



# Thai Primary Teachers' Views on Social and Emotional Learning: A Preliminary Survey

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**Abstract:** This study aimed to examine Thai primary school teachers' perceptions of Social and Emotional Learning (SEL), their experiences with SEL in classrooms, and the barriers to implementing these practices. Utilizing a Thai-translated version of the Instrument to Assess Teacher Perceptions of Social Emotional Learning (SEL) in PK-12 Schools, the study surveyed 189 primary school teachers in Thai medium schools. Additionally, qualitative analysis of open-ended questions was conducted using thematic analysis. The survey yielded significant insights into teachers' knowledge, skills, training, and experiences with SEL, as well as the obstacles to implementing SEL practices or receiving professional development within the Thai educational context. Results indicated that Thai primary teachers believe SEL has the potential to enhance students' social, emotional, and academic outcomes. The study suggests the need for developing SEL policies and curricula, enhancing teacher training, and conducting future research on the impacts of SEL.

**Keywords:** Social and Emotional Learning (SEL), teachers' perceptions and attitude, implementation of SEL, Thai primary school teachers, CASEL

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Received: July 20, 2024 Revised: January 10, 2025 Accepted: January 12, 2025

## Background of the Study

The last few decades of empirical research prove that school education is required to focus on non-cognitive learning outcomes such as Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) in addition to cognitive outcomes (Frank, 2020; Santos et al., 2023; Schiepe-Tiska, Dzhaparkulova, & Ziernwald, 2021). It is a growing movement within education (Graczyk, Domitrovich, Small, & Zins, 2006) and social and emotional competencies are considered as 21st century skills (Santos et al., 2023). The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL), perhaps the most prominent

conceptual framework of Social and Emotional Learning (Huck, Zhang, Garby, & Li, 2023), SEL is the process of gaining and using knowledge, skills, and attitudes to develop healthy identities, manage emotions, achieve goals, show empathy, build supportive relationships, and make responsible decisions. These programs can be implemented at distinct levels, such as classroom level, school-wide or in collaboration at family or community level (Graczyk et al., 2006). There are a variety of delivery models available to implement in school settings. Many empirical studies have been conducted in psychology and education. Effective implementation of SEL interventions will result in good academic performance (Yu, Yu, & Tong, 2023); increased prosocial behaviors, positive attitudes toward self and others, reduced aggression and emotional distress (Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor, Schellinger, 2011); positive impacts on teacher wellbeing (Sandilos, Neugebauer, DiPerna, Hart, & Lei, 2023) and economic outcomes (Belfield et al., 2015). A study by Baumsteiger, Hoffmann, Castillo-Gualda, and Brackett in 2022 also showed the positive impact of evidence-based approach to SEL on various aspects of school climate which includes discipline, student relationships, teaching quality, student–adult relationships, support for social and emotional learning, respect for diversity, student voice, and school satisfaction.

### **Primary Education in Thailand**

Primary education lasts six years, or Prathom 1 to 6 (Grades 1 through 6), according to the Thai educational system, primary school students are those who are enrolled in Thailand's primary education program and range in age from six to eleven. To ensure that every student develops holistically—becoming physically, intellectually, and morally well-rounded—the primary education management follows the Basic Education Core Curriculum B.E. 2551 (Office of the Basic Education Commission, 2008). Additionally, the curriculum aims to instill a sense of Thai identity and global citizenship awareness in each student. Thai primary school pupils are laying the groundwork for future academic and personal development at this critical juncture in their educational journey. Eight qualities were listed as desirables for Thai learners by the Office of the Basic Education Commission (2008): (1) love of the country, religion, and monarchy; (2) honesty and integrity; (3) self-discipline; (4) avidness for learning; (5) applying the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy principle in one's way of life; (6) dedication and commitment to work; (7) cherishing Thai nationalism; and (8) patriotism.

It is widely accepted that the educational system's quality is determined by the caliber of the teachers. In Thailand, Thai primary school teachers are highly responsible for educating young students in subjects like Thai language, mathematics, science, and social studies. Normally, they hold a bachelor's degree in education and must obtain a teaching license from the Teachers' Council of Thailand. A study from Pholphirul, Rukumnuaykit, and Teimrad (2023) revealed that the teacher shortage in Thailand has been especially severe in small rural primary schools, lacking adequate staffing, forcing underqualified and less experienced teachers to handle multiple subjects and grade levels. The students in Thailand spend long period of time in primary education, where they are inundated with a crowded curriculum focused heavily on academic subjects like mathematics, science, and languages, often leaving little room for social and emotional development. This imbalance in prioritizing academic skills over essential soft skills has become a significant challenge in the education system, impacting students' ability to cope with real-world conditions as they mature and enter the workforce. At present, there is a growing emphasis on incorporating student-centered and SEL approaches into the curriculum.

