

TEACHERS' PERSPECTIVES OF, AND STRATEGIES FOR, PROMOTING THE SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING OF PRESCHOOLERS: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF THAILAND AND THE REPUBLIC OF KOREA

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ABSTRACT

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Social and emotional learning has emerged as an important competency in the national curricula of several countries, inducing their schools to shift their focus solely from academic development to include promoting social and emotional learning competencies. This study compared how Thai and Korean pre-service and in-service pre-K teachers perceive social and emotional learning and implement social and emotional learning strategies in classrooms. The sample was 336 Thai and Korean senior early childhood education students and Thai and Korean pre-K teachers; the return rate was 67% (224 people). Data from an e-questionnaire and 12 semi-structured interviews were analyzed. Thai pre-service teachers had a lower mean score compared with other groups (significance level .05). All groups implemented social and emotional learning in daily routines rather than in just direct teaching. Some variables (age, practicum experience, teaching experience, social and emotional learning studies in teacher training degree, special educational needs teaching experience) positively correlated at a low level to teachers' perspectives of social and emotional learning and strategies for promoting social and emotional learning in young children; the number of preschoolers in the classroom had a low-level negative correlation. Therefore, teacher preparation programs and professional development should train teachers to use a variety of social and emotional learning strategies in the classroom.

Keywords: Preschool teachers; teachers' perspectives; teachers' strategies; social and emotional learning (SEL)

1. INTRODUCTION

Creative thinking, resilience, self-regulation, self-esteem, empathy, collaboration, and grit are significant soft skills for the early ages. Khine and Aarepattamannil (2016) emphasized how important these skills are in the twenty-first century for young children to succeed in later life. Moreover, children with emotional management and regulation skills are more likely to succeed in school (Humphries et al., 2018). Nowadays, many countries focus on social and emotional learning (SEL) as an important competency in the national curricula, requiring schools to shift their focus solely from academic development to include promoting SEL competencies. However, early childhood teachers need support to be able to implement effective SEL in the classroom (Steed et al., 2022).

SEL consists of five core competencies: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision making. Thus, SEL outcomes measure children's improvement in social skills and academic achievement. O'Conner et al. (2017a) mentioned that healthy interactions between children and adults build strong relationships, social skills, and decision making. For this reason, the teacher is the key figure in cultivating SEL through daily routines and direct instruction (Humphries et al., 2018; Ng & Bull 2018; O'Conner et al., 2017a). Torres et al. (2016) concluded that teacher education programs should encourage pre-service teachers to gain emotional and social skills to support the development of empathy and emotional control in children. Pre-service teachers who acquire such skills will be able to self-reflect, leading to self-perception. However, O'Conner et al. (2017a, 2017b) noted that there are only a few reports on classrooms in which there were significant social and cultural differences that effectively demonstrated the development of SEL in young children. Therefore, more research should be carried out to investigate successful strategies for implementing SEL for both children and teachers from different social and cultural backgrounds.

Heo et al. (2014) found that even when teachers valued the importance of social-emotional competence, implementation of social-emotional development strategies remained low. However, the emotional and social well-being of young children does not rely solely on nurturing but also on teachers as emotional models to cultivate the social and emotional development of young children.

Due to limited SEL research in both Thailand and the Republic of Korea, this study used mixed methods to investigate and compare how in-service and pre-service teachers perceive and promote SEL for preschoolers and what strategies they use in the classroom.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

In order to construct the framework for this research, researcher concentrated on examining literature related to the early childhood education and care (ECEC) curriculum of Thailand and the Republic of Korea, as well as concepts linked to SEL for young children.

2.1 Early childhood education in Thailand and the Republic of Korea

Early Childhood Education (ECE) in Thailand and the Republic of Korea is similar, as both have non-compulsory education, free education from the age of 3, two types of ECE institutes (childcare centers and kindergartens), and been influenced by Japan and Western missionaries.

Nowadays, the Thai early childhood curriculum B.E. 2560 for children 0–3 and 3–5 years old, as set up and revised by the Ministry of Education (MOE), focuses on the holistic development of the child through play and hands-on activities. It is a child-centered approach that emphasizes cooperation among families and communities to raise the child (Bureau of Academic Affairs and Educational Standards, 2017). Since 2020, the Thai MOE has driven the policy and goals of ECE, which focuses on the holistic development of each child according to age-appropriate standards, including physical, emotional, social, and intellectual development, along with two additional qualities: self-development and executive function (EF). The desired outcomes for children include self-esteem, self-confidence, rational thinking and thoughtfulness, and self-regulation (MOE, 2020).

