

SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING IN COLOMBIAN SCHOOLS

SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING IN COLOMBIAN SCHOOLS:

ASSESSING TEACHERS' KNOWLEDGE AND PRACTICES

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Master of Arts

By

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APPROVAL PAGE

The undersigned, appointed by the dean of the Graduate School, have examined the
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SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING IN COLOMBIAN SCHOOLS:
ASSESSING TEACHERS' KNOWLEDGE AND PRACTICES

presented by _____ Lucia G. Medina _____,
a candidate for the degree of _____ Masters of Arts _____,

and hereby certify that, in their opinion, it is worthy of acceptance.

Professor [David Bergin]

Professor [Christi Bergin]

Professor [Lisa Dorner]

DEDICATION

I would like to express my gratitude to the source of my interest and dedication to the SEL cause: children who have not experienced warmth and respect in their homes or schools, especially those more than ten thousand children who are victims of forced recruitment in the Colombian armed conflict.

Thank you to my mother, father, brother, and fiancé for their unwavering support and constant motivation to go beyond the ordinary and use my knowledge to serve humanity. Thanks to all the teachers who participated in this study and shared their experiences with vulnerability.

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Abstract

Universal school-based (USB) Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) programs are designed to promote the development of intra- and inter-personal competencies in a school setting, including self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making (Cipriano et al., 2021; Hoffman, 2009). Teachers' SEL knowledge, practices, and attitudes play a vital role in the success of SEL interventions because they can either facilitate or undermine the effectiveness of SEL programs. In this study, I interviewed thirteen Colombian teachers to determine their SEL knowledge and practices (i.e., SEL conceptualization, beliefs about effectiveness, self-efficacy, training, school support, barriers, ideal program characteristics,). The findings revealed that teachers in Colombian schools have a good understanding of socioemotional skills, positive attitudes toward implementing SEL practices, and make an effort to promote them in their students. However, due to the lack of SEL training opportunities, they struggle to provide evidence-based and contextualized support for their students' SEL development. To address this issue, providing SEL training for teachers is recommended because it can enhance their current practices, such as embedding implicit SEL into the curriculum, implementing specific interactions to support SEL, and using homeroom and parenting counseling spaces that promote SEL development. Moreover, careful consideration must be given to the conditions of rural public schools with lower socioeconomic status and teachers who lack postgraduate degrees because they have less training, economic resources, and physical safety to support their students' SEL. The study also highlights the need for culturally responsive and trauma informed SEL practices supported by public policies.

Keywords: Social and Emotional Learning, Colombian education, SEL knowledge, SEL practices

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Social and Emotional Learning in Colombian Schools:

Assessing Teachers' Knowledge and Practices

Introduction

Universal school-based (USB) Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) programming is aimed at improving students' ability to effectively handle daily tasks and challenges by integrating their cognitive, affective, and behavioral capacities at Tier 1 (Bergin et al., 2022). Similar to other approaches, the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) has specified SEL domains that encompass interpersonal and intrapersonal competencies, such as self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making (Cipriano et al., 2021; Hoffman 2009; Weissberg et al., 2017).

Despite the importance of SEL, Colombia currently lacks evidence based SEL programs, except for the pilot program Pisotón (Cosso et al., 2022). Socioemotional education in Colombia is mostly informal, consisting of brief workshops for teachers and students (Grijalba et al., 2021). While Colombian educators hold positive attitudes towards improving students' social emotional competencies at school (Camacho-Ortiz, 2020), they lack sufficient SEL knowledge (Grijalba et al., 2021). There has been growing political interest in supporting holistic development in schools (e.g., National Policy for Children and Adolescents' Comprehensive Care and Protection in 2018, and Law Project 438, 2021 to implement SEL as school subject).

Social and emotional development in Colombian children and adolescents is declining. According to the Colombian Institute of Neurosciences (2020), COVID-19 had substantial negative effects on children and adolescents; 88% of the sample described cognitive, emotional, and behavioral impacts, and 42% reported academic difficulties. Furthermore, Gaviria et al. (2015) mentioned in the Colombian National Mental Health Survey that the registered cases of

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depression and anxiety in Colombian children and adolescents have increased in recent years. The country is facing two social crises: the post-conflict and the influx of Venezuelan migrants, creating an unfavorable environment, particularly for disadvantaged families (The Hill, 2019; Universidad de Los Andes, 2021). Minors who have experienced violence, inequality, trauma, adverse family conditions, forced displacement, or migration are at the highest risk of developing mental health problems (Colombian Ministry of Health, 2018). Baez et al. (2019) emphasized the importance of studying social, cognitive, and emotional processes to overcome the social crisis in Colombia.

To support Colombian children' socioemotional development it is imperative to design, implement, and evaluate the effectiveness of SEL programs. In order to achieve this goal, for the designing phase, it is necessary to conduct an initial diagnosis of current practices and needs within schools across different regions of Colombia and understand SEL perspectives of educators, parents, and students. Contributing with this objective, in this article I explore teachers SEL knowledge and practices (i.e., SEL conceptualization, beliefs about effectiveness, self-efficacy, training, school support, barriers, ideal program characteristics,).

Measurement of teachers' SEL knowledge, attitudes, and practices

There has been considerable interest among researchers in evaluating educators' attitudes towards SEL, as they play a vital role in ensuring the fidelity of program implementation and outcomes. In other words, the effectiveness of an SEL program depends largely on educators' SEL knowledge and practices (Elias et al., 2003). To measure these variables, researchers often use surveys (e.g., Buchanan et al., 2009), interviews (e.g., Ee and Cheng, 2013), and focus groups (e.g., Humphries et al., 2018). Some studies have also evaluated the psychometric

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properties of instruments such as the Teacher Attitudes About Social and Emotional Learning (TASEL) (Schultz et al., 2010; $\alpha = .91$) and the Teachers' Beliefs about Social and Emotional Learning (RULER program) (Brackett et al., 2012; $\alpha = .74-.81$). Descriptions of these instruments can be found in Table 1.

Table 1

Studies that evaluate teachers' SEL knowledge and practices

Authors	Objectives	Findings
Brackett et al. (2012)	The authors aimed to develop and validate a measure of teachers' beliefs about SEL	Teachers' beliefs about SEL can be differentiated into three reliable and validated scales: comfort, commitment, and school culture
Bridgeland et al. (2013)	The authors implemented a national teacher survey to evaluate the role and value of social and emotional learning in America's schools	Teachers across the USA understand SEL is critical to student success in school, work, and life. Educators recognize that these social emotional competencies are teachable. They want schools to prioritize integrating SEL into the curriculum, instruction, and school culture.
Buchanan et al. (2009)	A survey was conducted to examine teachers' knowledge,	Educators believe in the value of SEL in school and life. Nearly