### **Factors Influencing the Effectiveness of the Programs**

The process of implementation and the effectiveness of SEL interventions for school children are influenced by many factors such as the characteristics of the school system (Buchanan, Gueldner, Tran, & Merrell, 2009); facilitators/ teachers' perceptions of the SEL interventions and trainings they

received, (Brackett, Reyes, Rivers, Elbertson, & Salovey, 2012; Zinsser, Shewark, Denham, & Curby, 2014; the sociocultural context (Triliva & Poulou, 2006). While evaluating the implementation of SEL, Cahill et al. (2019) emphasizes the factors at various levels that include the individual, school, and system level within the wider ideological and political settings of the program that impact on its implementation. Their study emphasizes the need to understand the interrelations that exist between various elements related to the implementation of the program, and their possible impact on program delivery and outcomes.

Thus, one significant aspect that turned up among many variables essential for the effective implementation and outcome of SEL programs is a factor related to one of stakeholders - teachers (Graczyk, et al, 2006; Meyers, Domitrovich, Dissi, Trejo, & Greenberg, 2019; Poulou, 2017; Schiepe-Tiska et al., 2021; Ulla & Poom-Valickis, 2023). The promotion of SEL programs at school mainly relies on teachers (Ferreira, Reis-Jorge, & Batalha, 2021). According to McShane (2019), there is a risk involved if the teachers do not have a deeper understanding of the SEL concepts because they may perceive it as an extra program that will take away some of the sections they value from the academic program. However, it continues to exist as a less studied area in the field (Zinsser et al 2014; Durlak et al., 2011).

### **Teachers' Perception of SEL**

The effectiveness of implementation of a SEL program is mainly influenced by the teacher and school related situational factors (Ulla & Poom-Valickis, 2023); this in turn leads to a significant impact on student cognitive and noncognitive learning outcomes. One of the earlier surveys conducted among teachers (Buchanan et al., 2009) to examine teachers' knowledge, perceptions, and practices regarding SEL in the classroom, helped understand the SEL practices. For instance, many teachers believe that SEL is important, and schools should take an active role in implementing SEL. They also believe that receiving training/support from a variety of professionals is important, however the academic demands decrease the opportunity for SEL (Buchanan et al., 2009). According to another study conducted in the same year by Ransford, Greenberg, Domitrovich, Small, and Jacobson (2009), it found that teachers' positive perceptions of school administration, training and coaching are related to the quantity and quality of the implementation of Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies, which is an SEL program.

Participants' narratives from a qualitative study using focus group reflected perceptions of teachers and school leaders as inadequately prepared to direct SEL and the barriers they found are social, political, and cultural factors. But they expressed an optimistic outlook on the significance of SEL for their work inside and outside the classroom setting (Garner & Gabitova, 2024). A study conducted among Chinese early childhood teachers also revealed teachers' positive attitude towards SEL. But their lack of knowledge in pedagogical content shows the need for well-designed training programs (Zong, Yang, & Li, 2024).

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought huge nervousness and confusion to schools, teachers and students alike. Consequently, implementation of SEL interventions is going to be more censorious (Rosanbalm, 2021). The pandemic has created a negative impact not only on the SEL of students but also on a decline on teachers' perception in student SEL skills (Roberge, 2024).

### **Culture and Implementation of SEL**

Perception of SEL competencies is highly impacted by the sociocultural context (Triliva & Poulou, 2006). The transformative social and emotional learning (Jagers, Rivas-Drake, & Williams, 2019), a form of SEL that aims to foster equity and excellence among people in all age groups emphasizes the role of agency, belonging, engagement, identity and culture as relevant expressions of the

CASEL 5 core competencies (self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision making). So, the focus is on programs and practices that cultivate these competencies and the importance of adult professional development in making these efforts maximally effective for diverse children and youth.

In Thailand, the school culture reflects the blend of traditional values and modernity. Most of the schools integrate Buddhist teachings and Thai cultural values into the curriculum, such as modesty and humility, collectivism, and respect for authority. The cultural frame of Thai teachers' perception on SEL learning can be unique and surveying it will provide important inputs to identify the important contextual factors to design a culturally informed teacher professional development for enhancing school children's SEL. This in turn results in effective implementation of a culturally competent SEL programs in Thailand.

Globally, research is consistent in supporting the positive impact of SEL on the academic and behavioral outcomes of students at all levels. However, it is important to realize that when teachers hold negative perceptions and attitude, insufficient knowledge, and lack of confidence to implement, the desired outcomes of the SEL programs may not be achieved. This can lead to dissatisfaction among teachers and disengagement among students. It is therefore necessary to conduct more research into teachers' perceptions of SEL, needs of SEL in their schools, training, experiences with SEL in their classrooms, and barriers to implementing practices.

