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Vietnamese Teachers' Perceptions of Social-Emotional Learning Education in Primary Schools

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Abstract

Teachers are the primary deliverers of Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) program, and therefore their beliefs, attitudes, and support towards SEL influence the adoption, sustainability, and impacts of this program. The aim of the present research is to measure the perception of social emotional learning education among Vietnamese primary school teachers. A group of 250 Vietnamese primary school teachers (142 males and 108 females) participated in the survey. They completed the Teachers' Perceptions of Social Emotional Learning scale (TPSEL). The scale included four subscales which are the Teachers' perceived level of the necessity of SEL education in primary schools (TPN), the Teachers' perceived level of the importance of SEL education in primary schools (TPI), the Teachers' perceived level of concern about SEL education in primary schools (TPC), and the Barriers to the Implementation of SEL Programs (BISEL). Results showed significant differences in BISEL among the teachers with different years of teaching experience. Moreover, various educational backgrounds affected TPN and BISEL considerably. The interaction effect on TPN and BISEL was found. The results suggested that regardless of the differences in educational backgrounds and years of experience, the teachers were all aware of the necessity as well as the challenges when implementing SEL in classrooms in primary schools.

Keywords: educational background, Social and Emotional Learning, teachers' perception, years of experience.

1. Introduction

Social and emotional learning is referred to by many names, including soft skills; non-cognitive or meta-cognitive skills; mindsets, essential skills, and habits (MESH) (Transforming Education); 21st-century skills (P21); and readiness abilities (Krauss et al., 2016). The previous research has suggested that teachers are the primary implementers of SEL programs. Their beliefs

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about SEL likely influence program delivery, valuation, and outcome (Brackett et al., 2012; Buchanan et al., 2009; Ee, Cheng, 2013). The research examined the perceptions of Vietnamese teachers of social emotional learning education in primary schools.

A substantial body of research has reported that teachers have the varying perceptions that may moderate the extent to which an SEL program is delivered as intended by program developers and has the intended impact on students. One research found that many teachers believe that SEL is important, schools should take an active role, receiving support from a variety of professionals would be helpful, and current academic demands decrease the opportunity for SEL (Buchanan et al., 2009). Another research found that the disseminators of knowledge in the classroom, teachers and their beliefs about SEL may shape the learning environment and in turn, impact students' developmental outcomes (Brackett et al., 2012). A third research found that teachers' perceptions of their role in infusing SEL and their doubtful belief that SEL will lead to students' academic achievement may impede the success of their SEL infusion in class (Ee, Cheng, 2013).

A teacher's perception of whether the SEL program is necessary also affects the effectiveness of the SEL infusion in classrooms (Schultz et al., 2010). The teacher's perception of the time limitation also influences the effectiveness of the infusion. It is likely that if the teacher is pressured to ensure the class performs well academically, he or she may think that SEL lessons can be sacrificed in favor of academic subjects (Schultz et al., 2010). This would lead to a less effective infusion of SEL in classrooms. The difference in perception of educators' responsibilities in developing SEL of students also leads to varying results; if the teacher feels that the social and emotional development of a child falls outside of the job scope of a teacher, he or she is not likely to carry out the SEL programs with conviction (Schultz et al., 2010). Although SEL is not a new topic, there are still a limited number of studies done in Vietnam, especially for Vietnamese teachers. To fill this gap, this research is conducted to empirically explore teachers' perception of SEL in Vietnam. The aim of this research is to measure perception of social emotional learning education among Vietnamese primary school teachers.

The research starts with reviewing the empirical literature of teachers' perception of SEL. A simple analytical framework is introduced in the second section, followed by research methodology, result, and discussion. The last section is conclusion.

2. Methods

Research Hypotheses

A 3×4 factorial design was used. The independent variables were two aspects of the teacher: educational background (Associate's degree, Bachelor's degree, and Postgraduate degree) and teaching experience (1-3 years, 3-5 years, 5-8 years, and over 8 years). Four dependent variables were measured: Teachers' perceived level of the necessity of SEL education in primary schools (TPN), the Teachers' perceived level of the importance of SEL education in primary schools (TPI), the Teachers' perceived level of concern about SEL education in primary schools (TPC), and the Barriers to the Implementation of SEL Programs (BISEL). The following null hypotheses were tested:

Ho₁ (main effect): There is no significant difference among the three study groups of different educational backgrounds (Associate's degree, Bachelor's degree, and Postgraduate degree) when they are compared simultaneously on the Teachers' perceived level of the necessity of SEL education in primary schools (TPN), the Teachers' perceived level of the importance of SEL education in primary schools (TPI), the Teachers' perceived level of concern about SEL education in primary schools (TPC), and the Barriers to the Implementation of SEL Programs (BISEL)

Ho₂ (main effect): There is no significant difference among the four study groups of different years of experience (1-3 years of experience, 3-5 years of experience, 5-8 years of experience, and over 8 years) when they are compared simultaneously on the Teachers' perceived level of the necessity of SEL education in primary schools (TPN), the Teachers' perceived level of the importance of SEL education in primary schools (TPI), the Teachers' perceived level of concern about SEL education in primary schools (TPC), and the Barriers to the Implementation of SEL Programs (BISEL)

Ho₃ (interaction effect): There is no significant interaction between educational background and teaching experience when teachers are compared simultaneously on the Teachers' perceived level of the necessity of SEL education in primary schools (TPN), the Teachers' perceived level of

the importance of SEL education in primary schools (TPI), the Teachers' perceived level of concern about SEL education in primary schools (TPC), and the Barriers to the Implementation of SEL Programs (BISEL)

Participants

The convenience sampling method was used to recruit teachers who volunteered to help with the study and administer the survey. The survey instrument was distributed to 280 Vietnamese teachers of six primary schools located in two large Vietnam cities (Can Tho and Ho Chi Minh), of which 250 questionnaires were returned, for an 89.29 % return rate, which exceeds the 30 % response rate most researchers require for analysis (Dillman, 2000). The sample of this study was drawn from 250 respondents who completed the survey instrument.

All participants were provided informed consent after receiving an explanation of the purpose of the research. The research was approved by the ethics committee of the Ho Chi Minh City University of Education. There were more males (56.8 %) than females (43.2 %) among the 250 Vietnamese primary teachers who were surveyed. Of these, the majority of the teachers had a bachelor's degree (48 %), 33.2 % had a postgraduate degree, and 18.8% had an associate's degree. 58.8 % of respondents had 1-3 years of experience teaching in primary schools, 19.2 % had 3-5 years of experience teaching in primary schools, 12.8 % had 5-8 years of experience teaching in primary schools, and 9.2 % of teachers had over eight years of experience teaching in primary schools. Table 1 shows the distribution of participants in the educational backgrounds by groups of teaching experience.

Table 1. Number of Participants in the Educational Background by Groups of Teaching experience Groups

Educational Background	Teaching experience				Total
	1-3 years	3-5 years	5-8 years	Over 8 years	
Associate's degree	12	16	4	15	47
Bachelor's degree	86	22	8	4	120
Postgraduate degree	49	10	20	4	83

Questionnaires

Participants were asked to complete the following questionnaire: the Vietnamese version of the Teachers' perceptions of Social Emotional Learning scale (TPSEL). This is a 26 item self-report scale, based on the original 35-item scale from Buchanan et al. (2009). The scale included four subscales including the Teachers' perceived level of the necessity of SEL education in primary schools (TPN), the Teachers' perceived level of the importance of SEL education in primary schools (TPI), the Teachers' perceived level of concern about SEL education in primary schools (TPC), and the Barriers to the Implementation of SEL Programs (BISEL). It was designed for primary and secondary school teachers. All participants were instructed to read the questions carefully and choose the responses that best described themselves. The TPSEL consisted of 26 questions administered to groups of teachers simultaneously. None of the teachers refused to answer the questionnaire and they were asked to select the option which best corresponded to their beliefs, by circling the number in front of the selected option. The survey consisted of three pages printed front to back and took approximately 10 minutes to complete. A consent form was attached to the cover page. The consent form contained information about the purpose of the survey and intended use of the information as well as instructions indicating that the survey responses were anonymous. Teachers were not offered any compensation for completing the survey. The first section of the survey contained five questions targeting at demographic information. The body of the survey contained 26 questions that asked teachers to respond to items ranging from a low of one to a high of five. Table 2 provides a sampling of the survey questions, listed by content domain.

Table 2. Sample Survey Questions

Domain	Survey Question
Level of the necessity of SEL education	Do you think SEL programs should be taught in the classroom?
Level of the importance of SEL education	Do you think that social-emotional competencies such as self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship management and responsible decision making are important to our students?
Level of concern about SEL education	To what extent are you interested in integrating the social-emotional learning in your teaching?
Barriers to Implementation SEL	What difficulties do you face when trying to infuse SEL into your lessons?