In the Republic of Korea, the early childhood national (or Nuri) curriculum emphasizes the holistic development of the child through child-centered and play-based learning (Jahng, 2013; Kwon, 2004). The revised version appeared in 2019 and retained five learning areas, namely physical exercise and health, communication, social relations, art experience, and nature exploration (Korea Institute of Child Care and Education, 2019).

As was also the case in Thailand, the notion of ECE in the Republic of Korea was influenced by Froebel and Dewey (Moon & Lee, 2005, as cited in Jahng, 2013), who believed in a progressive approach to acquire an understanding of the world ("constructivism"), along with "developmentalism" that values developmentally appropriate practice. In Thailand, being good members of a democratic society under a constitutional monarchical regime, practicing the Thai philosophy of "sufficiency economy" and exercising self-discipline are expected learning goals. On the other hand, the Republic of Korea emphasizes cultivating Korean culture, which

is representative of a collectivist society, as well as good values such as manners, self-regulation, traditions, socially appropriate practices, and cooperation (Jahng, 2013). Moreover, the government of the Republic of Korea is also committed to integrating SEL at all school levels. Children from weaker socio-economic backgrounds in particular should receive services to strengthen their physical and emotional-social competences (The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2021), whereas in Thailand the concept of SEL is not mentioned in the national curriculum.

Another difference between Thailand and the Republic of Korea is class size. Many Korean public preschools have only one class attached to the elementary school (the so-called “Byungsul kindergarten”) and there are usually only about ten children per class, a relatively small number. More recently, another type of preschool has been established, the “Dansul kindergarten.” This is an independent building that operates separately from the elementary school with class sizes much bigger than in the Byungsul kindergartens. In Thailand, public preschool class sizes are quite big, with approximately 25–30 children per class.

In-service ECE teacher education in Thailand currently implements both a 5-year and a 4-year revised curricula. The 5-year curriculum was revised in 2004 from four years with one practicum semester to five years with two practicum semesters, but this format will be discontinued in 2022. The new curriculum has reverted to a 4-year program with a one-semester practicum and was first implemented in 2019. In-service ECE teacher education in the Republic of Korea implements two types of curricula: a 3-year and a 4-year program, each including six weeks of observation and one month of practicum.

2.2 Components related to SEL enhancement for young children

Denham (2018) mentioned age-differentiated developmental tasks related to the SEL process for preschoolers, such as 1) beginning peer interaction while managing emotional arousal; 2) initiating prosocial behaviors and interactions, along with friendships; 3) staying connected with adults; 4) understanding basic emotional expressions, situations, and experiences—and ways to manage them (often with adult assistance), along with early efforts to solve interpersonal problems; and 5) beginning to follow social rules, like taking turns. Preschool teachers must provide all these experiences to preschoolers using explicit instruction. As a result, elementary school children will achieve academic success and dropout rates will be reduced (Frey et al., 2019). There are four components that improve SEL for young children, as follows:

2.2.1 SEL-emphasized curriculum

According to Frey et al. (2019), SEL has in the past been implemented as a hidden curriculum driven by the norms and values of social and cultural contexts. Nowadays, it is perceived that SEL should be taught as explicit instruction to ensure that children are able to achieve self-regulation and reach their full learning potential according to their capability. Therefore, SEL-related content must be written into the curriculum to make sure that teachers implement SEL in their classrooms. Preschool teachers are key to putting SEL into practice by incorporating it into daily routines and integrating it into real-life situations, while ensuring that children have the opportunity to practice their social and emotional abilities. To understand and apply knowledge in promoting successful SEL in the pre-K classroom, teachers must participate in professional development within the school system. It is important to determine the goal clearly, set up well-designed professional development with systematic mentoring and coaching, and continued monitoring.

2.2.2 Instruction and strategies for promoting SEL

Respect is essential in the teacher-child relationship, and teachers should set aside time for self-reflection to reflect upon what has been done in the daily routine to build strong and respectful relationships in the classroom (Jacobson, 2018). Moreover, effective action strategies promoting SEL include creating a positive atmosphere, guiding solutions for young children, assigning appropriate tasks, and allocating time to complete the tasks. Therefore, the teacher’s belief about emotional expression and values of SEL, socialization behaviors, and SEL strategies, as well as perceptions about their role as social and emotional supporters are crucial in creating effective emotional interaction (Zinsser et al., 2014). Meanwhile, Morkel and McLaughlin (2015) stated that factors affecting SEL promotion in young children include culture, temperament, and level of interaction. Since different cultures present different types of interaction and behaviors, a teacher must consider each child’s background when assessing their behavior or social and emotional competency.

