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The Possibility of Applying the Social-Emotional Learning Model in Teaching of Primary Teachers: A Vietnamese Case Study

Van-Son Huynh 

Ho Chi Minh City University of Education,
VIETNAM

Thien-Vu Giang* 

Ho Chi Minh City University of Education,
VIETNAM

Vinh-Khuong Nguyen 

Ho Chi Minh City University of Education,
VIETNAM

Chung-Hai Nguyen 

Ho Chi Minh City University of Education, VIETNAM

Hong-Quan Bui 

Ho Chi Minh City University of Education, VIETNAM

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Abstract: Although the social-emotional learning model (SEL) has been researched in Vietnam for many years, studies on teachers' SEL-based teaching competence have not been the focus. This study explored the possibility of applying the SEL model to the teaching of Vietnamese primary school teachers. Our case study of 50 teachers who participated in previous SEL projects highlights three factors that prevented successful SEL application in Vietnamese schools, including (a) confusion about the SEL-based teaching perspective, (b) traditional teaching methods, (c) limited training in social-emotional skills, and mental health policies for primary school teachers. The findings have broadened and deepened our understanding of the possibility of successful application of the SEL model in the classroom, which would depend on SEL-based professional supervision, consistency in SEL-based teaching methods and SEL practice guides/manuals, and promotion or adaptation of policies for SEL-based practice and application in schools.

Keywords: *Primary teachers, SEL, SEL-based teaching, SEL's perception, social-emotional learning.*

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Introduction

Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL, 2017) defines social and emotional learning (SEL) as an integral part of education and human development. The SEL model consists of five core competencies (self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making) and is considered one of the typical educational models. Many studies have investigated the possibility of applying the SEL model in primary education (Coskun, 2019; Goodman, 2021; Wood, 2018; Zins, 2004).

In primary education, the focus is on fostering students' social-emotional skills (Durlak et al., 2011; Zins, 2004) and how to support teachers in developing students' social-emotional competence (SEC) (Schonert-Reichl, 2017). Primary teacher education programs are needed to educate and develop SEC for future teachers to successfully apply the SEL model (Buchanan et al., 2009). According to Fernández-Berrocal and Pacheco (2009), primary teachers often function as emotional role models for students. The relationship between teacher and student is the most important in the educational and SEL-based practice process. Williford and Wolcott (2015) report that positive and supportive relationships between students and teachers promote positive learning outcomes and a balanced well-being. To successfully apply the SEL model to the classroom, teachers must create a safe, supportive, and protective atmosphere for students to be themselves and practice SEL. Thus, teachers must be able to teach social-emotional skills and have SEC and SEL-based application competence.

In Vietnam, SEL-based practice, application, and research have mainly focused on the private education sector, especially early childhood and primary education (Huynh et al., 2021). There have been few research projects or publications in the public education sector. Although Huynh (2019), Huynh et al. (2021), Nguyen (2020), and Tran (2018) have tried to explore and develop students' SEC for many years, their results have only reached the descriptive level. No research focuses on teachers' SEC and SEL-based application competence. This research gap has made it

* **Corresponding author:**

Thien-Vu Giang, Psychology Department, Ho Chi Minh City University of Education, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. ✉ vugt@hcmue.edu.vn

difficult for teachers in public education to achieve their SEL-based application and instructional competence. Against the background explained above, this study explores the possibility of applying the SEL model in teaching Vietnamese primary school teachers in the public education sector.

Literature Review

Applying the SEL model to teaching must begin with developing SEC for teachers and guiding them to practice SEL in their work and lives (Schonert-Reichl, 2017). When teachers are fully aware of SEL, they can teach according to the SEL framework and guide their students to practice SEL (Hen & Goroshit, 2016).

