

# Teachers' Perceptions of Social Emotional Learning in Early Childhood Centers in Shanghai, China

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## Abstract

Notably, previous studies have explored teachers' perceptions in various dimensions; however there is still a gap in the literature with regards to the perceptions of teachers about the level of Social Emotional Learning (SEL) subscales and also differences in their perceptions of SEL based on demographic data such as gender, school types, school location, teachers' qualification and teaching experiences. Hence, the study aimed at exploring teachers' perceptions of SEL in selected early childhood centres in Shanghai, China. The study was guided by three (3) specific objectives. A descriptive survey design was adopted for the study. The study involved a total of ten randomly selected early childhood schools which involved a total of 375 teachers. A structured questionnaire was used as an instrument for quantitative data collection. Data collected were analyzed using descriptive statistic such as mean and standard deviation, and inferential statistic such as t-test and ANOVA. The findings of the study among others showed that the teachers' perceptions of SEL in the selected schools were at the moderate level. More so, there were significant differences in teachers' perceptions of SEL based on teacher qualification and type of school, no significant differences was recorded based on location of school and teaching experience. Therefore, the study among others recommended that any form of SEL programme implemented by teachers at the early education level should be culturally and contextually appropriate for children in Shanghai in the future.

**Keywords:** Social Emotional Learning (SEL), Teachers' Perception of SEL, Gender and Perception of SEL, School Type and Perception of SEL, School Location and Perception of SEL

## Introduction

Social emotional learning (SEL) has received much attention in recent years and is becoming an integral part of current early childhood education curriculum all over the world. SEL programmes focus on the ability of the child to understand and recognize emotions, manage social problems and build positive relationships (Elias, 1997; Payton *et al.*, 2000). According to Goleman (1996), SEL refers to the process whereby children and adults acquire associating skills, knowledge, and attitudes of the core areas of social and emotional competency (SEC) such as self-awareness (emotional identification and recognition; precise self-perception; strength recognition, necessities and values; self-efficacy), self-management (compulsion of managing and controlling stress; skills of an organization; goal set-up; discipline and self-motivation), social awareness (viewpoint taking; sympathy; variances in identification; esteem of others), relationship skills (ability to communicate; engage socially; build up relationships; cooperative team-work; refusal; managing conflicts; seeking for help; negotiation) and responsible decision-making (analysis of a situation and recognizing the problem; reflection and evaluation; solving a problem; ethical, personal and social responsibility).

In addition, studies have revealed that SEL helps children in the establishment of right self-awareness, positive interpersonal relationships and provide a good foundation or base for their future social development (Zhou, Main & Wang, 2010). The two elements of self-awareness and positive interpersonal relationships are vital conditions for children to be able to lead a successful life in society and it was just the obvious "short board" in the growth of children in China with only one child. SEL also enables children to build self-confidence and interpersonal skills and can rationally solve the interpersonal difficulties and disasters confronted in their own development (Zhou *et al.*, 2010). According to Zhou *et al.* (2010), SEL can encourage the development of non-cognitive psychological factors and enhance Chinese children's academic results (Eisenberg *et al.*, 2009). Thus, in China it has been confirmed that SEL will help the development and growth of students' non-cognitive psychological factors and successfully help them improve their performance. China's primary education programme (for 4 to 11 years old) has been well developed with beyond half of all Chinese primary schools participating in the SEL program. A study shows that the SEL project has accomplished promising results in the improvement of early childhood schools, including significantly motivating the establishment of various school-based interventions precisely designed to encourage early childhood SEL (Denham & Weissberg, 2004). The importance of SEL cannot be overemphasized to all the

stakeholders, especially teachers in the child's early education. Teachers are the basic SEL programme deliverers as their support, beliefs, and attitudes to SEL actually has bearing on the sustainability, adoption and influence of such programmes (Ferguson, 2003)