Statistical Analysis

Statistical analyses were performed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS 22.0). Descriptive statistics were used to analyze the data collected. A two-way multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was performed with two independent variables (educational background and teaching experience) and four subscales of the TPSEL as dependent variables. The average item mean, average standard deviation, F values and effect sizes from MANOVA were calculated for each scale of the TPSEL questionnaire. These analyses were used to investigate differences in Teachers' perceived level of necessary for SEL education in primary schools (TPN), the Teachers' perceived level of importance for SEL education in primary schools (TPI), the Teachers' perceived level of concern with SEL education in primary schools (TPC), and the Barriers to Implementing SEL Programs (BISEL) of primary school teachers according to educational background and teaching experience.

3. Results

Descriptive Analysis

The participants scored in the average range on the TPSEL questionnaire. The mean score for the sample on the TPN subscale was 6.04 (SD = 1.71). The mean score for the TPI subscale was 1.67 (SD = .86). The mean score on the TPC subscale was 2.07 (SD = .81). The mean score on the BISEL subscale was .98 (SD = .64). [Table 3](#) presents descriptive statistics of dependent variables including TPN, TPI, TPC and BISEL results by educational background and groups of teaching experience.

Table 3. Summary of Mean (M) and Standard Deviation (SD) of TPSEL Questionnaire

Educational Background	Teaching experience				Combined
	1-3 years	3-5 years	5-8 years	Over 8 years	
<i>TPN</i>					
Associate's degree					
M	3.083	3.425	2.850	3.080	3.178
SD	.301	.281	.251	.398	.368
Bachelor's degree					
M	3.360	3.463	3.500	3.750	3.401
SD	.378	.292	.512	.300	.376
Postgraduate degree					
M	3.416	3.480	3.530	3.450	3.453
SD	.367	.168	.345	.100	.335
<i>TPI</i>					
Associate's degree					
M	3.333	3.375	3.450	3.346	3.361
SD	.130	.143	.100	.206	.159
Bachelor's degree					
M	3.507	3.281	3.475	3.300	3.456

SD	.300	.210	.353	.476	.305
Postgraduate degree					
M	3.232	3.240	3.3600	3.200	3.262
SD	.309	.157	.166	.230	.264
<i>TPC</i>					
Associate's degree					
M	3.666	3.487	3.750	3.720	3.629
SD	.299	.399	.100	.259	.325
Bachelor's degree					
M	3.883	3.736	3.825	3.700	3.846
SD	.435	.178	.580	.200	.407
Postgraduate degree					
M	3.506	3.760	3.630	3.750	3.578
SD	.458	.126	.313	.500	.407
<i>BISEL</i>					
Associate's degree					
M	3.037	3.511	3.204	3.090	3.230
SD	.179	.232	.239	.206	.292
Bachelor's degree					
M	3.069	3.247	3.250	3.159	3.117
SD	.196	.080	.265	.239	.200
Postgraduate degree					
M	3.120	3.000	3.000	3.136	3.077
SD	.260	.181	.193	.117	.236

Inferential Analysis

The null hypotheses were tested using a two-way MANOVA. In order to run MANOVA, we conducted preliminary assumption check for normality, univariate and multivariate outliers, homogeneity of variance-covariance matrices. To identify the univariate outliers, the variables were examined. No univariate outlier was detected in the sample, as indicated by z-scores falling between -3.29 and +3.29 (Tabachnick et al., 2001). One multivariate outlier was identified in the sample by means of inspection of Mahalanobis distances with $p < .001$ (Tabachnick et al., 2001), but was not excluded from the overall sample, following the recommendations by Field (2013) and Cousineau and Chartier (2010). MANOVA is robust to violations of normality if the sizes of groups are nearly equal or if the size of the largest group is less than about 1.5 times the size of the smallest group (Leech et al., 2005). The largest group in this research ($n = 86$) was about 21.5 times larger than the smallest group ($n = 4$), the multivariate homogeneity of variance-covariance matrices tested with Box's M test revealed that the M value of 250.114 was significant ($p < .05$). Therefore, the assumption of normality and homogeneity of covariance matrices were not satisfied. For this reason, a more robust statistic, Pillai's Trace, was used for reporting the result.