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	perceptions, and practices regarding SEL in the classroom	half of teachers reported partial satisfaction with current SEL knowledge and skills, while over one-third were not satisfied. Teachers are willing to receive consultative support (e.g., performance feedback)
Ee & Cheng (2013)	Teachers were interviewed individually to assess SEL perceptions, views on SEL infusion in class, and factors that enhance or hinder SEL implementation	Teachers perceived the importance of SEL in children's development. However, teachers did not indicate the effect of SEL on students' academic outcomes. Teachers perceived themselves as facilitators/role models when infusing SEL. They considered infusing SEL in English and Character Education easier than infusing it in Mathematics and Science. In addition, teachers found self-awareness to be the easiest social emotional competencies to infuse, followed by social awareness and responsible decision-making. They reported barriers are insufficient time to complete the curriculum and to plan and link SEL to their content.
Humpries et al., (2018)	This qualitative study explored early childhood teachers'	Content analysis revealed that teachers believed it was their

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	<p>perceptions (i.e., critical components and challenges) of classroom-based SEL programs</p>	<p>professional responsibility to promote their students' social emotional competencies. Teachers understood the importance of social emotional competencies for young children in the school environment. As barriers, they identified limited time, lack of parental support, insufficient resources, lack of contextual relevance, and lack of social emotional competencies emphasis in teaching.</p>
<p>Schultz et al., (2010)</p>	<p>The authors developed a questionnaire that assesses administrative support for and teachers' attitudes about social and emotional programming and established the structure and reliability of each of its scales</p>	<p>Factor analyses suggested six underlying constructs that were labeled administrative support, training, competence, program effectiveness, time constraints, and academic priority.</p>

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Measurement of Knowledge, Attitudes, and SEL Practices in Colombian Schools

Camacho (2020) conducted a study to evaluate facilitators' perceptions of SEL in non-governmental organizations for vulnerable children and adolescents in Bogota, Colombia. The author used semi-structured interviews and found that participants used the term SEL interchangeably with ethics, values, emotional intelligence, and conflict resolution skills. The participants reported the following conditions that contribute to socio-emotional learning: observation of children's and adolescents' needs; social, emotional, and pedagogical skills among facilitators; parenting; and parents' social and emotional skills. However, the facilitators also pointed out that most instructors and professors have a deficit in their own socio-emotional skills. In terms of program operation, factors such as planning and implementing activities or interventions, key partnerships, and ways to track the impact of practices on children were considered crucial. The facilitators believed that SEL interventions are essential in vulnerable contexts because these communities have limited available adults and have experienced normalization of violence.

Furthermore, Grijalba et al. (2021) conducted online interviews to determine the state of socio-emotional training in Colombia from teachers' perspectives. The study revealed that socio-emotional education is not systematically implemented in schools, and there is no official curriculum that addresses the needs of children and adolescents. The teachers' understanding of SEL is mostly focused on developing skills for managing emotions that can help students perform better in life. However, the researchers found that about half of the responses were copied from the internet, suggesting a poor understanding of SEL among the respondents who relied on online sources. Concerning self-efficacy, 73% of the teachers felt prepared to teach

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social-emotional competencies. Regarding the perceived importance of SEL, 99% perceived SEL as useful for improving coexistence and social relationships.

Study Purpose

Literature has consistently reported that teachers' SEL knowledge, practices, and attitudes can facilitate or undermine the success of SEL interventions. In other words, the greater teachers' knowledge, positive attitudes, and fidelity of implementation, the greater the effectiveness of the SEL programs. In this study, I examine Colombian teachers' SEL knowledge (i.e., SEL conceptualization, beliefs about effectiveness) and practices (i.e., teachers' self-efficacy, training, program characteristics, school support, barriers) in order to identify (1) the characteristics of Colombian teachers and schools that promote or hinder the socio emotional development of their students and (2) the priorities to address with SEL on the different schools and students. Understanding these factors makes it possible to design, adapt and apply SEL programs sensitive to sociocultural particularities. To achieve this goal, from a qualitative perspective (i.e., through interviews), I explored the teachers' insights about their SEL knowledge and practices.

Research Questions

The present study aims to answer:

1. What Colombian teachers know about SEL?
2. What SEL practices are implemented by educators?
3. How demographic backgrounds relate to Colombian school educators' knowledge and practices?

Method

Study Design

In this qualitative study, I employed one-on-one semi-structured interviews to gather data from Colombian teachers. Qualitative interviews are particularly useful when seeking in-depth and nuanced responses that can provide a more comprehensive understanding of a phenomenon (McNamara, 2022), especially when there is limited information available, as is the case with teachers' SEL knowledge and practices in Colombia.

Participants

Thirteen teachers (female = 10) were recruited by convenience sample to participate in individual live interviews based on their status as Colombian K-11/12 teachers. In order to ensure demographic diversity among participating teachers, I aimed to include individuals from various cities and towns across Colombia, including rural towns exposed to the armed conflict and public and private schools of different socioeconomic strata. Additionally, I sought to include teachers who had different levels of experience and fields of study. The demographic characteristics of the teachers can be found in Table 2.

Table 2

Participant Characteristics

Participant	Degrees	Class Subject	Grades	Location	Type of School	Student SES	Years service
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P1	Bachelors in English Language Teaching	English	6-11	Bogotá, D.C	Public	Medium -Low	40
	MA in Education						
P2	Bachelors in Bilingual Education	English	1-9	Villa de Leyva, Boyaca	Public	Low	2.5
P3	Bachelors in Journalism	Journalism	6-11	Florencia, Caqueta	Public	Medium -Low	8
	MA in Conflict emphasis in Colombian Armed Conflict						
P4	Bachelors in Literature and Psychology	Spanish	10-11	Bogota, DC	Private	High	7
	MA in Education						
	MA in Clinical Psychology						
P5	Bachelors in Natural Sciences and Environmental Education	Pre-writing and pre-math	Kinderg arten	Monte Libano, Cordoba	Public	Low * Δ	10
	Master of Education with an emphasis on early childhood education						

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P6	Bachelor in Personalized Learning	Arts and Math	6-8	Orito, Putumayo	Public *	Low	35
P7	Bachelor in Social Sciences	Social Sciences	6-11	Ibague, Tolima	Private	Medium	3
P8	Bachelor in Psychology MA in Montessori Pedagogy	Ethics, Religion	0-11	Cali, Valle del Cauca	Private	High	8
P9	Bachelor in Music MA in Pedagogy and Human Development	Music	6-11	Pereira, Risaralda	Public	Medium -Low	23
P10	Bachelor in Natural Sciences and Environmental Education	Natural Sciences	6-7	Pasto, Nariño	Public	Medium	20
P11	Bachelor in Childhood Pedagogy	Ethics, history, geography	Kindergarten-5	Rio Blanco, Tolima	Public *	Low	3
P12	Bachelors in English Language Teaching	English	1-5	San Carlos de Guaroa, Meta	Public	Medium -Low	5

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P13	Bachelors in Childhood Pedagogy	Pre-writing, Pre-math	Kindergarten	Cali, Valle del Cauca	Private	High	6
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Note: * = rural area, Δ = teacher exposed to the armed conflict

Procedure

Interview development. A total of thirteen semi-structured interviews were conducted with Colombian teachers from diverse sociocultural backgrounds. Semi-structured one-on-one interviews were used to provide flexibility for the interviewees to ask questions and expand their responses beyond the initial questions (Creswell, 2018). The semi-structured interview questions were adapted from items of previous instruments (i.e., Brackett et al., 2012; Bridgeland et al., 2013; Buchanan et al., 2009; Camacho, 2020; Ee & Cheng, 2013; Humphries et al., 2018; Schultz et al., 2010) to explore the Colombian teachers' knowledge of SEL and the SEL practices they implement.