In Vietnam, educators believe that SEL-based application competence is a component of teacher competence (Huynh, 2019; Tran, 2018; Vietnam Ministry of Education and Training, 2018). If teachers were not qualified to teach, they would not meet professional standards. In a survey by Huynh (2019) on the teaching competency of 250 primary school teachers in Vietnam, the SEL framework was perceived as a tool for teaching, even though many teachers were unaware of the SEL model. In public education, the SEL model is still unknown and has received little attention due to pressure from the current general education curriculum and administrators' educational perspectives (Tran, 2018). Unexpectedly, in Vietnam, SEL-based applying competence is considered as a teacher's ability to practice or use materials in the classroom; it is not a core competency or a standard for teacher training as it is successfully SEL applied in schools in developed countries (Cejudo & López-Delgado, 2017; Hen & Goroshit, 2016; Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). From another perspective, Huynh et al. (2021) reported that one of the current barriers for Vietnamese teachers in applying the SEL model is the limitation of their competence in accessing in-service training and retraining. This study highlighted that applying the SEL model to educational activities in public schools is impossible due to legal barriers and teachers' inability to apply the model.

Compared to other countries that have successfully applied the SEL model in the public education sector, Vietnam needs to conduct further studies on the main reasons for the unsuccessful implementation of the SEL model. Jennings and Greenberg (2009) emphasized the importance of teachers' broader knowledge of social-emotional skills to address students' needs. These authors believed that well-trained teachers in SEL-based practice and application can successfully practice SEL and guide their students in developing their SEC. Hen and Goroshit (2016) asserted that teachers with greater confidence in their social-emotional skills have a better understanding of the role of emotions in children's behavior and, therefore, can respond more appropriately to these needs by building trust, confidence, and respect in relationships with them. Weissberg et al. (2015) allowed SEL to be a distinct and central competency in the teacher training program. In countries with a learner-centered or competency-based perspective on education, the SEL framework should be applied as a standard in teaching so that teachers can both develop themselves through SEL practice and more effectively support their students in adopting the SEL (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009; Weissberg et al., 2015).

Given the gaps mentioned in the research above, this study focused on exploring Vietnamese teachers' opportunities to apply the SEL model based on their understanding of SEL, SEL-based instruction, and the teacher's own SEC, as noted in previous studies that emphasized the importance of equipping teachers with SEC before they practice SEL in their teaching professionals.

Methodology

Research Design

The purpose of this study is to explore how Vietnamese primary school teachers apply the SEL model to their teaching professionals. With the research question 'How did Vietnamese primary school teachers apply the SEL model to their teaching profession?', a case study with a qualitative approach and in-depth interviews is used to provide sufficient and rich data (Baskarada, 2014). This choice of research design can draw on participants' perceptions from their life experiences (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Detailed qualitative accounts are conducted in the context of case studies to explore or describe real-life environmental data and explain the complexity of real-life situations that cannot be captured through experimental or survey research (Gammelgaard, 2017). At the same time, case studies also facilitate close collaboration between the researcher and participants by using their stories (Baxter & Jack, 2008).

The study was approved and supervised by the ethics committee of a top pedagogical university under the Vietnamese Ministry of Education and Training and the Declaration of Helsinki. The research team consisted of experts with more than five years of experience with the SEL model from preschool to higher education in Vietnam. They were also the core team responsible for the SEL training of Vietnamese teachers and pedagogical students (Huynh, 2019; Huynh et al., 2021). Therefore, the research team had the qualifications to conduct a case study to explore how Vietnamese primary teachers apply the SEL model to their teaching professionals.

Research Participants

Based on the research question posed, we drew a purposive sample to find primary school teachers who have been trained in previous Vietnamese studies on the SEL model and the application of the SEL model in primary schools

during the 2017-2018 academic year (Huynh, 2019) and in the present. The participants provided rich data for our study.

The research team contacted school administrators to obtain permission for the study. After receiving approval from school administrators, we invited teachers to participate. When teachers agreed to participate in the study, we informed them about its objectives. We asked them to sign a written consent form to participate, ensuring secure information and permission to publish the results.

Fifty primary teachers, including eight males and 42 females, with work experience ranging from 3 to 28 years ($M = 13.5$), participated in the study. Interview data selected for analysis were taken from interviews with these participants.