### **Research Questions**

The researchers conducted this survey as an exploratory study with an objective of conducting a preliminary survey of an area that is less explored in the Thai cultural context. The following research questions guide the study in exploring various aspects of SEL from the perspective of Thai primary teachers: What are Thai primary school teachers' perceptions of SEL? What experiences do Thai primary school teachers have with implementing SEL in their classrooms? What barriers do Thai primary school teachers face in implementing SEL practices in their classrooms?

### **Methodology**

The primary aim of this research is to conduct both quantitative and qualitative investigation on Thai primary school teachers' perceptions of SEL in school.

#### *Sample*

The sample for the present study consists of 189 primary school teachers (38 male and 151 female) working in Thai medium schools in Thailand. All these respondents were Thai citizens: 171 were working in public schools, and 18 were working in private schools. The study aimed to gather insights from primary school teachers in Thailand, focusing on those working in Thai medium schools. By focusing on schools within Thailand, the study intended to address specific educational contexts, cultural factors, and systemic elements unique to the Thai education system. The sampling technique used was a convenience sampling and snowball sampling method. These non-probability sampling techniques involve selecting participants who are readily available and willing to participate. To gain preliminary insights, it is useful for exploratory studies where the goal is to gather initial understandings and identify patterns or trends that can inform further research. To gain preliminary insights, exploratory studies are useful for gathering initial understandings and identifying patterns or trends that can inform further research. For instance, the pilot study that contributed to developing the original English version of the Instrument to Assess Teacher Perceptions of Social Emotional Learning (SEL) in PK–12 Schools also used a convenience sampling method (Huck et al., 2023). The questionnaire was prepared in Google Forms format and sent to

various schools in Thailand, primarily in the central and northern provinces. The questionnaires were emailed to the principals, teachers, and other administrators of 11 schools, asking them to distribute them to the Thai primary teachers they knew. Based on feedback from a pilot survey with 20 Thai primary teachers and teacher trainees, specific names of the participants' schools were not collected. This decision was made because the majority of respondents indicated that they did not want to reveal their school names and wished to maintain confidentiality. The informed consent was obtained from the participants prior to data collection.

### *Instrument*

A Thai-translated version of the Instrument to Assess Teacher Perceptions of Social Emotional Learning (SEL) in PK–12 Schools (Huck et al., 2023) was used to conduct the study. After receiving permission from the authors of the original English instrument, it has undergone minor modifications to adapt it to the Thai educational context. The modifications were performed by 4 educational experts in Thailand. The final version of the survey questionnaire was rated by 3 experts for its semantic clarity, relevance, and readability. The scale's interrater reliability was established using percent agreement and the overall agreement was 93.33.

The Thai instrument consists of four sections as follows: Section I covers Background Information (e.g., age, gender, subjects taught, years of teaching experience). Section II focuses on Perceptions about Social and Emotional Learning (e.g., “Taking care of my students' social and emotional needs comes naturally to me”), with responses collected using a 4-point Likert scale ranging from ‘strongly disagree’ to ‘strongly agree’. Section III addresses Social and Emotional Learning Preparation and Implementation (e.g., “How satisfied are you with the amount of coverage SEL received?”), incorporating various types of questions with response categories detailed in the results section. Section IV includes Open-ended Questions (e.g., “Please share your experience implementing SEL practices”). All sections and their response categories were maintained as they appeared in the original English instrument (Huck et al., 2023).

### *Data Collection Procedure*

A detailed study proposal was sent to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of the university. After receiving the ethical approval from IRB, a formal request letter detailing the purpose of the study and a google form of the instrument were sent to the school administrators through email for the data collection. The data collected through google forms were analyzed for errors. Descriptive statistics are used to analyze the data.

## **Results**

The results are presented in the following sections including quantitative-based results and qualitative-based results. The quantitative-based results were background information, primary teacher perceptions of SEL, primary teacher experiences of implementation of SEL, common barriers in implementing SEL. The qualitative results were interpreted from two open-ended survey questions. The qualitative data were analyzed thematically. To ensure reliability, three researchers were familiar with coding process and the coding framework reviewed and coded the data independently. The researchers compared their coding results and discussed discrepancies to reach a consensus on coding decisions.