More so, the perceptions of teachers about SEL programme are vital for enhancing child development in Early Childhood Education (ECE). It also plays a salient role in the effective integration of SEL in classrooms (Schultz *et al.*, 2010). Teachers' perception refers to thoughts or mental images teachers have about their professional activities and their students, which are shaped by their background knowledge, life experiences and professional behaviour influences (Caldarella *et al.*, 2009). In the context of this study, it refers to the thoughts of teachers about SEL programmes in ECE. According to the study conducted by Buchanan *et al.* (2009), it was found that the majority of the teachers felt that it was not feasible to integrate SEL for more than a period per week. It is possible that if the teachers are pressured to enhance the academic performance of the students, they will most likely sacrifice the SEL lessons, resulting in an ineffective integration of SEL and low SEL growth in students (Schultz *et al.*, 2010). If the teachers perceive that the SEL programme is not part of the teacher's responsibility, there is a less probability of them carrying out the SEL interventions with conviction (Schultz *et al.*, 2010). The perceptions of teachers regarding their related work, and psychological knowledge were related to their application of the curriculum of social emotional learning (Greenberg & Kusché, 1993). Notably, teachers who possess a higher level of efficiency are probably going to be better deliverers of a quality curriculum. It was reported that the teachers' confidence and beliefs are related to their perceptions of both the importance and difficulties related to the integration of innovative programmes such as SEL (Denham & Weissberg, 2004; Jennings & Greenberg, 2009).

In addition, it can be said that teachers influence students with the subject knowledge that affects their delivery and pedagogy very strongly (Bierman *et al.*, 2010). As a result, the beliefs and perceptions of teachers is a determinant factor of their zeal for teaching; thus, guiding the practices and ideas of their teaching (Brownlee, 2003; Sing *et al.*, 2009). Hence, this affects the efficiency of the SEL implementation in the collaboration of students as well as classrooms (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009), which could have influenced either negatively or positively on their aptitude for learning.

The study of Buchanan *et al.* (2009) on perceptions, practices, and knowledge of teachers in SEL classrooms shows that teachers play an active role by getting training and support from various professionals to manage their pressure from academic demands and improves students' SEC. Furthermore, a research was conducted on the perceptions of teachers regarding the standards of social emotional learning (Fischer, 2017). The research investigated on the assessment of teachers as regarding their knowledge and use of SEL standards, alongside finding their perspectives in respect of the essentiality of SEL standards on their student's educational development. From the results obtained, the researcher indicated that teachers perceived that it was quite essential to implement social emotional learning standards so as to improve the academic advancement of the students (Ee & Cheng, 2016). Nevertheless, it was discovered that there was a lack of knowledge from the teachers and that they do not implement such SEL standards in their lesson plan; hence, the need for more SEL awareness research. Ee and Cheng (2013) reported that the teachers generally perceived how important SEL is in the development of character as well as in instilling appropriate values, hence ensuring holistic student development. Their findings are also in line with that of Buchanan *et al.* (2009), who stated that the knowledge of teachers regarding SEL in classrooms actually enhanced the life endeavours of the students. It was also informed that teachers who had more confidence in their abilities to teach the SEL programme had perceptions that it is more effective; thus, indicating that they enjoyed the SEL programme (Brackett *et al.*, 2012). Additionally, other studies such as Buchanan *et al.* (2009) and Esen-Aygun & Sahin-Taskin (2017), confirmed that there is a link between the confidence of teachers with their perceptions of the challenges as well as the importance of implementing SEL programmes. Furthermore, it has been revealed by Ee and Cheng (2016), that self-awareness was discovered to be the easiest social emotional competence to infuse, which was followed by social awareness and responsible decision making; however, according to their findings, none of the teachers felt self-management to be a relevant factor or one which was easy to illustrate.