Data Collection

We conducted semi-structured interviews with the participants. The interview guide was based on the guidelines for conducting case studies (Marginson, 2004). Open-ended questions are the focus of the interview to allow participants to express their experiences as fully as possible. A summary question table in the Vietnamese language was sent to participants at least three days before the interview. The interview began with the questions below:

1. *What does that mean to you when I talk about the SEL model?*
2. *Can you explain how you understand the social-emotional competence and SEL model?*
3. *Can you tell me about your experiences applying the SEL model to your teaching professionals?*
4. *What is your biggest obstacle when applying the SEL model to teaching and educating your students?*

At the end of the interview, the participants were asked two additional questions so that their whole experience was exploited:

1. *Is there anything else you would like to talk about that we have not covered?*
2. *Do you feel that you had a chance to share everything you wanted to?*

Sixty-two in-depth interviews were conducted between the researcher and participants (all 1:1 interviews), each lasting between 45 and 60 minutes ($M = 53.2$). Each participant was interviewed and asked to review their information before the end of the interview to ensure they had fully shared their experiences. The interview location was the participant's school office, ensuring a comfortable space and confidentiality of the interviewee's information. Participants were fully briefed before the interview, and all data collected were tape-recorded with the participant's consent.

Data Analysis

To ensure the confidentiality of information, codes were used instead of identifiers. A sequential number was placed after each code to indicate the order of respondents, e.g., T for the teacher and T1 for the first teacher interviewed. The software ATLAS.ti 9 was used to store and extract the interviews.

Interview data were analyzed using a thematic approach to develop case descriptions. Because of the large number of interview samples, similar responses among the participants were intended to form representative quotes from which the key themes of the analysis emerged. All quotes cited in this article were translated from Vietnamese to English from the interview transcripts. The findings were presented as themes representing how primary teachers apply the SEL model in their teaching profession. The analysis was conducted independently by three researchers (one was the researcher and two SEL experts). The three sets of results were discussed in the researcher group and supervised by another researcher to ensure reliability and semantic consistency. After the group discussion, the results were presented to the respondents for comment and approval for use.

Findings

The various SEL teaching experiences of the participants had some common characteristics, including the following themes: (a) confusion in the SEL-based teaching perspective, (b) traditional teaching methods, and (c) limited training in social-emotional skills and mental health policy for primary teachers. Each theme will be described in detail as to what and how the primary teachers apply the SEL model in their work.

Confusion in the SEL-based Teaching Perspective

In this study, the primary school teachers with some training in SEL and the application of the SEL model in the classroom had a basic understanding of the definition of SEL. However, they were confused about their understanding and knowledge of SEL. More specifically, all 50 participants (100%) correctly reflected the definition of SEL from CASEL (2017):

'SEL is the process through which children and adults effectively acquire and apply the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions, set up and achieve positive goals, be positive, empathize with and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, make responsible decisions.'

However, when they were asked to elaborate on their understanding of the students' SEL and individual teachers, inconsistencies in their understanding and SEL-based perspectives became apparent.

'That [SEC] is how each individual, or student, resolves conflicts in life. They use the SEC to manage their emotions and communicate more effectively.' (17 teachers reported)

'It is the framework of relationships and the learners themselves. SEL regulates wellness in people's mental health.' (14 teachers reported)

'It [SEC] is the skills that help students understand emotions and adapt to school and life.' (10 teachers reported)

'It [SEC] is a set of life skills that every individual must have to thrive.' (9 teachers reported)

Although teachers shared a broad definition of SEL, each applied and interpreted it differently. The teachers were confused about the various SEL-based perspectives but did not recognize that they were taught only one definition. This confusion came from the unsupervised self-study process of the teachers. T6, T13, and T32 clearly illustrated this:

'I researched SEL to help manage students better. I want to teach them the best. SEL is a useful tool for me to practice skills and attitudes in students.' (T6)

'SEL helps improve student achievement and equips them with the necessary skills. Applying the SEL framework will create potential educational standards that promote a professional and friendly educational environment.' (T13)

