 3 participants. Everyone who is a part of the study will be asked to participate in an approximately 60 to 90-minute in-person or online interview (Zoom platform) that will be audio recorded and later transcribed. Within the research project, your identity within the research will be kept confidential and anonymous. The decision to participate in this research will not affect your school performance or school records.

We are available to answer any questions you may have about this study or the results of this research at Email [dothidung@hdu.edu.vn](mailto:dothidung@hdu.edu.vn) or [zsolnai.aniko@ppk.elte.hu](mailto:zsolnai.aniko@ppk.elte.hu)

If you are willing to participate in this study, please email us for more information or to volunteer. If you do not email us, you will never be contacted again regarding this research. Thank you for your consideration and support!

Best regards,

Dr. Zsolnai Aniko

Do Thi Dung

**Appendix C. Informed Consent**

**Department of Education and Training  
Thanh Hoa province**

**SOCIALIST REPUBLIC OF VIETNAM  
Independence – Freedom - Happiness**

**Informed Consent**

The purpose of this study is for a theory to emerge that describes primary school teachers’ perspectives and understanding of social and emotional learning (SEL).

You will be asked to answer a series of 25 questions. This interview will take approximately 01 hour. There are no known risks associated with this study. We expect this research to assist in exploring how perspectives and understanding may affect SEL implementation in the school and SEL development of students. In addition, be aware of the influential factors may help predict successful implementation strategies that are specific to your school.

Please understand that the participation is completely voluntary. You have the right to withdraw from the research at any time without penalty. You also have the right to refuse to answer any question(s) for any reason, without penalty. Your individual privacy will be maintained in all publications or presentations resulting from this study.

If you are have questions or would like to have additional information about this research, please contact Do Thi Dung at 0945 484 889 (Zalo) or [dothidung@hdu.edu.vn](mailto:dothidung@hdu.edu.vn). This study has been approved by Department of Education and Training of Thanh Hoa (Vietnam). If you have questions about the subjects’ rights or other concerns, you can contact [vanphongso@thanhhoa.edu.vn](mailto:vanphongso@thanhhoa.edu.vn).

Signature of Participant.....Date.....

Printed Name of Participant.....

**Appendix D. Screen questions (For participant recruitment)**

**SCREENING SURVEY QUESTIONS**

**1. Have you heard about “Social and Emotional learning”? (Yes/No? Which sources?)**

.....

**2. Social-emotional learning (SEL) is demonstrated through 5 core competencies:**

Self-Awareness: The ability to recognize and name one's own feelings as well as one's thoughts and behaviors in different situations. This also includes the ability to accurately assess one's strengths and limitations and establish a grounded sense of confidence.

Self-management: The ability to regulate/regulate one's emotions, thoughts, and behaviors; maintain satisfaction; effective stress control; self-motivation; motivate and plan work to achieve goals.

Social awareness: The ability to recognize and empathize with others with different conditions and circumstances; this also includes the ability to absorb the views of others, to recognize and seek out, and to mobilize available and diverse support.

Relationship Skills: The ability to establish and maintain healthy and rewarding relationships with individuals, groups, and groups. The ability to communicate clearly, listen well, cooperate with others, protect oneself from inappropriate social pressures, resolve conflicts by negotiating, and seek help when needed, are all are clear examples of this skill.

Responsible Decisions: The ability to make choices based on considerations of emotions, personal behavior, goals, outcomes, and social interactions based on ethical standards and social norms.

**SEL is one of the 5 core skill groups in the preschool curriculum, at the primary level, do you think this skill is necessary and should be paid more attention? (Yes/No)**

.....

**3. Do you realize that we have been developing these competencies for students through teaching activities and daily experiences? (Yes/Partly/No)**

.....

**4. How do teachers evaluate their own social and emotional competence? For example: controlling and regulating your own negative emotions, thoughts, and behaviors, in and out of school; easy to empathize and understand others; easily establish and maintain good relationships with friends and colleagues; often making appropriate considerations for all issues, making relatively appropriate decisions in life as well as in professional activities. (Give yourself a score of 1 to 10)**

.....