2.2.3 Involving parents to support SEL for preschoolers

Regenstein (2019) suggested that teachers should support SEL in young children by building active participation with parents, meaning teachers need to be educated about the fundamentals of both classroom and home learning environment, as knowledgeable teachers can understand and choose the best way to support the social and emotional development of young children. This can include having conversations with parents about the importance of SEL, developing practical activities for parents to do at home, and exchanging information with parents about a child’s development from authentic observations.

2.2.4 Teachers' professional development in SEL

Preschool teachers need to improve their teaching practices by involving themselves in professional development, which is a continuum of learning that prepares them to deal with young children and their families. To be an effective preschool teacher, they must improve their knowledge, skills, practices, and dispositions. Moreover, a report from a survey of preparation programs for pre-service teachers revealed that an effective program must support them in their ability to self-reflect on their SEL competency, provide specific strategies in supporting and arranging a learning environment, and furnish examples of how to integrate SEL into the curriculum. This will ensure that pre-service teachers have the opportunity to reflect on SEL practices during their practicum. In accordance with the survey data, each preschool should set up its own whole-school professional learning community to improve skills and competencies related to SEL. They could also use videos for reviewing practices and feedback from peers to develop guidelines for teacher self-development (Schonert-Reichl, 2017).

The research framework is synthesized into two aspects. The first is teachers' perspectives on SEL, which comprises two sub-aspects: (1) knowledge and understanding of SEL, that is, definitions, values, and importance of SEL and (2) teachers' roles in promoting SEL, that is, positive relationship building (safe, caring, supportive, with responsive communication), collaborating with parents (home visits, communication with parents, parent education, information exchange with parents), and self-development (emotional competence and self-reflection skill, concentration). The second aspect is implementing SEL strategies, which also comprises two sub-aspects: (1) teaching support, that is, being a role model and direct teaching and (2) classroom management, that is, physical environment arrangement (materials, schedule, classroom rules) and emotional support (using normal tone of voice, guidance/coaching, allocating appropriate tasks, time extension, outdoor play) (Bridgeland et al., 2013; Ng & Bull, 2018; O'Conner et al., 2017a; Regenstein, 2019; Schonert-Reichl, 2017; Zinsler et al., 2014).

3. METHODOLOGY

A mixed-methods approach was used to collect quantitative and qualitative data to compare in-service and pre-service teachers' perspectives of, and strategies for, promoting SEL in young children.

3.1 Population and sampling

The study population comprised in-service and pre-service teachers, including Thai senior ECE student teachers (4th and 5th year) and Korean senior ECE student teachers (3rd and 4th year) studying ECE and enrolled in a practicum course. The Thai and Korean preschool teachers were working in public preschools. A total of 280 sample participants was calculated as the minimum sample size using G*Power at 3,000. In this study, 300 teachers were included, 75 from each group.

Thirty-minute one-to-one in-depth interviews were carried out with 12 persons, three from each group, via an online platform. For this purpose, a purposive sampling technique was used by selecting the three highest questionnaire scorers from each group. Ethical approval was obtained from The Research Ethics Review Committee for Research Involving Human Research Participants, Group 1, Chulalongkorn University (COA No. 094/65).

3.2 Research tools

The e-survey questionnaire consisted of three parts: Part 1 gathered the informant's background and was a checklist comprising 18 items; Part 2 asked them their opinions regarding perspectives of and strategies used in promoting SEL for preschoolers, which used a 5-level rating scale (5 = *strongly agree* to 1 = *strongly disagree*) comprising two aspects with a total of 50 items; and Part 3 comprised a single open-ended item for additional comment(s). The semi-structured interview form consisted of 10 items. Back translation was performed to ensure the meanings in the two languages of the questionnaire were identical. The item objective congruence index of the questionnaire and interview questions was verified by five experts. Content validity of the e-survey questionnaire and the semi-structured interview form were .95 and 1.00, respectively. The reliability of each questionnaire was calculated using Cronbach's alpha, achieving a score of .952 for the Thai questionnaire and .919 for the Korean questionnaire.

3.3 Data collection and analysis

An e-consensus form was completed before accessing the 15-minute e-survey questionnaire or engaging in the 30-minute interview. Online questionnaires were administered during May 2022 via email or social media, and the interviews were conducted during June 2022. During the one-to-one interviews with Korean in-service and pre-service teachers, a Korean-Thai interpreter was present to assist and then provide a verbatim transcription from the online meeting record.

Due to the low return rate for Korean preschool teachers, the researcher sent an additional 36 e-questionnaires to increase the return rate. The total number of e-questionnaires sent out was therefore 336, with 224 complete responses (67%), comprising 75% of the Thai preschool teachers, 66% of the Korean preschool teachers, 96% of the Thai pre-service teachers, and 31% of the Korean pre-service teachers.