'I believe teaching with an SEL approach will help my students develop their personalities comprehensively. I have high hopes for this program to have a significant educational effect. I always teach students to manage their emotions and communicate effectively with their peers. That is the spirit of SEL.' (T32)

In addition, teachers showed a lack of knowledge of the five components of the SEL model and how to guide students to develop these components. The knowledge they learned was an overview and theory of SEL, but not an application of SEL or a teaching approach to SEL. This finding can be seen in some claims as follows:

'Actually, the previous SEL training programs I participated in have not helped me implement SEL in my teaching. I understand the theoretical framework and related lessons but cannot successfully apply them to my teaching. Trainers just taught me the SEL's components and their integration into the educational program, but they did not teach me the depth or the core skills that make up the components of SEL.' (15 teachers reported)

'In my opinion, SEL is a life value, and teaching SEL is as vital as teaching Civic Education. The components in the SEL model are the life values that each individual should have.' (14 teachers reported)

'I do not understand why self-awareness differs and has to be taught independently from self-management. There is an overlap between the two!' (11 teachers reported)

'I wonder, when teaching SEL models to students, I will start from which component? All five components are important, but the most important one is unclear. Even how to apply; I do not understand how to guide students to apply these five in their lives simultaneously.' (10 teachers reported)

The teachers' acknowledgment proved the limited and confused perception of the SEL's content and the unified explanations of SEL, which explained their confusion when approaching this educational model. As a result, they were aware of the significance of implementing the SEL model but failed to know what content to teach, for what purpose, and how to do it effectively.

Traditional Teaching Methods

SEL appeared in the context of reforming the general education curriculum in Vietnam. Although SEL content was integrated into some subjects and teachers had been trained to teach this new curriculum, they still needed help in competency-based teaching methods because of the long-term familiarity with traditional teaching methods. All participants reported that they taught SEL traditionally.

'I have difficulty in teaching SEL. It seems that the way to guide students to practice and develop SEC is different from the traditional teaching method that we have taught.' (T4)

Some teachers showed considerable concern over the difficulties of applying the SEL model to their teaching. They perceived this strain, but they could not overcome it.

'I am confused about integrating SEL skills into the lesson. This created pressure when going to class, and my teaching volume increased. I had to be the strictest. Such dual content teaching is exhausting in the long run.' (T30)

'Teaching under the SEL model has many benefits, but the interests of our teachers do not change. My current salary is just enough to pay the rent. I could not design a lesson plan with integrated SEL content as instructed.' (T17)

'I have to continuously update and restructure my teaching views, methods, and subject content. This leaves me with no time for SEL. I felt tired when I was trained on SEL and tried to bring SEL into teaching. I think it was just enough to assign exercises for students to practice SEL.' (T44)

According to the teaching method using the SEL model Vietnamese teachers reported using, the teaching process ignored the student's experience. Teachers were under pressure from school administrators and educational and social policymakers to implement SEL, so they performed this formally and rigidly. At the same time, they were unaware of the way to teach using the SEL model. These findings were evident among the responses collected.

'The administrator assigns too many educational tasks for a school year; now SEL integration into teaching is too much for me!' (42 teachers reported)

'The workload of a primary school teacher, including teaching, taking care of students, making reports, making teaching plans according to prescribed timelines, making educational strategies for the school year, and participating in school's educational activities, is too heavy. When I was trained in SEL, I could only apply it in a structured way to teach. I do not have time to do in-depth research on SEL and effective SEL teaching.' (39 teachers reported)

'The current teaching methods I know of cannot be used to teach SEL. Social-emotional skills require a different teaching style that is more appropriate than traditional teaching. However, the active teaching methods that the Ministry of Education and Training trained me in did not meet the teaching requirements according to SEL. After all, how can we teach SEL effectively?' (37 teachers reported)

'The SEL model is like normal lesson content. I can actively teach SEL lessons to students when I have extra lessons. It is okay for students to know about SEL. In terms of practice, they can do it themselves at home.' (30 teachers reported)