*Full name (surveyed person):* .....

*Position:*.....

*School:*.....

## **Appendix E. Interview Protocol**

### **INTERVIEW PROTOCOL (Version 1)**

Research questions: 1) *What is social and emotional learning in primary school teachers' perceptions?* 2) *What are the roles of social and emotional competence from primary school teachers' perspectives?* 3) *How do primary school teachers implement social and emotional learning in school daily activities?* 4) *What supports do primary school teachers need to implement successfully SEL?*

#### ***Part 1: General participants' information and their descriptions of SEL***

- 1) How long have you been a primary teacher?
- 2) Which grade are you teaching this academic year?
- 3) What made you decide to become a primary school teacher?
- 4) How long have you been working in this school?
- 5) What is the motivation to you to work in this public school?
- 6) Have you heard of “social and emotional learning” or SEL? If yes, how do you understand it?
- 7) How do you describe self-awareness skills?
- 8) How do you describe self-management skills?
- 9) How do you describe responsible decision making skills?
- 10) How do you describe relationship skills?
- 11) How do you describe social awareness skills?

#### ***Part 2: Teachers' perspectives and views on the importance of SEL***

- 12) Is SEL important in your everyday teaching practices? Why or why not?
- 13) Is SEL important to your students' learning practices? Why or why not?
- 14) Is SEL important to educational activities inside and outside the classroom (extra-curriculum)? Why or why not?

#### ***Part 3: Teachers' perspectives and views on the integration of SEL in their teaching***

- 15) Do you integrate SEL throughout your teaching time or is it just a specific time of day/week that you dedicate to SEL?

16) Can you describe methods/ techniques in which you integrate SEL in your subject teaching?

17) Can you describe methods/ techniques in which you integrate SEL into your extra-curriculum activities?

18) What are the best methods, in your opinion, to implement SEL?

19) How do you think of potential SEL implementation in the new general education program?

***Part 4: Support for teachers in SEL implementation***

20) Have you had any formal/ informal training in SEL?

21) Do you feel that training has helped you integrate SEL into your teaching?

22) How do you describe the supports in implementing SEL within your teaching?

23) Would you like to share some additional information about how the skills we discussed in class are integrated into your school?

24) The influence of Covid19 pandemic on students' SL and the preparation, teaching and implementation of SEL in your teaching.

25) What are your concerns about the effect of the pandemic on your student's mental health in general, and social and emotional promotion in particular?

**INTERVIEW PROTOCOL (Version 2)**

Research questions: *1) What is social and emotional learning in primary school teachers' perceptions? 2) What are the benefits of social and emotional competence from primary school teachers' perspectives? 3) How do primary school teachers implement social and emotional learning in school daily activities? 4) What supports do primary school teachers need to implement successfully SEL?*

***Part 1: General participants' information and their descriptions of SEL***

1) How long have you been a primary teacher?

2) Which grade are you teaching this academic year?

3) What made you decide to become a primary school teacher?

4) How long have you been working in this school?

5) What is the motivation for you to work in this public school?



- 6) Have you heard of “social and emotional learning” or SEL?
- 7) If you have not heard/known of SEL, how could you tell me about teaching social skills, emotional skills and other relevant skills to primary school students?
- 8) Self-awareness is emphasized as one element of SEL by other teachers, what is your opinion?
- 9) Emotional management is emphasized as one element of SEL by other teachers, what is your opinion?
- 10) Empathy is emphasized as one element of SEL by other teachers, what is your opinion?
- 11) Cooperation is emphasized as one element of SEL by other teachers, what is your opinion?
- 12) Problem-solving emphasized as one element of SEL by other teachers, what is your opinion?
- 13) Any other elements that you think SEL should cover in primary education?
- 14) How do you think the above mentions elements interconnect with each other and make up a multi-facet SEC for primary students?