## Quantitative Data-based Results

### *Background Information/Demographics*

The respondents were 189 Thai school teachers (151 females and 38 males). The demographic characteristics of the sample are given in table1. Respondents' ages were reported as 20–29 ( $n = 50$ ); 30–39 ( $n = 45$ ); 40–49 ( $n = 32$ ); and 50 or older ( $n = 62$ ). Years of teaching experience ranged from less than one year ( $n = 13$ ) to 16 or more years ( $n = 72$ ), while other categories were: 1-3 years ( $n = 40$ ), 4-6 years ( $n = 18$ ), 7-10 years ( $n = 18$ ), and 11-15 years ( $n = 28$ ). The subjects they teach included Arts, Language, Mathematics and Science, and Social Sciences. Most of them have a bachelor's degree (83.07%), followed by a master's degree (15.34%), and a diploma (1.59%).

The respondents were asked to self-rate their knowledge and understanding of SEL on a scale of 1–5. Their mean rating was 3.60. The frequency and percent of the responses categories were: 1: none (0%); 2: low (1.6%); 3: moderate (47.6%); 4: high (40.2%); and 5: very high: (10.6%).

**Table 1**

### *The Demographic Characteristics of the Data*

Demographic Variable	Frequency	Percentage	Total
<b>Age</b>			189
20-29 years	50	26.46	
30-39 years	45	23.81	
40-49 years	32	16.93	
50 and above	62	32.80	
<b>Years of teaching experience</b>			189
Less than one year	13	6.88	
1-3 years (less than 4 years)	40	21.17	
4-6 years (less than 7 years)	18	9.52	
7-10 years (less than 11 years)	18	9.52	
11-15 years (less than 16 years)	28	14.81	
16 or more	72	38.10	
<b>Level of education</b>			189
Diploma	3	1.59	
Bachelor's degree	157	83.07	
Master's degree	29	15.34	

### *Primary Teacher Perceptions of SEL*

Overall, the Thai primary teachers' responses to the statements related to the research question, "What are Thai primary teachers' perceptions of SEL?" indicated their belief in the efficacy of SEL and its potential to improve students' academic, social, and emotional outcomes.

The respondents were asked to identify areas where SEL would be most beneficial, the highest average response was for "improving relationships between teachers and students" ( $M = 3.49$ ,  $SD = 0.55$ ). The second highest mean ( $M = 3.43$ ,  $SD = 0.54$ ) was for "preparing students to get through postsecondary education." Above 90% (either strongly agree or agree) of Thai primary teachers believe that SEL can positively impact all areas. See table 2 for the details.

**Table 2**

*Percent of Responses: A Larger Focus on Social and Emotional Learning Would Have a Positive Outcome on*

Areas of Benefits	Strongly Agree (4)	Agree (3)	Disagree (2)	Strongly Disagree (1)	Mean	SD
Preparing students for the workforce	33.3	63.5	2.6	0.5	3.30	0.54
Students becoming good citizens as adults	40.74	55.56	2.12	1.59	3.35	0.61
Students' ability to move successfully through school and stay on track to graduate	40.74	55.56	2.12	1.59	3.33	0.55
Preparing students to get through postsecondary education	44.97	53.97	0.53	0.53	3.43	0.54
Student achievement in academic coursework	36.51	60.85	2.12	0.53	3.33	0.55
Improving relationships between students and reducing bullying	44.44	52.38	2.65	0.53	3.41	0.57
Improving relationships between teachers and students	51.32	47.09	1.06	0.53	3.49	0.55

In addition, a vast majority of Thai primary teachers has a positive attitude towards promoting SEL skills in Thai schools (see table 3). Specifically, most of them (97.88%, agree or strongly agree) believe that it is important for schools to promote SEL skills as part of students' in-school experience. Similarly, above 90 % of the teachers agree that the development of social and emotional skills should be explicitly stated in the state's educational standards (96.30%), and teachers should model social and emotional learning. (98.42%) Additionally 95.77% of teachers believe that culturally relevant SEL programs can create opportunities for teachers to recognize and serve young people exposed to trauma. However, it is important to note that 53.44% perceive that it is more important to focus on academic learning than social and emotional learning.

**Table 3**

*Percent of Responses: Aspects of Beliefs about SEL*

Aspects of Beliefs about SEL	Strongly Agree (4)	Agree (3)	Disagree (2)	Strongly Disagree (1)	Mean	SD
Teachers should model social and emotional learning.	71.96	26.46	1.59	0.00	3.70	0.49
It is more important to focus on academic learning than social and emotional learning.	26.46	26.98	32.28	14.29	2.66	1.02
Culturally relevant SEL programs can create opportunities for teachers to recognize and serve young people exposed to trauma.	52.38	43.39	3.17	1.06	3.47	0.61
It is important for schools to promote development of social and	64.55	33.33	1.06	1.06	3.61	0.57

Aspects of Beliefs about SEL	Strongly Agree (4)	Agree (3)	Disagree (2)	Strongly Disagree (1)	Mean	SD
emotional skills as part of students' in-school experience.						
The development of social and emotional skills should be explicitly stated in my state's educational standards.	54.50	41.80	3.17	0.53	3.50	0.59

The participants were also asked to rank the options for school personnel who should be responsible for teaching SEL. Majority of the Thai primary teachers ranked the 'teachers' as the most responsible personnel for teaching SEL. The next high ranking was for the 'school counselors and followed by physical education/health teachers. Above 90% of respondents agree that teaching SEL should be a priority at all grade levels (see table 4).