The initial version of the semi-structured interview questions was reviewed by an expert in education and children development and the interview items were subsequently edited based on their feedback. Following this, a pilot study was conducted to test the semi-structured interview and refine them, as well as estimate the necessary time for each interview (Kim, 2011). For the pilot study, three teachers were recruited via convenience sampling from the metropolitan area: kindergarten ($n = 1$), elementary school ($n = 1$), and high school ($n = 1$).

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The semi-structured interview final version (See Appendix A) had 19 questions regarding SEL knowledge (i.e., conceptualization, beliefs about effectiveness) and SEL practices (i.e., self-efficacy, training, school support, program characteristics, barriers). The study was approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of the University of Missouri (Protocol No. 2093371). The IRB reviewed and approved the instruments, including the semi-structured interview questions and the informed consent form.

Interview participation. Subjects participated in the interviews using video recording software for approximately 60 minutes each. During the initial moments of the interview, I shared a digital copy of the informed consent form with the participant and read it aloud, then asked for any questions or concerns that the participant may have had before asking them to provide their consent. This process ensured that the participant fully understood the purpose, procedures, risks, and benefits of the study before providing their voluntary and informed consent. After this, the semi-structured interview was conducted in Spanish, and the subsequent transcripts and coding were also conducted in Spanish. Relevant quotes were translated into English for the purposes of this document. The video recordings were transcribed using Pinpoint Journalist Studio, and subsequently, the transcripts were manually edited to ensure accuracy and clarity. This process involved implementing turn-taking conventions, punctuation, and correcting any errors from the automatic transcription – data available at Open Science Repository (OSF) - <https://doi.org/10.17605/OSF.IO/6NT2R>.

Analytic plan.

Reflexivity is a critical aspect of qualitative research. Reflexive journals are tools to log evolving perceptions, day-to-day procedures, methodological decision point and personal

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introspections (Lincoln & Guba, 1982), In this study, a reflexive journal was employed to document the ideas generated after each interview, the connections between various categories, potential avenues for analyzing the obtained results, and relevant literature searches. This approach significantly enhanced the overall awareness and retention of information throughout the project, thereby facilitating the synthesis of the data and the presentation of well-articulated results.

To analyze the interviews, the methodology proposed by Flick (2014) was followed, which comprised three key stages: data reduction, data reorganization, and data representation. Initially, the transcripts were read to grasp the main ideas, followed by the application of predetermined deductive codes (refer to Table 3) to data segments. Additionally, I remained open to the possibility of inductive coding to create new codes when necessary. The deductive coding process for each participant is detailed in OSF - <https://doi.org/10.17605/OSF.IO/6NT2R>.

Subsequently, the data reorganization step, or thematic analysis, was carried out. During this step, redundancy in topics was identified, and a few sub-codes were reduced. Inductively created codes, such as the impact of Covid and the Colombian armed conflict, were removed, as they could be integrated into the deductive codes. Through reassembling and reorganizing the data, and considering links between codes, assertions were generated. Tables were used to represent the initial understanding and developing interpretations in this process. See copies of these materials in OSF - <https://doi.org/10.17605/OSF.IO/6NT2R>.

The final step, representation of the data, involved consideration of the assertions and propositions in light of prior research and theory. This approach allowed for a rigorous analysis

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of the data and facilitated the identification of meaningful insights and conclusions that could inform future research and practice.

Table 3*Final Codebook – Deductive Coding*

Code	Description
SEL- knowledge	Reports of whether they have heard of SEL, from which source, what their definition of social and emotional skills is, and their beliefs about the effectiveness of SEL in academic and out-of-school settings
SEL- practices	What teachers do to support the socio-emotional development of their students
Self-Efficacy	Extent to which teachers consider themselves capable of supporting students in their socio-emotional learning
Training	Training received for teaching SEL or for their own SEL
School Support	Whether there is a school culture that supports SEL and what their school would need to further promote the socio-emotional development of students

Program characteristics	Critical components that a SEL program/activities should have
Barriers	The limiting circumstances that prevent them from positively supporting the socio-emotional development of their students

Author Positionality

As the author of this paper, my positionality is rooted in my upbringing and experiences in Bogotá, Colombia. I strongly believe in the importance of social construction during the post-conflict period, as it is crucial for building a stable and lasting peace. I am committed to advocating for more equitable and inclusive education policies that benefit all individuals, regardless of their background or circumstances. As a master's student of Educational Psychology, my background and training have emphasized the importance of SEL in promoting positive educational and developmental outcomes. Furthermore, my personal beliefs align with this perspective, and I am a strong advocate for the incorporation of SEL into educational settings. These beliefs may have influenced my research questions and the interpretations of the data. However, throughout the research process, I made a conscious effort to maintain objectivity and to acknowledge potential sources of bias. This was achieved through the use of a reflexivity journal, as well as through ongoing discussions with my research supervisor and colleagues.

Results

Teachers' Conceptions of SEL: Defining Social and Emotional Skills with Minimal Mainstream Framework

When participants were asked if they had heard the term SEL, 85% referenced hearing about it. P2 and P4, who wrote their theses on SEL, said that their source was the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL). P2 mentioned, regarding the SEL literature, that “almost all of it was in English. I found one or two articles in Spanish, but they were mostly from Spain. I couldn't find anything like that in Latin America.” P5, who wrote her thesis on emotional regulation in children exposed to the Colombian armed conflict, mentioned the Social Learning Theory framework used in her research. Two participants recalled hearing the term mentioned in their college classes, although they did not remember any further details. P10 and P12 mentioned hearing the term from educational speakers during teacher training, although with different levels of depth. P10 had a greater depth on the topic during training. She said “University researchers hired by the National Ministry of Education advised us on addressing the students' socioemotional challenges in the post-pandemic world. They emphasized the need to integrate socio-emotional aspects into the curriculum and promote group experiences.” P12 mentioned, “I've heard of it maybe in the trainings that school give us teachers. We've been somewhat exposed to the topic, but in a superficial way”.

P1 and P3 hold a different view on SEL, as they consider it to be an exclusive role of counselors. P1 said, “counselors often do workshops on socio-emotional learning, especially since the pandemic started,” and P3 mentioned, “I've heard of it, but don't know if it's applicable to my work. Colleagues, especially psychologists, often talk about Goleman's idea of

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transcending learning to social and emotional aspects.” On the other hand, four participants, P6, P9, P11, and P13, mentioned not having heard the term before. Among these participants, it is important to highlight that P6 and P11 are teachers in schools located in economically disadvantaged areas in rural towns.