The MANOVA revealed a significant multivariate effect for teaching experience, Pillai's Trace = .126, $F_{(12, 711)} = 2.60$, $p < .01$, partial $\eta^2 = .042$, and a significant multivariate effect for educational background, Pillai's Trace = .180, $F_{(8, 472)} = 5.83$, $p < .01$, partial $\eta^2 = .090$. A significant multivariate effect for interaction was also found, Pillai's Trace = .261, $F_{(24, 952)} = 2.76$, $p < .01$, partial $\eta^2 = .065$. Therefore, the results revealed that all hypotheses were not rejected in this research.

Based on the significant effects found from the MANOVA, a separate two-way univariate analysis of variance (ANOVA) for each of the dependent variables was conducted without undue inflation of the experimentwise Type I error (Grimm, Yarnold, 1995). The Levene's Test of Equality of Error Variances tests the assumption of MANOVA and ANOVA that the variances of each variable are equal across the groups. If the Levene's test is significant, this means that the assumption has been violated. In this research, the value of Levene's test came out to be non-significant for all the variables with the exception of TPI [$F_{(11, 238)} = 5.300$, $p < .05$] and TPC [$F_{(11, 238)} = 7.476$, $p < .05$] factors. So, for the other variables (TPN [$F_{(11, 238)} = 1.213$, $p > .05$], BISEL [$F_{(11, 238)} = 1.953$, $p > .05$]) the assumption that the variances of each variable are equal across the groups was met.

Table 4. Combined univariate ANOVA table

Source	Dependent Variable	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p	Partial η^2
Corrected Model	TPN	5.043 ^a	11	.458	3.679	.001	.145
	TPI	3.149 ^b	11	.286	4.063	.001	.158
	TPC	5.724 ^c	11	.520	3.396	.001	.136
	BISEL	3.717 ^d	11	.338	7.802	.001	.265
	TPN	1240.505	1	1240.505	9953.448	.001	.977
	TPI	1222.918	1	1222.918	17358.467	.001	.986
	TPC	1500.182	1	1500.182	9791.278	.001	.976
	BISEL	1088.214	1	1088.214	25127.911	.001	.991
Teaching experience	TPN	.961	3	.320	2.571	.055	.031
	TPI	.314	3	.105	1.484	.220	.018
	TPC	.098	3	.033	.213	.888	.003
	BISEL	.877	3	.292	6.751	.001	.078
Educational background	TPN	3.536	2	1.768	14.186	.001	.107
	TPI	.396	2	.198	2.814	.062	.023
	TPC	.398	2	.199	1.300	.274	.011
	BISEL	.447	2	.223	5.156	.006	.042
Teaching experience * Educational background	TPN	1.613	6	.269	2.157	.048	.052
	TPI	.613	6	.102	1.451	.196	.035
	TPC	1.423	6	.237	1.547	.163	.038
	BISEL	1.819	6	.303	7.001	.001	.150
Error	TPN	29.662	238	.125			
	TPI	16.767	238	.070			
	TPC	36.465	238	.153			
	BISEL	10.307	238	.043			
Total	TPN	2885.400	250				
	TPI	2866.560	250				
	TPC	3495.840	250				
	BISEL	2456.140	250				
Corrected Total	TPN	34.705	249				
	TPI	19.916	249				
	TPC	42.189	249				
	BISEL	14.024	249				

a. R Squared = .145 (Adjusted R Squared = .106)
 b. R Squared = .158 (Adjusted R Squared = .119)
 c. R Squared = .136 (Adjusted R Squared = .096)
 d. R Squared = .265 (Adjusted R Squared = .231)

The ANOVA results as shown in [Table 4](#) revealed significant teaching experience effects on BISEL [$F_{(3, 238)} = 6.75, p < .05, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .07$] among the 1-3 years, 3-5 years, 5-8 years, and over 8 years (1-3 years: $M_{\text{BISEL}} = 3.07$; 3-5 years: $M_{\text{BISEL}} = 3.25$; 5-8 years: $M_{\text{BISEL}} = 3.15$; over 8 years: $M_{\text{BISEL}} = 3.12$). Significant educational background effects on TPN [$F_{(2, 238)} = 14.18, p < .05, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .10$] and BISEL [$F_{(2, 238)} = 5.15, p < .05, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .04$] among the Associate's degree, Bachelor's degree and Postgraduate degree (Associate's degree: $M_{\text{TPN}} = 3.17, M_{\text{BISEL}} = 3.23$; Bachelor's degree: $M_{\text{TPN}} = 3.40, M_{\text{BISEL}} = 3.11$; Postgraduate degree: $M_{\text{TPN}} = 3.45, M_{\text{BISEL}} = 3.07$). A significant interaction effect on TPN [$F_{(6, 238)} = 2.15, p < .05, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .05$] and BISEL [$F_{(6, 238)} = 7.00, p < .05, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .15$] were found.