According to Jennings and Greenberg (2009), teachers who possess a higher social emotional competence are more likely in engaging their students to interact in manners that are respectful and socially skilled. Thus, the pro-social skills of teachers would help in assisting their students to make ethical contributions as well as behave in a responsible way to their community, family members and peers. Furthermore, when there is a limitation in the necessary resources for teachers to manage issues related to social emotions within the classroom in an effective manner, the children would probably display less levels of performance as well as on task behaviour (Marzano *et al.*, 2003). The research by Buchanan *et al.* (2009) regarding the practices, knowledge and perceptions of teachers in the

SEL classrooms, informed that active roles must be upheld by teachers via receiving of support and training from diverse professionals to be able to keep up to the standard with current academic demands of improving the social emotional competency of students. Previous research have revealed that teachers who believe that the teaching process should be dynamic among teachers and students, instead of being an instructive relationship, are most possibly going to put in more effort in lesson delivery and planning, in conjunction with the reporting of higher reflective tendencies on the processes of learning and the abilities of the students (Brownlee, 2003; Ee & Cheng, 2013). According to Ortner, Kilner and Zelazo(2007), the increase in the classroom climate may emotionally drain the teacher and they may as a result resort to reactive and punitive actions. Therefore, it is very important for the teachers to have the correct perceptions, be able to maintain a high level of SECs and also be able to integrate SEL in the teaching-learning process to be able to maintain a positive classroom climate. Hence, the study investigated teachers' perceptions of SEL in early childhood centers in Shanghai, China.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Scholars have noted that perceptions of teachers about SEL programme are important for facilitating effective infusion of SEL and child development in ECE (Schultz *et al.*, 2010). This implies that the thoughts of teachers about the SEL go a long way in determining its integration in classrooms. In agreement, Schultz *et al.* (2010) stated that if the teachers perceive that the SEL programme is not part of the teacher's responsibility, there is a less probability of them carrying out the SEL interventions with conviction. Also, the application of the curriculum of SEL in schools has been related to the perceptions of teachers of related work and psychological knowledge (Greenberg & Kusché, 1993). This implies that perceptions of teachers about SEL might be dependent on teacher's individual characteristics such as gender, location, type of school, teaching experience and qualification. Notably, previous studies have explored teachers' perceptions in various dimensions; however there is still a gap in the literature with regards to the perceptions of teachers about the level of SEL subscales in early childhood centres in Shanghai, China, and also differences in their perceptions of SEL based on demographic data such as gender, school types, school location, teachers' qualification and teaching experiences. Research efforts geared towards investigating teachers' perceptions of the levels of SEL subscales and based on gender, school types, school location, teachers' qualification and teaching experiences of teachers would provide empirical information that would assist educational authorities in enacting and enforcing SEL programme policies in early childhood centres. Hence, the study sought to examine teachers' perceptions of SEL in early childhood centers in Shanghai, China

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of the study is to examine teachers' perceptions of SEL in early childhood settings in China. The study specifically sought to:

- investigate teachers' perceptions of the level of SEL subscales in the selected early childhood centres in Shanghai, China;
- examine the differences in the teachers' perceptions of SEL based on gender, teacher qualification, and teaching experience; and
- examine the differences in the teachers' perceptions of SEL based on school type and location.

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions were posed in line with the study

- What are the teachers' perceptions of the level of SEL subscales in the selected early childhood centres in Shanghai, China?
- Are there any differences in the teachers' perceptions of SEL based on gender, teacher qualification and teaching experience?
- Are there any differences in the teachers' perceptions of SEL based on type and location of school?

### **Methodology**

The study was conducted in selected early childhood centres in the city of Shanghai, China. Shanghai is one of the top four most developed cities in China. Shanghai was purposively selected for the study because it has the most varied childhood programmes which include public, private and international early childhood centres, and also has the best resources for early childhood education. A descriptive survey design was adopted for the study. The target population for this study was kindergarten teachers from selected public, private and international early childhood centres in Shanghai, China. There is a total of 896 public schools with early childhood centres, 452 private schools with early childhood centres, and 30 international schools with early childhood centres in Shanghai district.