Regarding the definition of social and emotional skills provided by the participants, 70% mentioned that they are intra- and interpersonal skills that promote well-being. For instance, P6 commented, “these are the skills through which students take care of themselves and can help others.” Participants who conducted their theses on SEL provided more detailed definitions, mentioning specific skills and school culture. For instance, P4 mentioned “these skills enhance students' self-awareness, emotion regulation, and communication abilities. Values play a key role in this context, guiding students in making discernments and fostering a sense of community. This cultural shift involves institutional efforts to train teachers and involve families in creating a supportive environment.”

Several participants also commented that social and emotional skills could be generalized from school to other contexts. For instance, P3 considered that, “Social and emotional learning are the scenarios where we, as individuals, learn various skills for life. However, these skills cannot be explicitly taught within the school setting alone, since they are also learned through other dimensions, such as the family and community.”

In essence, with regards to SEL knowledge, all participants possess adequate notions of what social and emotional skills entail, although many of them, particularly teachers from rural and low SES areas, have never been exposed to mainstream frameworks, as noted by P9, “these are skills that are managed in the classroom, even if one is not familiar with the SEL

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terminology.” However, a clear difference is evident in the quality of the answers of those who conducted their theses on SEL compared to others. The former are more accurate and detailed, mentioning for example, the taxonomy of socio-emotional skills and relevance of school culture.

Unpacking Teachers' Perceptions: How Most Teachers Understand SEL as a Keystone for Student Success

Regarding beliefs about effectiveness, all participants mentioned that SEL has benefits in both academic and non-academic areas. In terms of academics, the most reported benefit, by P2, P4, P8, P11, P13, was the increase in positive relationships between students and teachers, including the possibility of getting to know the students and providing them with the support they need. In this regard, P2 mentioned, “to teach, you need to build a meaningful relationship with your students before. Implementing these SEL strategies in school helps us all see each other as equals, and children begin to understand that there are different ways of relating.”

Another commonly reported benefit was that emotions that negatively impact learning can decrease with SEL. P7 stated, “SEL is crucial because if someone is feeling like a storm inside, it's impossible to ask them to shine with knowledge. So, I think it's important because it helps to reduce negative emotions to learn.” Similarly, positive emotions that enhance learning can increase, as stated by P5, “when we do breathing exercises with the students, we notice that they become a little more calm and focused during the day. We can see changes in the classroom in terms of discipline and concentration with these activities.”

Other mentioned benefits were the decrease in bullying, increase in self-confidence, strengthening of relationships between parents and teachers, promotion of creativity, creation of

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life projects, promotion of respect for diversity, increase in emotional awareness, emotional regulation, empathy, and communication and conflict resolution skills.

The non-academic benefits of SEL most frequently reported by participants include supporting the development of responsible citizenship, reducing domestic violence, assisting dysfunctional families, and a change in mindset of students, parents, and educators from a focus on academic achievements to a humanistic vision of worthiness and holistic perspective of education. In this regard, P8 commented, “SEL has the potential to change the school environment and provide students with tools such as reduced prejudices to contribute to a more loving and respectful society.”

Colombian Teacher Practices for Cultivating Students SEL – Embedding SEL Instruction into Content Areas

Diverse strategies are used by teachers to promote a range of socioemotional skills in their students. Among these approaches, the most reported activities implemented are those embedded into the academic curriculum. These activities vary based on the subject matter of each class. For instance, in his journalism and social communication class, P3 promotes the exploration of significant events in his students' lives through the creation of podcasts. He emphasizes the importance of personal reflection and self-expression: “a girl opened up about her father's murder in a tough neighborhood. Despite the short timeframe, the girl's storytelling was a beautiful and elaborate catharsis, without being overly dramatic or tearful.” Another example can be observed in the music course taught by P9:

The song list should promote identity construction, spirituality, political opinions, inspiring change. For example, “Tierra Mestiza,” “Todo Cambia,” or “Maria Paisaje

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Posmoderno" which addresses forced displacement and war in Colombia. The lyrics are analyzed and students share their personal connections to the songs. Many students shared their difficult stories such as with displacement because we have a lot of displaced people, street vendors, and even prostitution by some moms in public schools in Colombia.”

P7, who is the teacher of the Social Sciences class, remarked that he conducts citizen culture forums in his classes with students who are not victims of the Colombian armed conflict, where one of the topics discussed is the peace process and post-conflict period. Following these forums, the students visit the Colombian Truth Commission. He stated: “students learn about displacement and women's rights violations during the war and meet victims and reintegrated individuals. This cultivates social consciousness and citizenship awareness. The aim is to make students aware of harsh social realities that many Colombians face outside their bubble of privilege and cultivate empathy.”

The integration of SEL in high socio-economic status schools appears to be distinct. P4, who is both a Spanish teacher and a SEL-experienced psychologist, mentions that early in the school semester, she begins to work on self- and social-awareness:

On the first day, I ask my students to choose one of three texts and write about it. They can choose "Life is like...", "I am the type of person who...", or "I like/don't like...". Then, they introduce themselves to the class based on their chosen text. This helps us get to know each other on a deeper level from the very beginning. I model this for them by presenting my own paragraph. I tell them that I love teaching and that I'm happy to be here with them and watch them grow. I think this creates a unique environment because

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the students can see me as someone who genuinely cares about them and wants to be there for them.

To further illustrate the diversity of teaching strategies employed in different classes, I now examine the case of P10, a natural science teacher who focuses on teaching environmental protection, healthy development, and social skills:

In my class, I promote social and environmental awareness through group workshops, emphasizing the importance of teamwork. We discuss environmental problems in our city of Pasto and reflect on topics such as smoking, nutrition, protection of nervous system when studying relevant body systems. This approach encourages students to express their ideas and experiences.

The teachers of Childhood Education (i.e., P2, P5, P8, P11, and P13), reported employing storytelling, drawing, mindfulness practices, puppetry, and games in their respective classes to foster self-awareness, emotion regulation, respectful interaction, and sharing among their students. The Color Monster was a common strategy among them. P13 commented to this regard, “The Color Monster symbolizes seven emotions, including joy, sadness, and anger. Each week, we concentrate on a particular emotion, finding its functional aspects. On “blue day,” denoting sadness, we hosted a blue party, emphasizing that it is acceptable to feel sad and promoting healthy ways of expressing it.”

Regarding the content to teach to the students, it is noteworthy that P6 and P11, both teachers in rural and low socio-economic areas, mentioned that the content of their reflections with their students is on body care, prevention of gender violence, unwanted pregnancies, and sexual abuse. Thus, P11 stated,

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We reflect on videos that teach children how to respond to certain situations, such as not allowing touching certain parts of our bodies and not accepting candy from strangers because often they do not have good intentions. Unfortunately, around here we see many cases of inappropriate touching and sexual abuse. It has become a bit normalized.

Colombian Teacher Practices for Cultivating Students SEL – Interpersonal Interactions, Homeroom Teaching, and Parenting Counseling

Another frequently reported strategy by the participants was having non-academic interactions to establish closeness, build trusting bonds, and increase their students' confidence. This was described by seven of the teachers, including P12 who stated, "approaching students during break time to create a bond of trust and be seen as a partner who they can rely on for support, and allowing them to teach me things, making it a mutual learning experience." The role of teachers as models of social and emotional skills was also discussed by four of the participants. For instance, P2 stated, "I always try to lead by example, so I am careful about the words I use and how I express myself around them."