***Part 2: Teachers’ perspectives and views on the roles of SEL***

- 15) What are the benefits when students have SEC during academic learning activities?
- 16) What are the benefits when students have SEC during experimental educational activities?
- 17) What are the benefits for teachers and other stakeholders involving students with SEC?
- 18) What are the benefits for the local community involving students with SEC?

***Part 3: Teachers’ perspectives and views on the integration of SEL in their teaching***

- 19) How have you been integrating SEL into academic subjects/ experimental educational activities throughout daily teaching?
- 20) Can you describe methods/ techniques in which you integrate SEL in your teaching?
- 21) Role model and role play are two main instrumental techniques used for SEL integration as stated by other teachers, how would you think about these?
- 22) Several teachers have stated that classroom teachers/ class teachers have more time and other supportive conditions to integrate SEL in their teaching. How do you think?
- 23) SEL has been more effectively delivered in life skill classes with teaching experts from external life skill education centres. What do you think about this?
- 24) What are the best methods, in your opinion, to implement SEL?

25) The new general education program provides more time for non-academic education, how do you think about the application for SEL?

***Part 4: Support for teachers in SEL implementation***

26) It seems that the Board of School Committee has play important role in implementing any life skills education, how about SEL integration?

27) Professional development program every summer seem to help not much for your actual practice? How about other helpful sources for your development in general and life skill education in particular?

28) How do you describe the supports in implementing SEL which you think are needed?

29) What are your concerns about the effect of the pandemic on your students' mental health in general, and social and emotional promotion in particular?

**INTERVIEW PROTOCOL (Version 3)**

Research questions: *1) What is social and emotional learning in primary school teachers' perceptions? 2) What are the benefits of social and emotional competence from primary school teachers' perspectives? 3) How do primary school teachers implement social and emotional learning in school daily activities? 4) What supports do primary school teachers need to implement successfully SEL?*

***Part 1: General participants' information and their descriptions of SEL***

1) How long have you been a primary teacher?

2) Which grade are you teaching this academic year?

3) What made you decide to become a primary school teacher?

4) How long have you been working in this school?

5) What is the motivation for you to work in this public school?

6) Have you heard of "social and emotional learning" or SEL?

7) Previous teachers state that SEL is a part of life skills, what is your opinion and thoughts about this?

8) Self-management is described as an element of SEL, and it is....(synthesized concept given by earlier interviews). What is your opinion?

9) Emotional management is described as an element of SEL, and it is....(synthesized concept given by earlier interviews). What is your opinion?

10) Empathy is described as an element of SEL, and it is....(synthesized concept given by earlier interviews). What is your opinion?

11) Cooperation is described as an element of SEL, and it is....(synthesized concept given by earlier interviews). What is your opinion?

12) Problem-solving is described as an element of SEL, and it is... (synthesized concept given by earlier interviews)...What is your opinion?

13) Are there any other elements that you think could be covered in SEL in primary education?

***Part 2: Teachers' perspectives and views on the roles of SEL***

14) SEL is needed throughout the day of students' lives, it benefits students' academic and non-academic learning, how do you think about this?

15) SEL benefits other stakeholders who are directly and indirectly involved in students' life and activities, including school, family, and their local community, how do you think about this?

***Part 3: Teachers' perspectives and views on the integration of SEL in their teaching***

15) SEL has been integrated into every educational activity of students including academic and non-academic learning, how do you think about this?

16) SEL has been integrated into students' activities inside and outside school, how do you think about this?

17) Role models and role-play are the main methods to integrate into students' educational activities, how do you think about this?

18) Inviting specialists from private life skill training centres for SEL seems to be an effective method to improve SEC for students, how do you think about this?

19) How do think about the partnership between school-family-community in SEL for students?

20) How do you think of potential SEL implementation in the new general education program?

***Part 4: Support for teachers in SEL implementation***

21) Teachers do not receive sufficient support from the Ministry of Education or Department of Education for life skills education (including SEL), however, learning from external experts, self-training, and support from the Board of School Committee seems to be the main sources for teachers' competence in SEL integration, how do you think about this?