**Table 4**

*Percent of Responses: The Priority of Teaching SEL at Different Grades*

Teaching SEL should be a priority at:	Strongly Agree (4)	Agree (3)	Disagree (2)	Strongly Disagree (1)	Mean	SD
Pre-Elementary/ Kindergarten	38.62	56.08	4.23	1.06	3.32	0.61
Primary (P.1-6)	47.09	51.32	1.06	0.53	3.45	0.55
Lower secondary school (M.1-3)	55.56	43.39	1.06	0.00	3.54	0.52
Upper secondary school (M.4-5)	52.91	46.03	0.53	0.53	3.51	0.54

#### *Primary Teacher Experiences of Implementation of SEL*

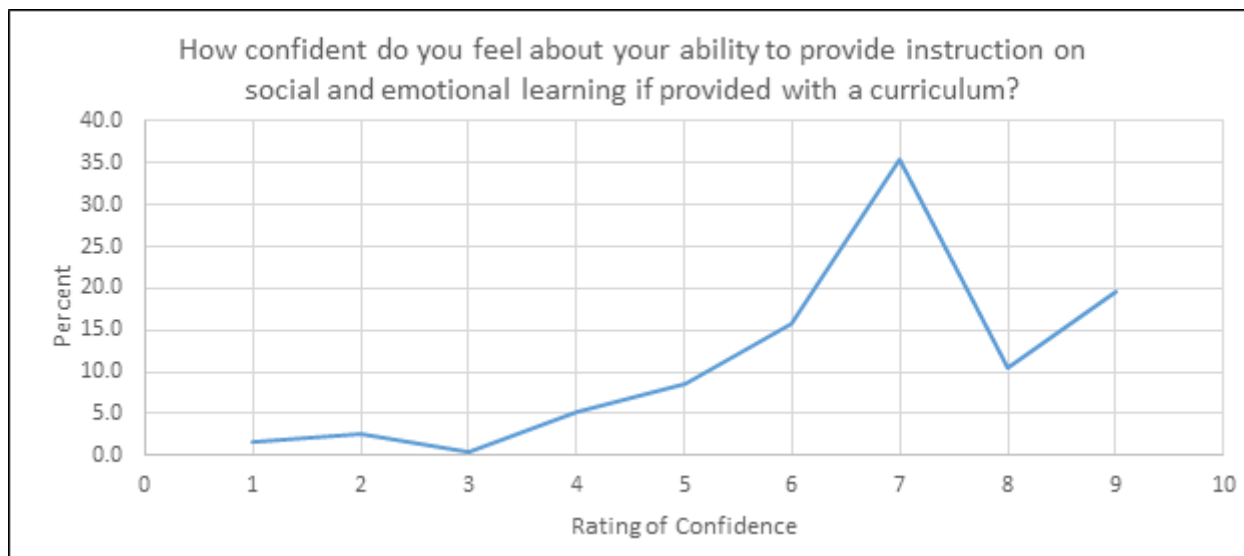
Another section of survey questions focused on the aspects of SEL implementation. Specifically, the Thai primary teachers were asked: "To what extent is teaching students social and emotional skills happening in your school?" Among the four options provided, altogether 45.5% of the teachers responded that it was happening as a school-wide program. Another 39.68% responded that it happens in some teachers' curricula but not in others. Some primary teachers are not sure about the implementation of SEL (12.7%) and few of them (2.12%) said it was not taught in their school. The Thai primary teachers responded that different types of SEL assessments were used by their schools, and they reported to use *formative assessment*, *self-rating*, and *rating scale*.

Are the Thai primary teachers confident in providing SEL instruction to their students? They were asked how confident they felt about their ability to provide instruction on SEL on a scale of 0 to 10. The mean response was 7.75 (SD 1.83); see figure 1. It can be assumed that the Thai primary teachers are confident in their ability to provide instruction on SEL curriculum.



**Figure 1**

*Rating of Confidence to Provide Instruction on SEL If Provided with Curriculum*



When they were asked ‘How interested are you in receiving further training on best practices for teaching SEL skills?’ altogether 85.71% participants reported that (somewhat interested, 58.73%; and very interested, 26.98%) they were interested in receiving more training on SEL. Very few of them (1.59%) reported they are not interested while 12.7% were not sure about their decision.