Purposively, a total of 10 schools from public, private and international early childhood centres were chosen randomly from a list of public, private and international early childhood centres that agreed to participate in the study. Respectively, four public, three private and three international kindergartens participated in the study. A total of 375 teachers (135 teachers were from public schools, 128 from private and 112 teachers were from international schools) were involved in the study. Further analysis indicated that 313 (83.5%) were female teachers whilst the remaining 62 (16.5%) teachers were males.

A structured questionnaire titled "Social Emotional Learning Perception Questionnaire" (SELPQ) was used as an instrument for data collection. The instrument composed of five dimensions, namely teacher self-reflection, professional learning in SEL, school climate, resources for student support and educating all students. Also, the instrument was structured on 5-point scale (Scale: 1=very low, 2=low, 3=moderate, 4=high, 5=very high). The questionnaire used in this study was developed by adapting items from two instruments published in the literature. The first instrument was Editorial Projects in Education (EPE)(Swanson & Barlage, 2006) and second one was Civic Enterprises by Peter D. Hart Research Associates (Bridgeland, Bruce & Hariharan, 2013). The questionnaire comprised of two main sections. Section A of the questionnaire explored the respondents' demographic information. The final section, namely Section B had a total of 36 items, it examined the perceptions of teachers towards SEL. Teachers' perceptions as to social emotion learning included investigating the self-reflection of teachers, professional learning in SEL, school climate, resources for student support as well as educating all students. The questionnaire was subjected to face validation by a panel of experts comprising three experienced academics from SEGi University, to validate questionnaire. The panel was required to look into various aspects of validity such as face validity, content validity and construct validity. All the members of the panel of experts confirmed that the items and constructs they represented, accurately reflected SEL in early education of children. More so, a pilot study was conducted to establish the reliability of the instrument based on five dimensions. Cronbach's Alpha Reliability Coefficient index determined were 0.88 on teacher self-reflection, 0.83 on professional learning in SEL, 0.88 on school climate, 0.77 on resources for student support and 0.89 on educating all students. The instrument was therefore considered reliable based on the recommendation by Goertzen (2017). As an adapted instrument from Fischer (2017), researchers carried out an exploratory factor analysis on data collected in the pilot study which confirmed the number of factors reported by the developers of the questionnaire.

Researchers obtained permission from the Faculty of Education of SEGi University and the Institute of Graduate Studies (IGS) to collect data for the study. Upon receiving the approval, the researchers communicated the selected kindergarten principals via email through ex-colleagues and scheduled a meeting in early September, the first two weeks of school after the end of the summer holiday. The researchers met with the school dean from each school administrative office to explain the purpose of this research study. Hence, the officers gave official permission for the researchers to meet the faculty staff to conduct the research study. For quick and convenient data collection, the questionnaires were designed from paper to online questionnaires and administered to each participant via email or WeChat, therefore all the questionnaires were completed through WeChat. Ethical considerations were upheld during data collection process. Researchers ensured that prior permission was obtained from the relevant authorities such as the District and State Education offices and the schools involved in the research. Afterwards, researchers ensured prior consent was also obtained from the respondents, hence participation was voluntary. More so, all respondents were assured of the confidentiality and privacy of their identities and responses to all the questions.

Statistical Package for the Social Science (SPSS) version 22.0 was used for data analysis. Descriptive and inferential statistics were used for data analysis. Data collected for the study were analyzed using descriptive statistic such as mean and standard deviation, and inferential statistic such as t-test and ANOVA at .05 and .001-level of significance.

## **Results and Discussion**

The results for the study are presented in the Tables below.

**Research Question 1:** What are teachers' perceptions of the level of SEL in the selected early childhood centres in Shanghai, China?

Data for answering research question 1 are presented in Table 1 below.

**Table 1: Teachers' overall perception of SEL (n=36)**

Environment Scales	No of items	Means (S)
Overall Perception	36	3.09 (0.68)
Teacher Self-Reflection	8	3.35 (1.17)
School Climate	9	2.99 (0.96)
Professional Learning in SEL	7	3.04 (0.97)
Resources for Student Support	3	3.08 (1.14)
Educating All Students	9	3.01 (0.98)

Scale: 1=very low, 2=low, 3=moderate, 4=high, 5=very high

Data in Table 1 show that the mean score for the overall perception and for 91 each of the sub-scales, ranged from 2.99 on school climate to 3.35 on teacher self-reflection. The results show that the teachers' perceptions of the level of SEL in the selected schools were at the moderate level.