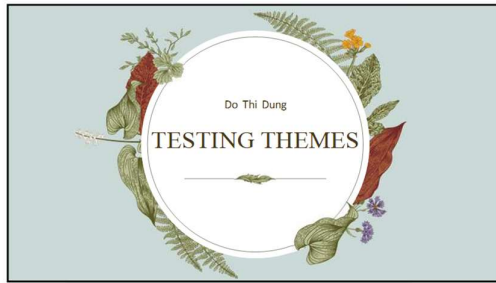
22) Family is an instrumental factor in effective SEL implementation, how do you think about this?

23) Local community is also an instrumental factor in effective SEL implementation, how do you think about this?

24) How do you think the necessity of coordination of different forces in SEL, including school, family, and community?

25) Covid19 pandemic impacts tremendously on students' SEL, how do think about this, and how teachers could do to help students recover from adversity?

## Appendix F. Testing theme PowerPoint sample



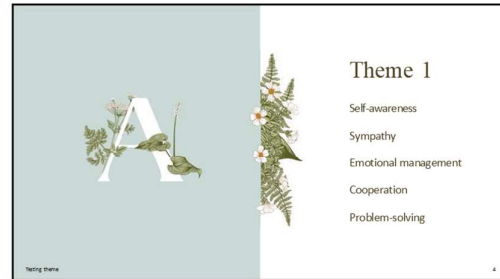
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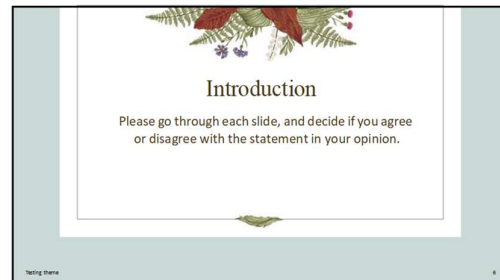
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6




## Giới thiệu

Đề nghị thầy/cô bấm vào từng slide, và kiểm tra xem những khẳng định ở mỗi slide là phù hợp hay không phù hợp với quan điểm của thầy/cô.

Teaching theme 7

7



## Self-awareness



Teaching theme 8

8

## Strengths and Weaknesses

- Students know their strengths and weaknesses.
- They know which subjects, activities, or events they can perform well, and they are confident of their presence.
- They know which subjects, activities, or events they may fail to achieve good results or they would need much time, and effort to prepare and work on these to achieve positive results.
- They recognize their faults, mistakes

Teaching theme 9

9

## Điểm mạnh và điểm yếu của mình

- Học sinh biết được điểm mạnh, điểm yếu của mình
- Các em biết là môn học nào, hoạt động nào các em có thể thực hiện tốt, và các em tự tin tham gia những hoạt động này.
- Các em biết là môn nào, hoạt động nào các em có thể không thể hoàn thành, hoặc đạt được điểm, thành tích tốt khi tham gia. Hoặc các em cần nhiều thời gian, sức lực để chuẩn bị cho những hoạt động này để đạt được kết quả khả quan.
- Các em nhận ra lỗi sai, khuyết điểm của mình

Teaching theme 10

10

## Liking or dislike

- Students know what they like and what they don't like
- Students develop love for things in their life: family, school, friends, community, their nation, plants, animals...
- Students identify good traits/characters/aspects from an object or situation, or person so that they enjoy being around or in the circumstance with them.

Teaching theme 11

11

## Thích hoặc không thích

- Học sinh biết họ thích cái gì, không thích cái gì
- Học sinh phát triển tình cảm tích cực với mọi thứ trong cuộc sống: Từ gia đình, nhà trường, bạn bè, cộng đồng dân cư, đất nước, cây cỏ, chim muông,...
- Học sinh nhận ra những mặt tốt của sự vật, hiện tượng, con người để luôn cảm thấy thích thú, dễ chịu khi ở cạnh hoặc ở trong những tình huống có vật, hay người nào đó.

Teaching theme 12

12