Quantitative data were analyzed using frequency, percentage, mean, standard deviation, and two-way ANOVA. Pearson's correlation coefficient and Spearman's rho correlation were used to find the correlation between variables. Qualitative data were analyzed using content analysis, while a variety of measures (including member checking and review by three experts qualified in the field) were implemented to ensure the trustworthiness of the data/findings.

4. FINDINGS

The results are presented into two parts as follows:

4.1 Teachers' perspectives of and strategies for promoting SEL in young children

Teachers' opinions of SEL for young children were at a high level ($M = 4.18$, $SD = .51$). Considering each aspect, the mean score for implementing SEL strategies ($M = 4.25$, $SD = .57$) was higher than that for teachers' perspectives on SEL ($M = 4.07$, $SD = .51$). Comparing the four sample groups, the mean score for Korean senior ECE students was the highest ($M = 4.39$, $SD = .43$), followed by Korean preschool teachers ($M = 4.30$, $SD = .56$), Thai preschool teachers ($M = 4.24$, $SD = .42$), and Thai senior ECE students ($M = 3.96$, $SD = .48$).

For teachers' perspectives on SEL, the mean score for Korean senior ECE students was again the highest ($M = 4.28$, $SD = .36$), followed by Korean preschool teachers ($M = 4.18$, $SD = .53$), Thai preschool teachers ($M = 4.13$, $SD = .51$), and Thai senior ECE students ($M = 3.87$, $SD = .48$). The same pattern was evident for attitudes toward implementing SEL strategies, with the mean score for Korean senior ECE students the highest ($M = 4.46$, $SD = .50$), followed by Korean preschool teachers ($M = 4.38$, $SD = .62$), Thai preschool teachers ($M = 4.31$, $SD = .44$), and Thai senior ECE students ($M = 4.01$, $SD = .56$) (see Table 1).

Table 1: Mean scores and standard deviations of teachers' perspectives of, and strategies for, promoting SEL in young children

Items	Pre-Service Teachers						In-Service Teachers						Total (<i>n</i> = 224)		
	Thai Senior ECE Students (<i>n</i> = 72)			Korean Senior ECE Students (<i>n</i> = 23)			Thai Preschool Teachers (<i>n</i> = 56)			Korean Preschool Teachers (<i>n</i> = 73)					
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	means	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	means	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	means	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	means	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	means
1. Teachers' Perspectives on SEL	3.87	.48	high	4.28	.36	high	4.13	.51	high	4.18	.53	high	4.07	.51	high
2. Implementing SEL Strategies	4.01	.56	high	4.46	.50	high	4.31	.44	high	4.38	.62	high	4.25	.57	high
Total	3.96	.48	high	4.39	.43	high	4.24	.42	high	4.30	.56	high	4.18	.51	high

4.2 A comparison between the four groups of the teachers' perspectives of, and strategies for, promoting SEL in young children

The two nationalities gained different perspectives of, and strategies for, promoting SEL in young children; however, Korean teachers gained a higher mean score when compared with Thai teachers.

4.2.1 Teachers' perspectives on SEL

A significant effect of interaction between the level of teacher and nationality of teacher on teachers' perspectives on SEL in young children was found at the .05 significance level (see Table 2, Figure 1). The difference in the mean score of teachers' perspectives on SEL according to nationality was dependent on the level of the teacher.

4.2.1.1 Knowledge and understanding

In relation to defining SEL, all four groups registered their lowest mean score for "I understand that SEL can be categorized into three skills." On the values and importance of SEL, the lowest mean scores for Thai senior ECE students and preschool teachers were for "I believe that SEL must be taught explicitly," while the lowest mean scores for Korean senior ECE students and preschool teachers were in relation to "I believe that SEL impacts children's writing and reading skills at the elementary level."

Data from the interviews revealed that Thai and Korean preschool teachers provided SEL definitions covering all five areas (self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skill, and responsible decision making). However, Thai and Korean ECE students did not mention responsible decision making.

Considering the value and importance of SEL, Thai senior ECE students reflected that SEL is the foundation of later life, affecting habits, discipline, manners, and the way we live in society. Meanwhile, the other groups mentioned that SEL affects achievement and learning ability in later life.

4.2.1.2 Teachers' roles in promoting SEL

In relation to positive relationship building, all groups had the same level of belief for two items, which were "I believe that teachers' stress has an effect on children's emotional well-being" and "I believe that teachers' moods have an impact on the classroom atmosphere." However, the lowest mean score for Thai senior ECE students was for collaborating with parents ("I educate parents about SEL so that parents can practice it the same way at home"), while for Thai preschool teachers it was for "I give parents the opportunity to be involved in their child's classroom." For both Korean senior ECE students and preschool teachers, the lowest mean score was for self-development, "I regularly practice self-regulation, such as meditation and self-control."