'Students cannot develop SEC on their own without the guidance of teachers. I have taught students step-by-step how to practice social-emotional skills through the SEL model. I guide them with all the life experiences I have. However, they soon forgot. I do not know where I went wrong.' (28 teachers reported)

'I gave my students the experience of social-emotional skills and provided them with knowledge about the SEL model. However, they absorb it as a normal lesson, and there are even students who memorize the SEL model to answer the lesson. I feel this SEL model is gradually becoming more of a memorization theory for students than a lesson in skills.' (27 teachers reported)

All these comments prove that the teachers themselves had neither a thorough understanding of the SEL model nor a teaching method consistent with the core concept of the SEL model, so they could not apply it successfully in a lesson. In addition, the traditional way of teaching theory and ignoring learners' experiences while teaching made SEL inaccessible.

Limited Social-Emotional Skills Training and Mental Healthcare Policy for Primary Teachers

We found that mental care policies and social-emotional skills training for Vietnamese primary school teachers are still limited. A meager income and strict social policies for teachers over the past 20 years in Vietnam affected the mental life of teachers to a certain extent, hence their lack of enthusiasm for their profession and devotion to teaching. The interviews with 50 teachers reveal their frustration and dissatisfaction with the current welfare, social and salary policies for Vietnamese teachers. They claim that this professional pressure prevented them from meeting the teaching orientation of developing students' competencies and qualities according to the new general education curriculum. All teachers confirmed that they were underpaid.

'... although the general education curriculum is restructured, teachers' welfare, social, and income policies have not been restructured and met living needs in the current context. We have struggled to raise wages and other policies, but the educational authorities have only been receptive and have not had a written response to the legislation.'

Some other teachers even mention the threat of welfare, social, and salary policies to their mental life:

'I was so depressed and lost faith in the teaching profession. The work is overloaded, but the income is not commensurate. I have to take care of my students and also my family. I am exhausted.' (T11)

'If my material needs are not guaranteed, how can my mental needs be met? Although the teaching profession is noble and respected by everyone, in essence, the teacher has not been respected and cared for by society in a thoughtful way.' (T29)

'I agree with educational restructuring, but the salary policy for teachers must also be changed. I cannot teach and develop students' competencies when I have difficulty managing daily living expenses.' (T44)

A majority of the teacher participants also reveal limitations in their social-emotional skills when talking about the welfare policy:

'I often lose control of my emotions while teaching or communicating with my students.' (47 teachers reported)

'I cannot comprehend the students' feelings. They are too inexperienced.' (42 teachers reported)

'I have trouble expressing my feelings in class. Students are stressed when they study with me even though I have fun with them.' (40 teachers reported)

'I lost confidence in my profession and my ability to teach.' (29 teachers reported)

'I do not know what I am teaching for. It looks like my career goals have been eroded over the years.' (25 teachers reported)

'I find it difficult to communicate and maintain relationships with my colleagues and students.' (44 teachers reported)

'I have trouble connecting with my students and sharing my students' learning outcomes with their parents.' (43 teachers reported)

'I am afraid to make certain decisions regarding students. I am not confident because I am worried I misjudged them.' (36 teachers reported)

'I am indecisive in my life.' (38 teachers reported)

'It seems I lack responsibility and determination in my teaching profession.' (45 teachers reported)

Indeed, if teachers lack social-emotional skills, they cannot guide or support their students, so students will not fully develop their SEC. When interviewed more deeply about the limitations in social-emotional skills, the teachers shared:

'No one taught us these skills. Neither the university nor the training courses of the Ministry, the Department of Education and Training provide training for us.' (48 teachers reported)

'I take skill training classes, but the trainers are all focused on sharing how they do it. They were not geared towards our skills development needs.' (45 teachers reported)

'I do my research and learn about social-emotional skills to train myself personally, but the more I read, the less I understand. I do not know if the way I am practicing is correct. No one corrects me when I am wrong.' (39 teachers reported)

'My school used to hire SEL training experts to train teachers to teach the model. However, they focus on content for students rather than developing SEC for teachers. As a result, we get nothing but our students' SEL knowledge, not ours.' (27 teachers reported)