Another area of exploration related to the implementation was educators’ training on SEL. The SEL training the participants received varied across different levels and modes (Table 5). Altogether 41.27% of respondents reported either they had not received SEL training, or they are not sure about the training. It was also noted that 12.17 % received their SEL training through in-service professional development rather than in a pre-service degree program; 16.4% had received training both pre-service and in-service, and 30.16% had received training pre-service. Regarding the satisfaction with the SEL training they had received in teachers’ pre-service and in-service training (Table 6), ‘somewhat satisfied’ was the most frequently reported level for both training types (31.75% and 29.63% respectively). Only very few were extremely satisfied (7.41%, 6.88% respectively). The rest of them can be categorized into ‘dissatisfied,’ ‘neither satisfied nor dissatisfied,’ and ‘did not receive training or not sure if they received training.’

**Table 5**

*Types of SEL Skills Training Received by the Participants*

Demographic Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Have not received training	35	18.52
Not sure if I have received training	43	22.75
Received training both pre-service and in-service	31	16.40
Received training pre-service / through college teacher preparation program	57	30.16
Received training through in-service professional development	23	12.17
Total	189	100

**Table 6***Levels of Satisfaction with the SEL Training*

Levels of Satisfaction	Pre-Service/College Teacher Preparation Program		In-Service Professional Development	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Have not received training/Not sure if I have received training	68	35.98	80	42.33
Dissatisfied	3	1.59	1	0.53
Somewhat dissatisfied	10	5.29	13	6.88
Neither Satisfied or dissatisfied	34	17.99	26	13.76
Somewhat satisfied	60	31.75	56	29.63
Extremely satisfied	14	7.41	13	6.88
Total	189	100		

*Common Barriers to Implementing SEL*

The respondents were provided with various common barriers to SEL implementation, and they were asked, “Which of these issues is a barrier to implementing SEL in your classroom?” The most common barriers were lack of sufficient time available to prepare for teaching lessons, the insufficient level of training regarding SEL; the number of students in the classroom makes it difficult to do a “nonacademic” activity, personal skepticism regarding or disagreement with the philosophy of SEL, and maturity and interests of the students. More detailed information about the experience of SEL implementation, common issues in implementation, and their suggestions for improvement were identified in the responses to the open-ended questions. The following section gives the details.

**Qualitative Data-Based Results**

Qualitative data-based results are derived from non-numerical data collected through two open-ended survey questions.

*Question 1: Please share your experience implementing SEL practices. Describe any obstacles you have encountered and had to overcome. If you were not able to overcome obstacles, explain why.*

One theme of the answers to this question was their ‘challenges in addressing and managing emotional behavior of children.’ This theme is exemplified in one participant’s statement, “*From the experience of working with children whose behavior is difficult to manage, along with the knowledge of emotions and child development, finding effective coping strategies is one of the key challenges.*” The participants also addressed the challenges related to group dynamics, emotional outbursts, and conflicts among students. They highlighted managing and addressing emotional behavior, focusing on creating a safe and supportive environment and helping students regulate their emotions through strategies like meditation. They also emphasized the need for individualized approaches to address diverse emotional and social needs. For instance, another teacher says, “*... I have noticed that students have difficulty controlling their emotional behavior in certain situations. One approach to managing this is to avoid over-engaging with the child. Instead, it is important to observe and remind the child that we are a safe space for them. With time, this approach will make it easier for the child to be controlled and to cooperate.*”

When asked to describe any obstacles you have encountered and had to overcome, they identified two major obstacles. Firstly, they reported the lack of student concentration and motivation. The participants mentioned challenges related to students lacking concentration in studies. They also highlighted the challenges related to motivating students, especially those uninterested in studying. Secondly, they were concerned about the lack of parental cooperation. They noted difficulties when parents did not cooperate in addressing students' emotional and social challenges. One teacher's frustration was evident in her words: *"Some problems cannot be solved by teachers alone. Parents must accept their child's behavior in order to jointly solve the problem."* Parents' cooperation is important in solving some problems as another teacher noted: *"From experience, it has been found that today's students, due to their addiction to playing games, require teachers to communicate with their parents. Identifying these problems and solving them together is essential."*

Mainly they reported two reasons for not being able to overcome obstacles: Limited Time and External Family Factors. The participants mentioned that limited time hindered their ability to thoroughly address emotional and social challenges. They had to focus on course content and the workload management is difficult. They also reported challenges arising from students' family backgrounds, such as domestic violence, which were mentioned as obstacles beyond teachers' control. Many participants reported it and one teacher's observation is notable: *"Male students exhibit uncontrollable behavior and often bully weaker peers. I tried to manage my emotions and asked the student why he was behaving this way. The student revealed that his father had attacked his mother. He is under a lot of pressure. Although things improved briefly after our conversation, the behavior eventually returned to its previous state. I am unable to resolve the issue, and the main obstacle appears to be the student's family situation."*

#### *Question2: Participant Suggestions to Enhance SEL Knowledge and Skills for Future Teachers*

The participants suggested many strategies to enhance SEL knowledge and skills for future teachers. These may be categorized as school-based strategies and personal strategies.