**Research Question 2:** Are there any differences in the teachers' perceptions about SEL based on gender, teacher qualification and teaching experience?

Data for answering research question 2 are presented in Table 2 to 4 below

**Table 2: Distribution of mean, standard deviation, t- and p-values of teachers' perception based on gender (n=375)**

	Gender	N	Mean (S)	t-values	p-values
	Female	313	3.41(1.16)		
Teacher Self-Reflection				2.519	0.012*
	Male	62	2.93(1.15)		
	Female	313	3.02(0.95)		
School Climate				1.589	0.113
	Male	62	2.77(0.98)		
Professional Learning in	Female	313	3.05(0.97)		
SEL				0.696	0.487
	Male	62	2.94(0.97)		
Resources for Student	Female	313	3.03(1.13)		
Support				2.030	0.044*
	Male	62	3.41(1.09)		
	Female	313	3.04(0.96)		
Educating All Students				1.577	0.116
	Male	62	2.79(1.02)		
	Female	313	3.12(0.66)		
SEL Overall				2.046	0.042*
	Male	62	2.89(0.71)		

Scale: 1=not at all important, 2=not important, 3=somewhat important, 4=important, 5=very important, p-value: <0.05, N = Number of respondents

Data entries in Table 2 show that in the overall perception of SEL, female teachers had a statistically significant higher mean score than male teachers, [Mf= 3.12(0.66), Mm= 2.89(0.71)],  $t(313) = 2.046, p < 0.05$ . On the teacher self-reflection sub-scale, female teachers had a statistically significant higher mean score than male teachers, [Mf= 3.41(1.16), Mm= 2.93(1.15)],  $t(313) = 2.519, p < 0.05$ . On the resources for student support sub-scale, male teachers had a statistically higher mean score than female teachers, [Mm= 3.41(1.09), Mf= 3.03(1.13)],  $t(313) = 2.030, p < 0.05$ . The use of notation for Mean: it is written as Mf which means Mean of Female, while Mm means Mean of Male.

**Table 3: Analysis of variance of teachers' perceptions of SEL based on academic qualification (n=375)**

		Sum of				
		Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Teacher Self-Reflection	Between Groups	34.162	2	17.081	13.385	.000***
	Within Groups	398.166	372	1.276		
	Total	432.328	374			
School Climate	Between Groups	27.086	2	13.543	16.149	.000***
	Within Groups	261.653	372	.839		
	Total	288.739	374			
Professional Learning in SEL	Between Groups	11.805	2	5.903	6.485	.002**
	Within Groups	284.000	372	.910		
	Total	295.805	374			
Resources For Student Support	Between Groups	42.521	2	21.261	18.223	.000***
	Within Groups	364.000	372	1.167		
	Total	406.521	374			
Educating All Students	Between Groups	31.114	2	15.557	17.971	.000***
	Within Groups	270.081	372	.866		
	Total	301.194	374			
SEL Overall	Between Groups	16.801	2	8.401	20.708	.000***
	Within Groups	126.569	372	.406		
	Total	143.371	374			

Scale: 1=not at all important, 2=not important, 3=somewhat important, 4=important, 5=very important, p-value :< 0.001

Data in Table 3 above indicate that there was a statistically significant effect of academic qualification on overall perception of SEL, [F (2, 312) = 20.71,  $p < 0.001$ ] and on each of the sub-scales of SEL the  $p < 0.01$  level of statistical significance.