Vietnamese teachers' social-emotional skills were limited due to their passive learning and self-development style. Primary school teachers relied on the knowledge provided by educational administrations or universities, but they lacked self-study. When faced with educational restructuring (especially SEL), they relied on trainers. Although some teachers tried to learn and research independently, they lacked professional support and gradually lost motivation for self-study. The constraints on teachers' learning, teaching, and personal development prevented them from developing their SEC and successfully applying the SEL model in the classroom. The interview data of T25 gives us an overview of this limitation:

'We no longer have time to self-study SEL because of work pressure and personal economic limitations. We need the support of SEL experts to supervise and guide us in learning about SEL properly. Do not let us find out on our own in a state of perspective confusion and inadequate care.'

Discussion

This study explored the possibility of applying the SEL model among Vietnamese teachers through in-depth interviews with 50 participants. The results have explained the ineffectiveness of teachers in applying the SEL model, including (a) confusion in the SEL-based teaching perspective, (b) traditional teaching methods, and (c) limited training in social-emotional skills and mental health policies for primary school teachers. If the above three problems persist, it will be impossible for Vietnamese teachers to apply SEL in teaching.

Previous studies of teachers SEC have emphasized the importance of equipping teachers with social-emotional skills and focusing on teaching and development with SEC (Buchanan et al., 2009; Durlak et al., 2011; Jennings & Greenberg, 2009; Schonert-Reichl, 2017). Furthermore, when teachers used the SEL model in the classroom, they faced a lack of refresher courses and tools to support the development of SEC for their students (Jones et al., 2013). This situation was similar to the current limitation Vietnamese teachers faced when an education administrator required them to teach SEL. However, the framework of SEL only existed in several private schools in Vietnam, and the pilot project existed in very few public schools (Huynh, 2019; Huynh et al., 2021; Tran, 2018). Therefore, there were no specialized training courses on SEL for Vietnamese teachers working in the public education sector. The prerequisite for the successful application of SEL in educational programs depended on the organization and implementation of the SEL model and theoretical framework from managers and educators to teaching staff and from teachers to students. Based on the

themes that emerged in this study, we proposed solutions to address the organizational limitations and implementation of the SEL model in the Vietnamese public education sector.

First, professional supervision in SEL-based application and teaching is required to implement the SEL model in schools successfully. According to Elias et al. (1997), the approach and research on the SEL framework of a country must depend on the country's educational policy and curriculum. Alternatively, educational policymakers and administrators need to fully understand the nature of SEL to provide it to teachers. Huynh et al. (2021) reported that the lack of SEL-based practice among Vietnamese teachers led to limitations among students SEC. Our research findings explained and extended this earlier finding, suggesting that the incompetence of Vietnamese teachers' SEL-based perspectives was due to SEL trainers' and managers' limited understanding of the SEL framework. Teachers' understanding of SEL was based on CASEL (2017) and provided through refresher courses for SEL educators and researchers. Providing teachers with a model of support and supervision by international SEL experts from developed countries during this initial phase could minimize confusion in understanding and applying SEL-based instruction. This could be remote supervision based on the strategies and plans for promoting SEL in schools or regular training courses specifically for education managers/administrators (focused on helping them to properly understand the nature of the SEL framework and related regulatory framework) and for teachers (focused on their SEC development and how they can practice SEL in work and life).

Second, consistency in SEL-based teaching methods and SEL practice guidelines is mandatory in countries that wish to implement SEL in educational curricula. Differences in national policies, curricula, educational backgrounds, and teacher quality between developed and developing countries have led to different SEL-based teaching methods and applications (Liem et al., 2017; Schonert-Reichl, 2017). It would not make sense for educators and education managers to fully adopt the application of the SEL-framework for education from a developed country without learning from it or comparing it to their current curriculum. Furthermore, not every country's educational method is suitable for the educational context in Vietnam. According to Buchanan et al. (2009), teaching methods based on SEL need to be researched and have continuous piloting to find the best and most suitable one. In Vietnam, the current educational perspective is competency-based education (Vietnam Ministry of Education and Training, 2018). However, many teachers cannot adapt to new educational perspectives and teaching methods, leading to stagnation in changing teaching methods (Huynh, 2023). Therefore, in addition to regular training on SEL-based teaching methods (focusing on teaching and practicing social-emotional skills), educators in developing countries who want to apply the SEL-framework should also use other SEL-handbooks for practice (for both teachers and students) to motivate them to make their understanding and awareness of SEL practice more positive.