Four teachers from low and medium-low socio-economic schools shared a common practice of identifying the needs of their students and taking action to alleviate them, which included providing food and uniforms. P1, for example, stated that her role as a teacher involves various activities, one of which is to ensure that her students have access to basic needs such as food and clothing: "as educators, it is important for us to be aware of which families are experiencing extreme needs, such as those related to food and clothing. We take it upon ourselves as teachers to address these needs, as unfortunately, schools may not provide sufficient support in this regard." This is related to the ability to closely familiarize with students. She

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mentions that “I have a list of students’ needs because I’m always asking questions about where they live, how they’re doing, and where they do their homework. I make it a priority to address their needs -- whether it’s groceries or something else.”

Three teachers mentioned being homeroom teachers and using this space to enhance students’ socio-emotional skills. In Colombia, homeroom teaching refers to the responsibility of a teacher to lead and coordinate a specific group of students in a given academic level. This includes, among other things, taking attendance, frequent meetings with students, keeping a detailed record of academic and behavioral progress, regular communication with parents or guardians to inform them about their children’s performance, and providing support and guidance to students in their learning and personal development. P10 mentions that:

Twice a week, I use homeroom as a way to connect with my students on a deeper level. During the first week, I conduct interviews to learn about their family dynamics and address any emotional support needed for those coming from dysfunctional homes. Recently, we focused on adaptability and integration as we welcomed new students, engaging in interactive activities and discussing real-life cases to reinforce the school’s code of conduct.

Another tool implemented was parenting counseling or involving parents in practices to promote socioemotional development also at home. Parenting counseling is an educational program carried out in some schools in Colombia where parents must attend each semester a mandatory, weekend session lasting 5-7 hours, where they receive lectures and workshops from child and adolescent development professionals. The sessions aim to provide parents with a better understanding of their children’s development, appropriate ways to support them, and

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helpful parenting tips. Thus, P12 commented: “parenting counseling is about getting parents more involved in the school community because sometimes parents think of school as just a daycare. The focus is to show that school is a second place of learning, with home being the first.” P13 also commented on the topic of educating parents: “I also give parents strategies for responsible parenting, because parents tend to be very traditional and even scold or hit their children. I send them games and everything, super well-explained so they can do it at home.”

Self- Efficacy

In response to the question regarding their confidence in supporting their students' SEL, 70% of the participants expressed a sense of confidence. Because the interviewees were not necessarily familiar with the term self-efficacy, I referred to confidence. Nine teachers said that they would be even more confident if they could receive SEL training. P7 said “teaching is always changing and there's no one right way to do it. I'm pretty confident in my skills, but I know I need to keep learning and growing if I want to be the best teacher I can be.”

The remaining four participants, P1, P6, P9, and P13 provided particularly confident responses. They attributed their sense of security to their ability to develop a strong understanding of their students, years of experience in education and other personal experience with children, and effective management of challenging situations with their students. For example, P6 mentioned “yeah, it's all about life experience and years of service. I think it really helps shape you as a person, and having three daughters definitely adds to that.”

On their part, P10 and P11 mentioned feeling somewhat secure in their abilities. While they strive to improve as educators, they also recognize the need for further training. On the other hand, P3 and P5 mentioned that they do not feel confident due to the need for further

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training. P3 states that, “The concepts of socio-emotional learning are not so clear or how to teach that or how to take it to the classroom, so there is no confidence at all.”

The Many Faces of Training: Scarce Explicit SEL Training, Need for Culturally Responsive Practices, Self-Taught Teachers, and Tier 3 Practices

Four participants reported having received training in SEL, but their experiences varied. P1 stated that while she receives continuous training, it is not particularly useful due to a disconnection between the training content and the real-world context, especially the Colombian armed conflict:

I've received those programs many times, but I don't agree with them. Psychologists come in from the Ministry of Education, and they know a lot about the topic, but they don't understand the war or poverty. They haven't been in the same situations as me, like in Venecia Cundinamarca, where we were attacked and had to hide under desks to avoid getting shot. The people who train us need to have more than just theoretical knowledge. I remember when I was with my students and the guerrillas came to our school and we had to lie down on the ground to avoid getting hit by bullets. There were 7-year-old children with me, and one girl was crying. I held her hand and said, "It's going to be okay; we just need to stay still and be invisible." And then she asked me, "Why do they want to kill us if we've been good?" What can you even say to that? In those meetings they talk about things like self-control using these abstract parameters that don't connect with the reality of what we're dealing with. It's frustrating.

P2 and P10, raised the topic of SEL conferences that have taken place in their respective schools in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic. They highlighted the increased need to

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support the socio-emotional development of students and observed that such conferences are not delivered frequently in their schools. Specifically, P10 mentioned, “we were advised to pay closer attention to the human aspect while also not neglecting academics. The aim was to increase awareness and tolerance, as some students had been dealing with feelings of loneliness and disconnection after having spent the past two years in solitude.” P4 also mentioned that the character education training provided at her school is not frequent: “in school, we've had about three character education trainings where we had experts come in and do some workshops with us and show us some tools. Recently, the school even sponsored me to attend a virtual version of the training.”

The remaining nine participants stated that they have not received any training in SEL. Interestingly, P7, P9, P11, and P8 mentioned that the training most closely related to SEL was for the inclusion of neurodiverse students. P9 shared his experience as follows: “We have meetings with the guidance counselors twice a semester where they talk about adjustments to the PIAR, which is the improvement plan and accommodations for people who have learning difficulties. So, they gave us some awareness about including people with disabilities.”

Some of the participants who reported not having received formal SEL training mentioned that they strive to be self-taught and voluntarily educate themselves on socio-emotional skills. They do this by reading literature on development (P8, P11, P13), and googling, as P6 noted: “well, not that I can recall. I haven't received any training on that. What I do is read and ask Dr. Google. It's up to us to prepare ourselves on our own.” In the vein of self-education, we find that P5, P10, and P4 use virtual platforms that provide information and activities to enhance socio-emotional development in the classroom. P4 mentioned that her school provides access to the private platform Character Strong. P5 and P10 mentioned the Colombian

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government's free-access platform, called Colombia Aprende. P10 mentioned regarding this platform: "I found the Colombia Aprende website, which is a platform by the National Ministry of Education. It was very helpful for me to enrich my teaching and pedagogical work. The ideas for workshops on the website were very interesting. It's important to consider that not all cities are the same, and not all workshops work for everyone."

Regarding the participants' learning of their own skills, the most commonly reported sources were religion (P9, P11, P6, P13), family (P2, P4, P7, P13), and individual readings (P8, P10, P5, P12). Other sources included practicing meditation (P2, P4), attending therapy (P2, P8), being a psychologist (P4, P8), and having training in politics and critical social thinking (P3).