Data from the interviews revealed that all four groups focused on positive relationships with children, including positive communication, reinforcement, and proper responsiveness toward the individual differences of children. In addition to self-development, such as being aware of their emotions, Thai senior ECE students and preschool teachers mentioned meditation practices, praying, and listening to classical music, while Korean senior ECE students mentioned writing diaries and reading books, and Korean preschool teachers mentioned reading books, watching YouTube or related videos from websites, and practicing breathing exercises. However, only Thai senior ECE students did not mention working collaboratively with parents in promoting SEL in young children.

Table 2: The effect of level and nationality on the teachers' perspectives of promoting SEL

Source of Variation	SS	df	MS	F	p-value
1. The Teachers' Perspectives on Promoting SEL					
Level of Teacher	0.29	1	0.29	1.20	.274
Nationality of Teacher	2.45	1	2.45	10.02	.002*
Level of Teacher * Nationality of Teacher	1.40	1	1.40	5.71	.018*
Total	3786.39	224			

* $p < .05$

Level of teacher means 1) Pre-service teachers, and 2) In-service teachers

Nationality of teacher means 1) Thai, and 2) Korean

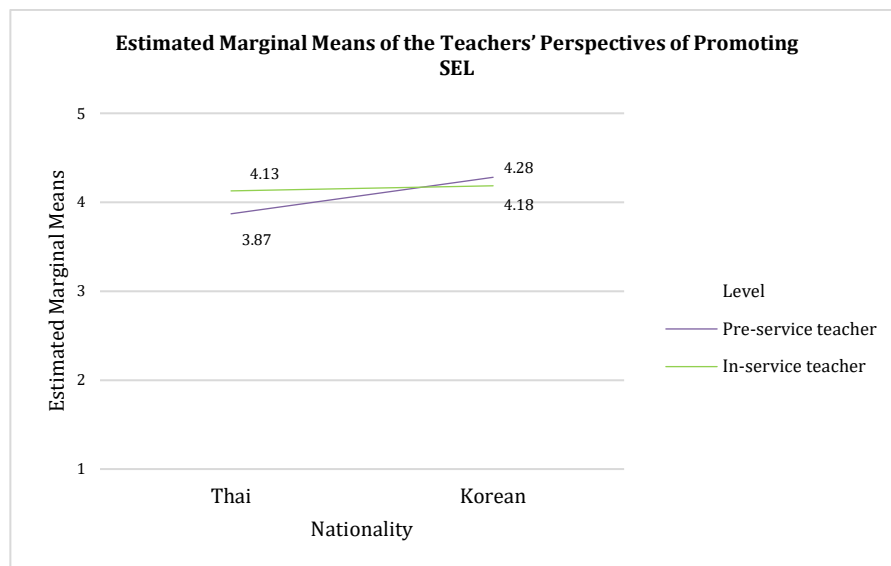


Figure 1: The effect of level and nationality on the teachers' perspectives of promoting SEL

4.2.2 Implementing SEL strategies

A significant effect of interaction between level of teacher and nationality of teacher on teachers' implementation of SEL strategies was found at the .05 significance level (see Table 3, Figure 2). The difference in the mean score of teachers' implementation of SEL strategies according to nationality was dependent on the level of the teacher.

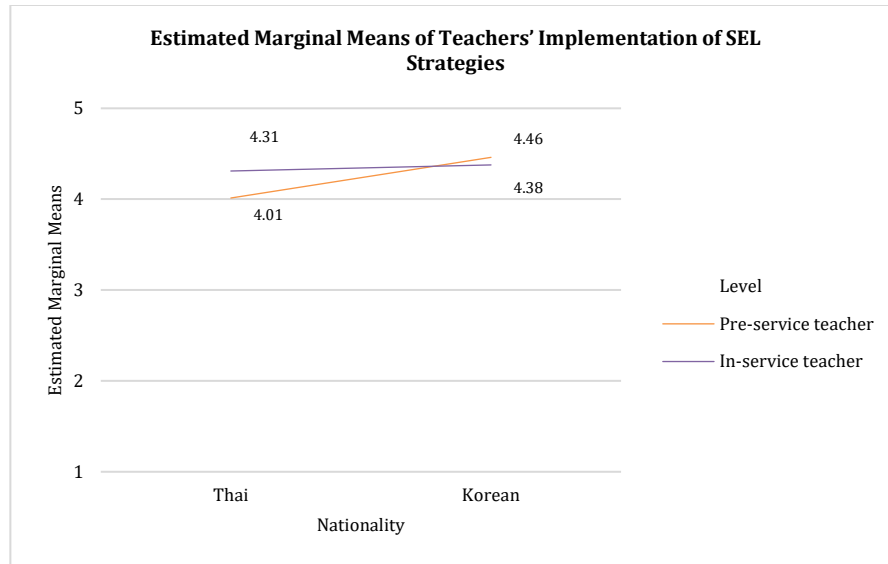
Table 3: The effect of level and nationality on the teachers' implementation of SEL strategies