**Table 4: Analysis of variance of teachers' perceptions of SEL with respect to teaching experience (n=375)**

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Teacher Self-Reflection	Between Groups	2.659	2	1.329	.965	.382
	Within Groups	429.669	372	1.377		
	Total	432.328	374			
School Climate	Between Groups	1.515	2	.758	.823	.440
	Within Groups	287.224	372	.921		
	Total	288.739	374			
Professional Learning in SEL	Between Groups	6.631	2	3.316	3.577	.029*
	Within Groups	289.174	372	.927		
	Total	295.805	374			
Resources For Student Support	Between Groups	11.654	2	5.827	4.604	.011*
	Within Groups	394.867	372	1.266		
	Total	406.521	374			
Educating All Students	Between Groups	2.107	2	1.053	1.099	.335
	Within Groups	299.088	372	.959		
	Total	301.194	374			
SEL Overall	Between Groups	1.279	2	.639	1.404	.247
	Within Groups	142.092	372	.455		
	Total	143.371	374			

Scale: 1=not at all important, 2=not important, 3=somewhat important, 4=important, 5=very important, p-value : <0.05

Data in Table 4 indicate that there was a statistically significant effect of teaching experience on teachers' perceptions of professional learning in SEL dimension at the  $p < 0.05$  level of statistical significance, [F (2, 312) = 3.58,  $p < 0.05$ ]. There was also a statistically significant effect of teaching experience on teacher perceptions of resources for student support of SEL dimension at the  $p < 0.05$  level of statistical significance, [F (2, 312) = 4.60,  $p < 0.05$ ].

**Research Question 3:** Are there any differences in the teachers' perceptions about SEL based on type and location of school?

Data for answering research question 3 are presented in Table 5 to 6

**Table 5: Analysis of variance of teachers' perceptions of SEL based on type of school (n=375)**

		Sum of				
		Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
SEL Overall	Between Groups	99.976	2	49.988	359.407	.000***
	Within Groups	43.395	372	.139		
	Total	143.371	374			
Teacher Self-Reflection	Between Groups	193.511	2	96.755	126.405	.000***
	Within Groups	238.817	372	.765		
	Total	432.328	374			
School Climate	Between Groups	132.285	2	66.142	131.900	.000***
	Within Groups	156.454	372	.501		
	Total	288.739	374			
Professional Learning in SEL	Between Groups	98.517	2	49.258	77.899	.000***
	Within Groups	197.289	372	.632		
	Total	295.805	374			
Resources for Student Support	Between Groups	169.031	2	84.515	111.031	.000***
	Within Groups	237.490	372	.761		
	Total	406.521	374			
Educating All Students	Between Groups	162.831	2	81.416	183.588	.000***
	Within Groups	138.363	372	.443		
	Total	301.194	374			

*p-value* : <0.001

From the results shown in Table 5, it can be seen that there was a statistically significant difference based on school type on overall teacher perception of SEL and on each of the sub-scales at the  $p < 0.001$ , [F (2, 312) = 359.41,  $p < 0.001$ ]; [F (2, 312) = 126.41,  $p < 0.001$ ]; [F (2, 312) = 131.90,  $p < 0.001$ ]; [F (2, 312) = 77.90,  $p < 0.001$ ]; [F (2, 312) = 111.03,  $p < 0.001$ ] and [F (2, 312) = 183.59,  $p < 0.001$ ].

**Table 6: Means, standard deviation, t- and p-values of teachers' perceptions of SEL from urban and rural schools (n=375)**

	Urban Schools	Rural Schools	t-value	p-value
	(n = 226)	(n = 149)		
SEL Overall	3.07 (0.66)	3.13 (0.67)	- 0.81	0.418

*Scale: 1=very low, 2=low, 3=moderate, 4=high, 5=very high*

Data in Table 6 shows the means, the standard deviation, and the t- and p-values of teachers' perceptions of SEL by school location. From the results mean scores on SEL in the rural (3.13) were slightly higher than the mean scores in the urban school (3.07).