School Support and Overcoming Barriers to Effective Socio-Emotional Support

With regard to school support, the training offered by the school was discussed by P4, P8, and P10. P8 commented: "we're really privileged in a lot of ways, like with the Montessori training we've been able to get because school supports us when autonomously we want to take courses. Usually, the school covers 50% of the cost, so we have all these opportunities that I know aren't available in public schools." The other factor that was also frequently mentioned was infrastructure, as reported by P4, P8, and P13, the three participants from schools with high socioeconomic schools. They referred to materials that facilitate the acquisition of socio-emotional skills. P4 mentioned that: "I have a calm corner for my 10th-grade students, where there's a space with a yoga mat, tents, a wheel of emotional granularity, and some books about basic emotions. Then we can sit there and do a short meditation, some breathing exercises, or maybe even practice gratitude or compassion."

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Another characteristic of school support, which was mentioned by P4 and P10, is the support provided by the school director. As mentioned by P10: “after the pandemic, the school started investing and looking for opportunities within government entities to improve the conditions for the students. This was possible because we have a great director who is demanding but also very caring and concerned about these young people. Plus, he’s young, which is a good thing.”

The topic of holistic education which could value and support students beyond their performance on standardized tests, known in Colombia as ICFES, was brought up. P9 mentioned, “This school is different because it cares more about the students as people than about their academic performance. I can say that this school really supports the socio-emotional development of the students, but in general, schools are focused on getting good results on the ICFES exams to get accreditation and avoid being criticized, so they neglect the human side for the sake of academics.”

Two teachers, P6 and P12, did not mention any type of school support. However, P2 and P3 mentioned that their schools believe in supporting the socio-emotional development of students through religion, but they disagree with this practice. P3 commented: “the school's leadership, such as the psychologist and the director, are the ones who inspire and guide everything that happens in the school, and they are indeed very Catholic. They believe that socio-emotional education is a form of religious education. However, the students may not share this belief.”

Regarding the needed support to overcome barriers, 77% of the participants mentioned that teachers should receive more training. Also, P2 and P3 believe that special attention should

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be given to traditional teachers. P2 said that “there are some old-fashioned teachers who are resistant to change and believe they are doing things right. They have a barrier of ‘I have a lot of experience, what are you going to tell me to do?’”

Additionally, P1, P2, P13, P3, P10, and P13 mentioned the need for better training for psychologists. For instance, P1 mentioned “the psychologists are very young, without much experience, only theory. They should have a wider background and also experience with what to do in an armed conflict context and how different children are in poor areas.” In relation to this, P1, P6, P3, P5, and P12 also commented on the need for more psychologists in their schools. Specially, P5 commented that psychosocial staff or counselors do not go to their school because people is afraid of going to towns exposed to the armed conflict:

In the last three towns where I've worked, there's been armed conflict, and where I am right now, it's considered a post-conflict zone, but honestly, the conflict still lingers; there are armed people who live in the community. Sometimes, we ask for support from a clinic psychotherapist but they refuse to go because they're afraid to enter that area, and I understand their fears. But what can we, as teachers who enter that area every day, do?

P2 commented on the need for school director support, while P11 and P12 mentioned the need to cover basic needs and improve infrastructure. Finally, P3, P8, and P10 discussed the importance of having support from the creation of public policies. P3 mentioned:

The Ministry of Education needs to come up with policies to address these issues. They have guidelines that need to be implemented, but there are so many of them, like thirty or more. The school is forced to do a lot of things, like teaching history, promoting peace, and other things, but they end up not doing anything well. It would be great if the

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Ministry could come up with a serious policy to address these problems and improve education. They could ensure that the roles and profiles of guidance counselors and projects are actually effective.

Designing an Ideal SEL Program for Colombian Schools: Perspectives from Teachers on Program Characteristics

When asked about how they would envision an ideal SEL program for their school, the importance of involving families in the educational community was brought up by P1, P10, P8, P11, P13, and P12. For instance, P1 mentioned: “Programs should involve the family, and there's a good reason why. Whether or not students develop self-control in school depends largely on the self-control they see in their parents and immediate surroundings.”

The contextual relevance and need to address basic needs was mentioned by P2, P1, P5, P3 and P9 with each participant citing the armed conflict in Colombia. P2, who has not been exposed to the armed conflict, mentioned: “you can't just talk about SEL theories and concepts without taking into account the population's context. For example, in rural area affected by armed conflict you have to meet other needs first before trying to teach them a bunch of things they might not even understand.”

This ideal program should conduct screenings to identify students who may be at risk of socioemotional problems, specially related to the armed conflict. P3 mentioned “we don't even know which people impacted by war we are working with. We know that some of our population still feel the consequences of the war, such as displacement and their parents' trauma. We need to get to know the people we're working with and understand the impacts that the war has left on them”.

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The inclusion of teacher training in such programs was also mentioned by P8, P9, and P5. P9 commented “that training should start with the teachers themselves, teaching us self-regulation.” P4, P1, and P12 emphasized the need for programs applied to students of all ages and grades. For instance, P4 said “I think it's something that educators sometimes forget when students enter high school -- that they still need socioemotional support. So the classroom should also be a place where teenagers feel happy and free, and where they have the opportunity to play, work in teams, and explore their creativity”.

Regarding the types of activities to be included, P7 and P4 proposed that the program should incorporate dynamic and playful activities that integrate SEL into their lessons. P8, P12, and P2 emphasized the need for more opportunities for practice and less theory, suggesting that frequent and long-term programs would be most effective in achieving these aims. In this way, P8 commented, “I feel like kids don't need so much theory and chit-chat, because they only understand about 50%. They need specific examples and opportunities to practice the skills.” The skills to be taught through these programs, as described by childhood and elementary teachers, include self-awareness, self-management, relationship building, and social awareness. The middle and high school teachers placed particular emphasis on responsible decision-making in addition to the skills mentioned previously.

Discussion

SEL is crucial for students' well-being and academic success. In Colombia, the Ministry of Education established a National Policy for Children and Adolescents' Comprehensive Care and Protection in 2018, which focuses on social and emotional well-being. However, little is known about Colombian teachers' familiarity with and practices regarding SEL. This study examines

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Colombian teachers' SEL knowledge and practices to contribute to effective SEL across the different contexts in Colombia schools. I explored differences in the socio-emotional state of Colombian schools based on the school type, SES, teacher education level, teacher background, and geographical setting.

Regarding “Teachers’ Conceptions of SEL,” most had learned about SEL through sources such as peer-reviewed articles, CASEL, college classes, and teacher training. However, teachers from low SES rural public schools were less likely to have heard of SEL. This highlights the educational disparities between rural and urban areas, which will be addressed in subsequent sections. Moreover, the lack of SEL literature in Spanish further hinders teachers' knowledge of SEL. For instance, in a recent systematic review of SEL programs in Ibero-America, Fernández-Martín et al. (2021) found that only two out of 22 studies were reported in Spanish, emphasizing the need to provide teachers with access to quality and evidence-based information in their language.