##### *School-Based Strategies*

This includes *professional development and training*. Participants recommend professional development courses, training sessions, and workshops for future teachers to enhance their SEL knowledge and skills. They stressed the need for ongoing training, continuous self-improvement, and encouraging teachers to attend seminars or training sessions periodically. These suggestions are reflected in different teachers' statements. For example, *"Bring in various technologies or platforms to help educate about emotional and social aspects for future teachers"* (participant 23); and *"Teachers should be encouraged to attend training and participate in various activities so they can share their experiences with students"* (participant 25). *Curriculum development*: They propose developing a curriculum for future teachers that specifically addresses SEL and its implementation in teaching and learning. *Regular training and support*: Participants suggest regular and occasional training sessions, along with continuous support, to ensure that teachers stay updated on SEL knowledge and skills. As mentioned by a participant, this may include the services of psychologists or specialists to provide training and insights on SEL. And incorporating various technologies or platforms to educate future teachers about emotional and social aspects may enhance this. *Focus on Student Development*: They highlight the importance of training future teachers to understand and cater to the emotional and social needs of students at different age levels. *Integration with Core Curriculum*: Some participants recommend adding social and emotional content to the core curriculum to ensure a holistic approach to education. *Incorporate SEL in Teaching Methods*: Integrating SEL principles into teaching methods, including using group work, active learning, and etiquette training can make better implementation of SEL. *Parental Collaboration*: The teachers

identify the importance of collaboration between teachers and parents to address students' emotional and social needs effectively.

### *Teacher-Based Strategies*

The Thai primary teachers suggest many strategies that can be implemented by the teachers. *Attitude and Mindset*: Participants emphasize the importance of cultivating positive attitudes, understanding the context of schools and students, and adopting a positive and optimistic mindset. This is clearly reflected in one teacher's opinion: *"Being open-minded, understanding, and compassionate can help us avoid prejudice against students who behave inappropriately. Every action has a stimulus or cause, and I firmly believe that students do not want to behave badly. We need to identify the underlying causes of their behavior and find a way to address them."* Another suggestion by the participants is to *Promote Emotional Regulation*. They observe the significance of emotional regulation, self-awareness, and patience for teachers and recommend practices like meditation. This may help the teachers promote mindfulness and managing their own emotions (eg., anger management) in classrooms. Another strategy suggested by the participants is to *Promote Compassion and Understanding*. The participants realize the importance of compassion, understanding, and open-mindedness in dealing with students and their diverse behaviors. Generally, it can be assumed that the teachers are aware of the culturally appropriate strategies like meditation as a self-care strategy which they believe help practicing SEL skills in their classroom. Similarly, they are aware of their roles in the classroom as they mentioned the importance of *cultivate positive teacher-student relationships*. They highlight the role of teachers as role models and the importance of positive teacher-student relationships in fostering emotional and social development. A teacher's comment reflects the above mentioned themes: *"The teacher should serve as an emotional regulator and a positive role model for children. It is important to treat the children well and to set a good example."*

## **Discussion**

In Thai context, the status of teachers' perceptions about SEL and their feedback for the development of both in-service teachers and teacher trainees are not explored. Nevertheless, such an examination is important in developing SEL curriculum for students, SEL teacher training modules and SEL survey questionnaires. As an initial attempt towards this goal, the current study aimed to investigate Thai primary school teachers' perceptions of SEL, needs of SEL in their schools, training, experiences with SEL in their classrooms, and barriers to implementing practices. The survey data were analyzed using basic descriptive statistical techniques in SPSS.

The survey results show that the Thai teachers believe in the potential of SEL in enhancing students' positive outcome in social, emotional and academic aspects. It can be inferred that the Thai teachers are not different from the teachers from other countries in terms of their perceptions about the efficacy and benefits of SEL. For instance, teachers from the United States have similar beliefs (Huck et al., 2023).

However, the Thai teachers believe that the SEL programs should be culturally informed. This information is relevant because of two reasons. First, they believe that the major benefit of SEL is to improve teacher-student relationships. Second, the cultural and social context of Thailand is unique, which cannot be compared with the much studied Western context (Savina & Wan, 2017). Therefore, applying SEL for enhancing teacher-student relationship in the Thai context needs further investigation to answer questions like: What is a culturally appropriate teacher-student relationship in Thai context? What are the specific relationship needs of teachers? What are the specific relationship needs of a student? How far do these relationships facilitate the teaching-learning process to achieve educational goals?