Third, developing countries need to conduct more research to promote or adapt policies for SEL-based practice and application in schools. Our findings showed that one of the main reasons for teachers' failure to apply the SEL model in teaching was that they did not receive the necessary policy support. Vietnamese teachers neither received good mental health care nor acquired SEC (Nguyen, 2020; Peeraer & Van Petegem, 2012). The problem of limited salaries and difficulties in social welfare and career policies for teachers has been frequently mentioned in previous studies in Vietnam (Nguyen, 2020; Thien-Vu, 2020). A study by Trang (2021) found that Vietnamese teachers working in the public sector are among the professional group with the highest absenteeism rate and that the cause is career policy. To overcome this limitation, education administrators or policymakers should consider the framework of SEL as an additional workload and offer SEL-teaching educators a side income. Vietnamese teachers can only acquire social-emotional skills if they feel satisfied with sufficient workload and income; otherwise, the SEL models and theoretical frameworks will remain elusive in education forever.

Conclusion

In summary, this study explored the possibility of applying the SEL model in teaching 50 Vietnamese primary school teachers as a case study. With the help of the thematic analysis, we found that the SEL model can be successfully applied in teaching in Vietnam only if the following constraints are removed: (a) confusion in the SEL-based teaching perspective, (b) traditional teaching methods, and (c) limited training in social-emotional skills and limited mental health policies for primary school teachers. These findings focused on the applying competence of teachers and the factors that influence their capacity to practice and teach SEL. Teachers are the primary drivers of SEL programs in schools and classrooms. Thus, they must have the knowledge and skills needed to create a safe and supportive learning environment and the capability to teach social-emotional skills and guide students in practicing those skills. Thus, the possibility of successfully applying the SEL model to instruction depends on SEL-based professional supervision, consistency of SEL-based instructional practices and SEL practice guides/manuals, and promotion or adaptation of strategies for SEL-based practice and application in schools.

Recommendations

Our findings have enriched and broadened the understanding of the process of organizing and implementing the SEL model in developing countries, typically in Vietnam, including (a) the need for consistency of the SEL program with the national educational perspective, (b) the focus of SEC training and development for both teachers and students, and (c)

the mastery of SEL by school heads, including managers, educators, educational researchers, policymakers, and professional supervision and support from international SEL experts. With future research, this study can help consolidate the evidence on the importance of professional supervision in SEL-based practice and application in schools, develop SEL practice guidelines/manuals in schools, and propose policies or solutions to implement SEC for teachers.

Limitations

Nevertheless, this study had some limitations. First, regarding teachers' SEL-based practice, we did not evaluate the practical evidence in the participants' lesson period; we only learned about the experiences they shared in the interviews. Second, the correlation between SEC of Vietnamese teachers and students was not investigated. Third, the influence of other educators (i.e., parents, school psychologists, and school social workers) on SEC and how they apply the SEL model in their teaching was not examined. Fourth, the results of using the SEL model in the private education sector in Vietnam have not been discussed in depth or reviewed by teachers in private schools. These limitations make way for future research directions, particularly in understanding how to apply the SEL model to teach in a developing country like Vietnam.

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Authorship Contribution Statement

Le: Conceptualization, design, data acquisition, admin, technical and material support, supervision, final approval. Giang: Design, data analysis/interpretation, drafting the manuscript, critical revision of the manuscript, editing/reviewing. Nguyen: Design, technical and material support, supervision, editing. Nguyen: Data acquisition, editing, data analysis, material support. Bui: Proofreading, editing, critical revision of the manuscript.

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