4. Discussion

This research examined the extent of teachers' perceptions of SEL education in primary schools. Following recent research ([Brackett et al., 2012](#); [Buchanan et al., 2009](#); [Ee, Cheng, 2013](#); [Youngblood, 2015](#)), the hypothesis of this present research was that the teaching experience and the teacher's educational background affect the teacher's perception of the necessity, importance, concern and barriers to the implementation of SEL programs in primary schools.

The main findings indicate that there was a significant difference among groups of teachers with different teaching experiences and educational backgrounds when they are compared in the Teachers' perceptions of Social Emotional Learning scale. These findings showed a relationship between the years of teaching experience and the teachers' perception of difficulties in implementing SEL education in classroom. The results of this research also proved that the teacher with high educational background had high perceived level of the necessity of SEL education in primary schools.

This research highlighted the fact that the teachers' educational background and teaching experience had significant influences in applying SEL education in classroom. Teachers with Postgraduate degree had higher perceived level of the necessity for SEL education in primary schools compared to those with Bachelor's degree and Associate's degree. This finding was supported by the result of [Buchanan et al. \(2009\)](#) who found that nearly all (98.9 %) teachers believed that SEL education played an pivotal role for the success of students. Teacher educators have a special responsibility in developing soft skills like SEL among teacher trainees. In addition, teacher educators have a major impact on the development of SEL for teacher trainees. Unfortunately, an Associate's degree often takes a period of three-year training in university which is not enough to instill SEL into teacher trainees. This is proved by this research's results showing that teachers with Associate's degree find it most challenging when applying SEL in classroom compared to other teacher groups. This result seemed to be consistent with [Schulz \(2008\)](#) and [Esen-Aygun and Sahin-Taskin \(2017\)](#) suggestions. They emphasized that teachers who had their training at the University (Bachelor's degree, Postgraduate degree) were more familiar with the concept of SEL than those training at Teacher Training College (Associate's degree). Therefore, teachers should be aware of their educational developments.

This research also found that teachers with 3-5 years of experience found it most challenging when applying SEL in classroom compared to other teacher groups except for 1-3 years of teaching experience group. This suggests that teachers who have more teaching experience at schools find it less difficult when infusing SEL into classroom as they are more familiar with this concept. For the teacher group with 1-3 years of experience, the figure is lower than other groups since the teachers are usually fresh graduates or interns who are not required to apply SEL in teaching.

The p-values tell us that there is an interaction effect of teachers' educational background and years of teaching experience on the perception of SEL. However, the interaction effect of teachers' educational background and years of experience may not have strong impact on the perceptions of Vietnamese primary school teachers about social emotional learning education. It is important to notice that despite the differences in educational background and teaching experience, teachers were all aware of the necessity as well as the challenges when implementing SEL in classroom.

The limitations of this research pertain mostly to the sample and the self-reported measurements. Although the sample was of good size, it consisted mostly of teachers who had Bachelor's degree or Postgraduate degree. Associate's degree was less present. This might suggest a limitation to the generalization of findings across the years of teaching experience and all teachers' educational levels. In addition, this research employed only self-report questionnaires, which might bias the findings as well, and was a cross-sectional research, which does not allow

concluding about causal relationships between research variables. Future studies should address these limitations, and further examine teachers' social-emotional competencies, and how they contribute to an effective teacher-student relationship in Vietnam.

5. Conclusion

Results from the current research support Buchanan et al. (2009) supposing SEL to be important in school. To the best of the authors' knowledge, this is the first research to examine the perception of Vietnamese teachers about Social Emotional Learning education in primary schools. In addition to the very limited research in this aspect in Vietnam, the results of this research are necessary for Vietnamese teachers to have a better understanding of Social Emotional Learning education. We are hopeful that this research will stimulate similar investigations in an effort to rigorously continue to bridge the gap between research and practice in Vietnam schools.

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