Source of Variation	SS	df	MS	F	p-value
2. The Teachers' Implementation of SEL Strategies					
Level of Teacher	0.51	1	0.51	1.71	.192
Nationality of Teacher	2.97	1	2.97	9.92	.002*
Level of Teacher * Nationality of Teacher	1.62	1	1.62	5.43	.021*
Total	4122.05	224			

* $p < .05$

Level of teacher means 1) Pre-service teachers, and 2) In-service teachers

Nationality of teacher means 1) Thai, and 2) Korean

**Figure 2:** The effect of level and nationality on teachers' implementation of SEL strategies.

4.2.2.1 Teaching support

Thai senior ECE students and preschool teachers had similar mean scores for teaching support but these were lower at the .05 significance level than for Korean senior ECE students and preschool teachers. However, for three items related to practices ("I respond positively to the children's needs," "I express both positive and negative emotions," and "I communicate my feelings to children with appropriate verbal and gestural expressions"), no differences were found.

In the context of being a role model, Thai senior ECE students and preschool teachers rated the lowest mean score for "I observe and note problematic child behavior." For direct teaching, the lowest mean score for Thai senior ECE students and pre-K teachers was for "I provide learning experiences related to SEL," whereas for Korean senior ECE students and preschool teachers, it was for "I teach children to express their emotions through role play."

Data from the interviews revealed that all four groups used indirect teaching to support young children's social and emotional development in the classroom's daily routine, and they all mentioned being a good role model, such as using a neutral and soft voice, with polite and positive words. Thai senior ECE students reflected that they did not set up a lesson plan to teach SEL during circle time but rather used related stories, songs, discussion, and art activities to promote social and emotional development. However, they needed guidance from school mentors to deal with the child conflicts. Korean senior ECE students applied the 4Rs technique in dealing with conflict in the classroom. Thai preschool teachers integrated EF activities into the lesson plan, arranged small and whole-class activities, and mentioned using art activities to promote the social and emotional development of young children. Meanwhile, Korean preschool teachers mentioned using stories, role play, and small group play according to the children's interests.

4.2.2.2 Classroom management

Thai senior ECE students had the lowest mean score at the .05 significance level in this category. However, no real differences were found among all four groups for the following three items: "I put up signs or posters to help children manage their emotions and self-control," "I set a clear daily schedule and follow it consistently," and "I listen carefully and communicate calmly with children to help them control themselves."

In terms of the physical environment, the lowest mean score for all four groups was for “I put up signs or posters to help children manage their emotions and self-control,” while for emotional support, again the lowest mean score for all four groups was for the same item, “I provide an individual plan for children with behavioral problems.”

Data from the interviews revealed that Thai senior ECE students rated themselves between 2 and 3.5 out of 5 for their SEL practices. They mentioned setting up play corners where children could play according to their preferences; one had set up an emotional corner where children could learn about emotions. They also mentioned non-verbal support such as hugs and other physical contact.

Korean senior ECE students also mentioned that they needed more knowledge and experience to acquire competency in teaching young children, but they rated themselves between 3.5 and 5 out of 5 for their SEL practices. During practicum, they followed their school mentors' guidance, especially on physical environment arrangement.

Thai preschool teachers rated themselves between 3.5 and 4 out of 5 for their practices. They reflected that they did not emphasize social and emotional development in direct teaching rather than physical or academic abilities. They shared their emotional support for young children, such as time out, calm down areas, taking a walk outdoors, practicing meditation, and emotional check in. One participant reflected that she understood the importance of emotional development after two years of being a teacher.

Korean preschool teachers rated themselves between 3.5 and 4.7 out of 5 for their SEL practices. They mentioned that being a role model is important in supporting young children's emotional development. They provided children guidance on how to solve problems and mentioned that deep listening and forecasting skills are important for teachers.

4.2.3 Relationships among teachers' perspectives of, and strategies for, promoting SEL in young children

Data analysis using the Pearson correlation coefficient revealed that teachers' perspectives on SEL and their implementation of SEL strategies positively correlated at a high level ($r = .746, p < .01$) (Table 4). Data analysis by Spearman's rho correlation revealed that having studied SEL in a teacher training degree positively correlated at a moderate level to teachers' perspectives on SEL ($r = .368, p < .01$), while it positively correlated at a weak level to teachers' strategies for promoting SEL ($r = .288, p < .01$) (Table 5).