Based on the findings of this study, the selected Thai teachers believe that they should model social and emotional learning. In addition, they hold the view that it is important for schools to promote development of SEL skills as part of students' in-school experience and it should be explicitly stated in the Thailand's educational standards. These observations necessitate the need of SEL training for Thai teachers while they are of the opinion that teaching SEL skills should be a priority at all grade levels. This survey revealed that a considerable number of the participants had not received SEL training or they are not sure about the training. And those who received SEL training in different forms are not completely satisfied with the training they received. This is reasonable, since at present, it is not a requirement for SEL training to be part of Thailand's compulsory teacher training.

In short, developing or adapting culturally relevant SEL skills modules is essential since such culturally informed adaptations of SEL programs are found to be successful (Castro-Olivo, & Merrell, 2012). The major barriers that could prevent Thai teachers from using SEL reported by the Thai teachers were 'time available to prep for teaching lessons, the current level of training regarding SEL.' These barriers were reported in other surveys with non-Thai teachers (Huck et al., 2023). However, some unique obstacles reported by the Thai teachers identified by the qualitative analysis included the lack of parental cooperation. The support of the parents is important in developing social and emotional skills in children (Wilkinson & Kao, 2019). Other obstacles they reported included lack of student concentration in the classroom, behavioral problems, and student motivation. These psychological barriers may be linked to the SEL skills of the students. The results show that most of the Thai teachers are interested in receiving more training on SEL. In addition, they are confident about their ability to provide instruction on SEL if provided with a curriculum. The teachers' self-efficacy is another decisive variable that determines the outcome of the training (Conroy et al., 2019). The qualitative analysis provides more insights into the Thai teachers' observation to enhance SEL knowledge and skills for future teachers. They suggest the importance of attitude and mindset of the teachers about SEL training. This suggestion is logical in Thai context, in which SEL is not popular. Therefore, it is practical to conduct SEL awareness programs for the teachers and school administrators to create a positive attitude towards SEL.

Another important suggestion is to integrate it with the core curriculum and incorporate SEL in teaching methods. This can help manage the major barrier of time management of the teachers. The school based SEL programs are reported to be effective (Boncu, Costea, & Minulescu, 2017).

The findings of this study have pedagogical implications for the school curriculum in Thailand. Currently, SEL is not part of the mainstream Thai curriculum. Considering the positive impact of SEL on cognitive and non-cognitive educational outcomes, as reported in the literature, and the views of Thai primary teachers on SEL, it is crucial to encourage and promote SEL in primary schools. Additionally, to fulfill broader educational objectives, a holistic approach like SEL is necessary.

### **Scope and Limitations of the Study**

The scope of this study is limited by its sample size, which aims to represent the specific population of Thai primary school teachers. Although 189 participants provide some insights, this sample size may still be too small to capture the full range of experiences and perceptions across the entire population of Thai primary school teachers. Larger and more diverse samples could yield more robust findings.

Since this study focuses exclusively on Thai medium primary schools, it is assumed that the population is relatively homogeneous, which enhances internal validity. However, the findings exclude insights from bilingual or international schools in Thailand, potentially missing variations in SEL implementation and perceptions across different educational settings.

Additionally, the participants were selected using a convenience sampling method, which introduces selection bias. Participants who are readily available and willing to participate may have different perspectives compared to those who are not. This self-selection bias can skew results and lead to the overrepresentation of certain views. While convenience sampling is useful for preliminary insights, it limits the ability to draw definitive conclusions or make broader inferences. Therefore, given the exploratory nature of this study, its findings should be interpreted with caution and used as a basis for more rigorous and representative studies in the future.

For future research, it is recommended to conduct similar surveys with Thai teachers at various educational levels, such as pre-primary, junior high school, and high school. Additionally, using larger and more diverse samples, including those from bilingual or international schools, may provide a more comprehensive understanding of teachers' perceptions. Furthermore, conducting a focus group or in-depth interviews may help explore the teachers' experience, expectations, and efficacy of implementing SEL in Thai schools.

### Conclusion

This study highlights the significant potential of Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) in enhancing students' social, emotional, and academic outcomes, as perceived by Thai primary school teachers. It underscores the need for culturally informed SEL programs and emphasizes the importance of modeling SEL and integrating it into the core curriculum. Key barriers identified include insufficient training, lack of parental cooperation, and student behavioral issues. Despite these challenges, teachers express a strong interest in further SEL training and confidence in their ability to teach SEL with adequate support. Future research should focus on broader, more diverse samples and explore deeper insights through qualitative methods.

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