In this study, I addressed a limitation of Grijalba et al.'s (2021) study where participants copied mainstream definitions of SEL. All participants in their own words demonstrated sufficient understanding of social and emotional skills as crucial intra and inter-personal skills for student success in school and life, similar to findings from Bridgeland et al. (2013) and Buchanan et al. (2009). However, participants who focused on SEL in their theses provided more detailed and accurate definitions, naming specific CASEL skills. Some participants noted that these skills could be applied beyond the classroom if families and communities also acquired them. Coordinated school-family-community partnerships have been shown to enhance student socioemotional and academic development (Mahoney et al., 2021; Swanson et al., 2021).

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Considering the theme “Unpacking Teachers' Perceptions: How Most of Teachers Understand SEL as a Keystone for Student Success”, my results show that Colombian teachers perceive SEL as essential for student success, with benefits in both academic and non-academic areas. SEL is seen as a means of building positive relationships between students and teachers, reducing negative emotions that can hinder learning, and increasing positive emotions that improve learning. Teachers also believe SEL can decrease bullying, increase self-confidence, promote creativity, and nurture responsible citizenship. These perceptions are consistent with existing metanalysis (e.g., CASEL, 2013., CASEL, 2022).

To analyze the theme “Colombian Teacher Practices for Cultivating Students SEL” is important to consider that there are three ways of delivering SEL lessons: explicit lessons, embedded SEL instruction into content areas, and teachers naturally foster social emotional competencies through their interpersonal and student-centered instructional interaction (Weissberg et al., 2017). Supporting the findings of Grijalba et al. (2021), I found that none of the participants in this study are following a comprehensive evidence based SEL program with their students. However, each one, from systematic to informal manner, strives to promote the socioemotional development of their students. The SEL practice most reported was embedded SEL instruction into content areas. Classes aim to develop self-awareness, self- management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making in students through various strategies like podcasts, song lyrics analysis, citizen culture forums, and group workshops. The music and social studies teachers in middle-low and middle SES areas focus on Colombian post-armed conflict awareness. Del Pozo Serrano et al. (2018) suggest that socioemotional education is crucial for post-conflict reconstruction and social transformation in Colombia. SEL with emphasis on peace education, human rights, and conflict resolution should

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be included in curriculums to promote peaceful coexistence, empathy, and respect for diversity, (Perez, 2016).

Childhood education teachers use explicit instruction, storytelling, drawing, mindfulness, puppetry, and games to teach emotional recognition, regulation, and peer interactions. No differences were found between teachers from high, medium, and low SES schools, including rural areas exposed to armed conflict. However, the teacher from the rural area with low SES who has experienced armed conflict may be an exceptional example, as it is not common for teachers in rural areas to hold graduate degrees. Furthermore, the participant indicated that she works in this location because she was born and raised in the area and has had opportunities that differ from the average, therefore, she desires to aid her community. Explicit SEL programs are more common in childhood education than in middle or high school, according to Williamson et al. (2017). However, students' needs differ across developmental stages, so older students may benefit also from explicit targeted interventions addressing concerns like stress management, relationship building, and decision making.

Teachers use positive and nonacademic interactions to build relationships and promote students' wellbeing. This is aligned with the practice of naturally foster social emotional competencies through interpersonal interactions reported by Weissberg et al. (2017). Similarly, authors such as Jones and Doolittle (2017) argue that specific interactions can develop socioemotional skills. Several participants also discussed modeling socioemotional skills to their students as a strategy to support their SEL. Indeed, teachers are important role models for children's SEL. Jennings et al. (2020) mentioned that educators promote students' socioemotional development by exhibiting their own socioemotional competencies during interactions with students, parents, and other adults.

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Differences in SEL practices between SES and geographical settings of schools are noticeable when teachers from low and low-middle SES public schools mention that, initially, their efforts are oriented to support socioemotional development by providing resources such as food and clothing. In addition, the SEL content taught by teachers in rural areas (e.g., prevention of sexual abuse, teenage pregnancies, presenting a world different from that of armed conflict) is unique compared to what is reported by other teachers (e.g., responsible use of cell phones, empathy with victims, self-awareness, emotional regulation, social skills with peers). In rural and vulnerable areas of Colombia, according to Ortega and Solano (2023), there is a significant inequality in educational opportunities due to factors such as the state's lack of protection, poverty, and the aftermath of the armed conflict.

The role of homeroom teaching in supporting socioemotional development was also highlighted. Homeroom teaching can be an effective way to teach SEL because it could provide a supportive environment where students can develop positive relationships with their peers and their teacher, receive guidance and support in developing social and emotional competencies, and practice applying these skills in real-world situations (Kashy-Rosenbaum et al., 2018). However, it is worth noting that only three teachers in this sample are homeroom teachers, which may limit the extent to which this approach can be implemented.

Teachers aim to involve parents in their children's academic and socioemotional development. Parenting counseling could be another important SEL strategy. Miller et al. (2018) mentioned that parents significantly impact their children's emotional and social growth through their parenting practices, including emotional support, boundary-setting, and modeling positive social behaviors. Involving parents in SEL programs can enhance their effectiveness, as trained parents can better support their children's SEL development, creating a consistent and supportive

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environment across home and school settings. However, limitations such as limited participation, resources, scope, cultural barriers, and duration should be considered.

Considering self-efficacy, about 70% of the teachers surveyed expressed confidence in supporting their students' SEL, which is consistent with Grijalba et al. (2021) where 73% of the participants felt confident in teaching SEL. Additionally, teachers acknowledge the importance of receiving more SEL training to improve their own socioemotional skills and to support their students' socioemotional development, and then, increase their self-efficacy. With training, teachers could gain a better understanding of the concepts and techniques involved, leading to better implementation of SEL programs in the classroom. Moreover, the positive attitudes found towards SEL can foster a supportive classroom environment, promoting a sense of community and well-being among students (Elias et al., 2003). Furthermore, it is noteworthy to mention that out of the two participants who expressed no sense of confidence regarding their ability to support students' socioemotional development, one was the sole teacher in this sample whose students are exposed to armed conflict. Therefore, enhancing her self-efficacy would require not only training but also overcoming security barriers and basic needs of the students and their communities.

Regarding the theme "The Many Faces of Training", none of the participants had received formal SEL training to implement established evidence-based programs with their students. However, four urban teachers had received some training on social and emotional skills for students and teachers, although infrequently and mainly after the COVID pandemic. Authors such as Sugishita and Dresser (2019) have emphasized the importance of ongoing SEL training and support for teachers. Furthermore, one of teachers who received training, who is from a public school with low SES, disagreed with the trainings because she finds it frustrating that they

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are not contextualized for armed conflict or poverty. Culturally sensitive SEL is important for these contexts because it recognizes and respects the diverse backgrounds and experiences of students and acknowledges that social and emotional competencies may vary across cultures. It can also enhance the effectiveness of SEL interventions because students and teachers are more likely to engage and respond positively when the content is relevant and meaningful to their cultural context (Hecht & Shin, 2017).