Table 4: Pearson correlation of teachers' perspective of, and strategies for, promoting SEL in young children

Variables	Y1	Y2
Teachers' Perspectives in SEL (Y1)	1	.746**
Implementing SEL Strategies (Y2)		1

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

Table 5: Spearman's rho correlation of teachers' perspectives of, and strategies for promoting SEL in young children

Variables	X1	X2	X3	X4	X5	Y1	Y2
Age (X1)	1	-.335**	.878**	.495**	.238**	.225**	.184**
Number of Preschoolers in the Classroom (X2)		1	-.261**	-.115	-.252**	-.217**	-.228**
Experience in Practicum/ Experience in Teaching (X3)			1	.532**	.164*	.180**	.146*
Experience in Teaching SEN (X4)				1	.180**	.266**	.193**
Study SEL in In-Service Training (X5)					1	.368**	.288**
Teacher's Perspectives in SEL (Y1)						1	.746**
Implementing SEL Strategies (Y2)							1

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

*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

Finally, it can be concluded that respondents' background data such as age, practicum experience/teaching experience, having studied SEL in the teacher training degree, and special educational needs teaching experience positively correlated to teachers' perspectives of, and strategies for, promoting SEL in young children, while the number of preschoolers in the classroom negatively correlated at a low level.

5. DISCUSSION

These research findings show that in-service and pre-service teachers, both Thai and Korean, value SEL as an important area of learning during preschool age and use SEL-related strategies in their classroom. It is generally accepted that SEL plays an important role as the foundation of children's development and learning

for later life. As Ahmed et al. (2020) mentioned, SEL leads to social and emotional competencies for children. It is involved in social interaction, effective teacher-child relationships, and withstanding social and emotional pressure. These skills must be taught in school, and the method of teaching should be written into the school curriculum.

5.1 SEL is not strongly emphasized in the Thai pre-service ECE curriculum

When compared to the other groups, Thai senior ECE students had the lowest overall mean score. Most of them did not study SEL-related concepts during their course work, and the same applies to Thai preschool teachers. Thus, both Thai senior ECE students and preschool teachers had lower mean scores in relation to knowledge and understanding of SEL than their Korean counterparts. Korean in-service ECE curricula, on the other hand, mention social and emotional development, which is related to the SEL concept and focus on techniques dealing with conflict such as the 4Rs. This relates to the suggestion made by Torres et al. (2016) that teacher education programs should encourage pre-service teachers to acquire social and emotional skills to be able to support the social and emotional development of young children, while Zinsler et al. (2014) emphasized the importance of preparing pre-service teachers by building an awareness of how SEL is important in the early years of life. As a result, teachers can create a proper learning environment and effective emotional interactions.

It should be noted, however, that the Thai pre-service training program requires a four-month practicum, a longer period than the single month required by the Korean pre-service training program. This longer period may benefit Thai pre-service teachers by allowing them to acquire competency in promoting social and emotional development for young children by the end of the practicum.

5.2 Age and experience affected the roles of teachers in promoting SEL in young children

Although Thai preschool teachers had not taken courses related to SEL in their teacher training institutes, most of them were over 25 years old and had 5–10 years of teaching experience. This is similar to the Korean preschool teachers, most of whom were 31–35 years old with 5–10 years of teaching experience. In terms of class size and composition, many Korean public preschool classes are quite small, with fewer than 10 children per class, but including at least one special needs child. In contrast, Thai public preschool classes are quite big, with 25–30 children, but most do not include special needs children. As factors related to teacher practices in promoting SEL, Ng and Bull (2018) mentioned group size and Ling and Sidhu (2020) mentioned gender, types of school, school location, teachers' education level, and teaching experience.

Data from the interviews revealed that Thai public preschools implement many ECE-related concepts, especially the notion of EF. In the past few years, many workshops and handbooks have emphasized the benefit of providing EF activities in the early years. According to the policy and guidelines laid down by the Thai MOE, ECE for young children aims at the holistic development of all four domains (physical, emotional, social, and cognitive) according to age, in addition to enhancing self-development and EF to help achieve the goals of self-esteem, confidence, reasoning, critical-mindedness, and self-regulation. O'Conner et al. (2017c) concluded that EF and self-regulation are the mental processes linked to SEL competencies. This may explain why Thai preschool teachers had higher mean scores in relation to teachers' roles and SEL strategies used in the classroom when compared to Thai senior ECE students. However, using the time-out technique may not prove to be an effective strategy for promoting social and emotional skills; hence, teachers also need to learn more about SEL strategies in supporting young children in the classroom. Thai senior ECE students needed more experience in the classroom to be more confident when putting their knowledge into practice.