Since the majority of teachers have not received any SEL training, several take the path of self-education, either through reading materials on their own, searching online, or using public or private platforms for teacher SEL training. One of the main benefits of SEL self-training is that it can be done at the teacher's own pace and convenience. Strategies such as Colombia Aprende, a public platform for training designed by the Colombian Ministry of Education, can be useful in ensuring that teachers have evidence-based tools with adequate frameworks. However, for long-term maintenance, programs that involve community learning should be included where teachers can also receive feedback on their performance.

In relation to the theme “School Support and Overcoming Barriers to Effective Socio-Emotional Support,” teachers who work in schools with high and high-medium SES reported receiving school support to facilitate SEL practices. This support included training provided by the schools, infrastructure that facilitates the teaching of socio-emotional skills, and director support to create a SEL culture. The needed school support mentioned by most of the participants focused on providing more training for teachers in SEL, having more trained psychologists in SEL to support tier 1 and tier 2 practices, involving families to the school, and creating public policies that lead to consistent SEL practices.

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Participants emphasized the importance of tailoring the program to the context of students on the theme “Designing an Ideal SEL Program for Colombian Schools,” especially those from vulnerable areas affected by armed conflict. Public school teachers specifically highlighted the need to focus on socioemotional competences that promote a culture of peace. Trauma-informed SEL practices can help create safe and supportive learning environments that address the social and emotional needs of students who have experienced trauma, promote resilience, foster community and connection, and create a sense of belonging (Baez et al., 2019; Pawlo et al., 2019). Regarding this matter, I believe that Colombian schools, especially those with low SES, public schools, and rural schools, would benefit from trauma-informed SEL practices that could address the needs of communities, families and students who have been exposed to violence, displacement, and loss. Other factors mentioned by participants for the creation of a suitable SEL program include involving families, providing continuous training and feedback to teachers, and making the program applicable to students of all ages and grades, rather than exclusive to younger students. These factors align with the characteristics of successful SEL programs (Redding & Walberg, 2017).

Important limitations should be considered for this study. Sampling bias may be an important factor since participants were selected through purposive sampling and were aware that the interview would be about SEL, which may have influenced their decision to participate due to a pre-existing positive attitude towards SEL. Therefore, the findings may not be generalizable to all teachers. Similarly, the limited sample size also limits the scope and generalizability of the findings. For future studies, I suggest creating and implementing a scale to evaluate the state of SEL education in Colombia with a larger and more diverse sample. Another factor that could affect the validity of the findings is social desirability bias, as participants may have given

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answers that they thought the interviewer wanted to hear or expected from a teacher. Ensuring anonymity through questionnaires may help to reduce this limitation in the future.

Implication for practice

This study has significant implications for practice of educators, school administrators, and policymakers in Colombia. It highlights the need to create an educational culture that promotes SEL practices, especially in low SES, public, and rural schools. This objective can be facilitated by the current teachers' acknowledgment of SEL benefits and their willingness to be trained. It is crucial to adapt SEL training and programs to the needs and challenges of the different educational contexts. By prioritizing SEL education, policymakers can support teachers and students in vulnerable areas exposed to the armed conflict increasing their academic and socioemotional well-being. The study also highlights the need for trauma-informed practices to address the effects of violence, displacement, and loss experienced by many Colombian families and students. Quality socio-emotional education for all is a crucial step toward building a peaceful post-conflict society. Finally, Colombia has various laws for the physical, mental, and educational protection of children in vulnerable areas. However, these practices are inconsistent due in part to corruption (Benavides, 2012). According to Datnow et al. (2022), policymakers need to analyze the overlapping and inconsistent nature of public policies to effectively implement holistic education. This analysis can help establish a clear and secure policy framework that addresses the diverse needs of all students.

Conclusion

Colombian teachers have a good understanding of socioemotional skills, positive attitudes toward SEL, and make an effort to promote them in their students. However, due to the lack of

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training to enhance their own social emotional competencies and contextualized SEL training opportunities for their students, they struggle to provide systematic SEL practices.

Socioemotional education in Colombia is hindered not only by lack of teacher training but also by persistent socioeconomic inequality and the impact of the armed conflict. The factors posing the greatest vulnerability to socioemotional education, which require heightened attention, include low SES public schools, rural areas exposed to conflict, teachers without graduate degrees, and lacking prior exposure to SEL. Teachers in low socioeconomic and rural schools in Colombia prioritize addressing basic student needs, and their SEL practices are more informal, and less evidence based in contrast to other teachers from more favorable contexts. Teachers from different backgrounds agree that any SEL information or program to be implemented should be culturally sensitive and oriented toward building a peaceful society in the context of post-conflict. To achieve this goal, teachers would need continuous evidence-based trauma informed SEL training and trained psychologists who can address the needs of all students. Positive attitudes toward SEL and training are a beneficial factor for program effectiveness. Also, strategies that currently work should be enhanced, such as embedding SEL into the curriculum, positive interactions, using online public training platforms, homeroom teaching, and parenting counseling. Furthermore, it is recommended the revision of public policies to ensure the coverage of basic needs in schools located in vulnerable areas, continuous training to teachers and counselors to promote their own SEL and students' SEL, and the creation and implementation of explicit universal SEL trauma-informed programs tailored to the needs of students and their communities.

Appendix

Semi Structured Interview Questions

SEL Knowledge

Conceptualization

- Have you heard the term Social Emotional Learning? Buchanan (2009)
- What do you understand by social and emotional skills? Camacho (2020)

Beliefs about effectiveness

- What are the benefits of implementing SEL in the classroom and schools? Ee and Cheng (2013)
- Could SEL help to enhance academic outcomes? How? Buchanan (2009)
- Could SEL help students to be successful in life? How? Buchanan (2009)

SEL Practices

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Current practices

- What do you do to support the socio-emotional development of your students?
- How do you manage the classroom regarding disruptive behaviors and following rules?
Tschannen-Moran (2001)
- Do you increase the students' engagement? Describe how (e.g., motivating students to do well in school, assisting families to help their children) Tschannen-Moran (2001)
- Do you do something to establish positive relationships with and among your students?
Ryan (2015)

Self-efficacy

- Do you feel confident in your ability to provide instruction on SEL? Elaborate it.
Brackett (2012)

Training

- Have you received training to learn how to develop the students' SEL? Describe it.
Brackett (2012)
- How have you been trained or educated to develop your social and emotional skills?
Camacho (2020)
- Do you consider that the received training is enough to provide SEL training to your students? Schultz (2010)
- Do you think that all teachers should receive training on how to teach social and emotional skills to students? Why? Brackett (2012)

School support

- Does the culture in your school support the development of children's social and emotional skills? How? Brackett (2012)
- What type of school support do you need as a teacher to implement SEL programs/activities? Humphries (2018)

Program' characteristics

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- According to your experience, which should be the critical components of a program that supports a child's social-emotional development? Humphries (2018)
- Are you implementing or have you implemented SEL programs/activities? Or has someone else in your school? Describe it. (Objectives, frequency, type of activities, outcomes) Buchanan (2009)

Barriers

- What type of barriers do you find to implement SEL activities/programs in a satisfactory manner? (e.g., time available to prep/teach lessons, level of SEL training, personal skepticism with SEL, prior negative experiences, number of students in the classroom.) Buchanan (2009)

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