5.3 SEL should be promoted using many approaches and not only through classroom routine

Data from both pre-service and in-service teachers reflected the importance of the teacher as a role model in supporting SEL in young children. In the interviews, all 12 teachers mentioned the importance of teachers in this regard. As O'Conner et al. (2017a) recommended, SEL is often delivered in daily classroom routines rather than using direct instruction. Because play-based activity is a teaching approach emphasized in both the Thai and Korean national curricula, teachers took the time to observe when children played together and provided support when they were in need, such as helping them resolve conflicts. Moreover, they all relied on building strong relationships among teachers and children, as recommended by Humphries et al. (2018), Ng and Bull (2018), and O'Conner et al. (2017a), since the classroom teacher is the key person in promoting SEL through daily routine and indirect instruction. Only one Thai preschool teacher mentioned direct instruction during circle time, but only to promote social skills. Hence, both Korean and Thai preschool teachers often use indirect instruction for social skills and emotionalization.

However, the focus on SEL should not only be through daily classroom routine or indirect instruction but also through direct instruction to promote desired behaviors, especially emotional management and responsible decision making. There are many SEL strategies and materials teachers should implement in the classroom, for example, setting a positive tone, suggesting solutions rather than telling children what to do,

allocating appropriate tasks, or allowing extensions of time to complete tasks that are related to action-based strategies (Ng & Bull, 2018). According to Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (2020), SEL comprises five core competencies, which are self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision making. Teachers who have knowledge and understanding of SEL and are aware of its values and benefits for young children can provide the best form of learning experience to promote all the SEL core competencies, and as a result, children will develop social and emotional competencies that are the basis of future academic success (Ahmed et al., 2020; O'Conner et al., 2017b).

5.4 Parents should be involved in the emotionalization of young children through collaboration with teachers

Thai preschool teachers had the highest mean score for collaboration with parents, while Thai senior ECE students had the lowest for the same aspect. In particular, Korean preschool teachers and Thai senior ECE students rarely involve parents in the classroom. For practicum students, it is not their role to communicate and be in charge of dealing with parents, hence they may perform at a lower level when compared to the class teachers. For Korean preschool teachers, building relationships with young children is the priority when compared with the parents. Furthermore, the COVID-19 pandemic may have affected the opportunity for parents to be involved in their children's classroom.

Even though both in-service and pre-service teachers understand the values and importance of SEL and the parents' involvement in supporting young children's emotional and social development, teachers also need support to put the concept into practice. As claimed by Zinsser et al. (2014), teachers accept their important role and responsibility in relation to children's emotional development, even though they believe that parents should be primarily responsible in this regard. As suggested by Regenstien (2019), teachers need to have the knowledge and strategies required to deal with parents in this regard so that they can build active participation with parents. Moreover, they can develop practical activities for parents to engage in at home, which will enable young children to experience the same SEL approach both at home and at school.

5.5 Limitations

There are limitations to this study. The sample groups differed significantly in numbers, with the Korean pre-service teachers' group significantly smaller than the others. However, the data distribution for Korean pre-service teachers was a normal distribution, whereas the data from the larger number of Korean in-service teachers had a non-normal distribution. Moreover, this study relies on teachers' subjective opinions in relation to understanding SEL and the strategies used for promoting SEL in young children. Teachers' actual practices and children's SEL competencies need to be observed, appraised, and examined for correlation to validate teachers' self-perception and the authenticity of their practices in relation to SEL. An in-depth study of the practicum context comparing Thai and Korean pre-service teacher training programs and how they affect the opportunity for teachers to implement SEL strategies or to support young children's SEL learning environments would also shed valuable light on this issue.

5.6 Implications

The results of this study may be considered by Thai and Korean ECE in-service institutions in addressing SEL-related content in their curricula. Furthermore, the findings showed that the lowest mean score for all four groups, both Thai and Korean pre-service and in-service teachers, was in relation to the SEL definition related to cognitive regulation or responsive decision making. This suggests that teacher preparation programs should teach SEL content directly.

Coaching in-service teachers during practicum courses can increase their confidence and encourage them to put their theoretical knowledge into practice, ensuring they are well-prepared to promote SEL for young children when they become preschool teachers in the future. On the other hand, in-service teachers need to accumulate experience and gain more insight into how to promote SEL in young children in diverse classroom contexts. Guidelines, handbooks, resources, and toolkits related to SEL are materials in-service teachers need for their self-development and professional development. As Steed et al. (2022) concluded, teachers require assistance in the form of school structures for effective SEL, such as an SEL team, time for SEL instruction, administrative support, and SEL training.

Future research should investigate factors of effectiveness in implementing SEL in the classroom in different contexts. Moreover, SEL in-service and pre-service training programs should be developed to confirm the quality and effectiveness of the programs' implementation.

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