### Discussion of the Major Findings

The findings of the study showed that the teachers' perceptions of the level of SEL subscales in the selected early childhood centers in Shanghai, China were at the moderate level. Specifically, exploring teachers' perceptions of

SEL subscales based on gender, the findings revealed that female teachers had significantly higher mean scores than the male teachers, implying that female teachers were more concerned and supportive of SEL as compared to their counterparts. In agreement with the findings of this study, [Sak \(2015\)](#) in a study reported that females who taught at the early childhood level were more loving and nurturing and this was most probably due to the fact that it is the female teachers that had been mothers have a natural caring instinct. This could hence be a possible reason as to why the female respondents in this study displayed a more caring and supportive role compared to their male counterparts.

Furthermore, regarding teacher qualification, results revealed that the college teachers had the highest perceptions and were more supportive of SEL, followed by the teachers who possessed a master's degree. The least supportive and concerned were the bachelor's degree holder teachers. This indicates that the difference in the qualification of teachers affects their perceptions of SEL implementation. Although, there was no direct study as regarding SEL on the difference in the perceptions of early childhood teachers from different academic qualifications, previous study findings suggest that there is a significant relationship between school-level teacher qualifications and teachers' perceptions of school-based Professional Learning Community (PLC) practices (Ho, Lee & Teng, 2016).

The study also found that there was a significant effect of teaching experience on the teachers' perceptions of each dimension: self-reflection, school climate, professional learning in SEL, resources for student support and educating all students. The mean values were significant in relation to the teaching experience of the teachers. Results from related literature also proved that differences exist regarding perceptions of teachers of SEL based on experience. From the work of Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (2007), which focused on the differential antecedents of self-efficacy beliefs of low experienced and experienced teachers, it was discovered that among the sources of teachers' self-efficacy beliefs, teachers with more experience perceive themselves in a higher and more potent way than their counterparts, the low experienced teachers.

The findings of the study also revealed that there are differences in the perceptions of teachers about SEL with regards to the type and location of the schools. Regarding school type, it was found that the perception of public kindergarten teachers' about SEL was significantly different from that of the private kindergarten teachers', as well as that of the international kindergarten teachers' perceptions, respectively. The perceptions of the teachers from private school was found to be the highest for the resources for student support dimension, which indicates that the teachers perceive that students had access to support resources in the school. It also shows that the school provides the students with resources for SEL. The teachers' perceptions about other dimensions were found to be rather low with the teachers having lowest perceptions about "educating all students". This shows that the teachers are not actually embracing the concept towards providing SEL to all the students in the school. The public-school teachers showed the highest perceptions about themselves; the teacher self-reflection indicated that the teachers in public schools have more confidence in themselves and in teaching SEL in schools.

However, contrary to the teachers' perceptions in private schools, the public-school teachers' perceptions of SEL was the lowest for "resources for student support" dimension. It clearly indicates that the teachers in public schools perceive that the school is not providing the students with enough resources for SEL to take place. Unlike the public and international schools, the teachers' perceptions on school climate were found to be the lowest in the private schools. Since the teachers' perceptions from different schools varied with respect to all the dimensions, it was found that there was a significant difference in the perceptions of teachers regarding SEL in different type of schools. It indicates that the school type affects the teacher's perceptions about SEL in schools. The reason behind the reporting of teachers' in public school having the highest perceptions about SEL, could be possibly because the teachers are well trained and assessed before being assigned to the public school. In accordance to the result of this study, scholars such as Esen-Aygun and Sahin-Taskin (2017), reported that teachers who participated in their research, students who live in the city centres possessed stronger social emotional skills than those who live in towns and villages. Correspondingly, some studies have also indicated the importance of the school's environment on students' social emotional development. For example, students' social emotional learning skills differ regarding where they live (Bierman *et al.*, 2010; Durlak *et al.*, 2011; Payton *et al.*, 2008). Based on these findings, it can be said that students who live in urban areas have higher social emotional skills than students who live in rural areas.

## Conclusion

Perceptions of teachers about SEL can greatly influence its integration in ECE. This study examined teachers' perceptions of SEL in selected early childhood centres in Shanghai, China. The study involved a total of ten randomly selected early childhood schools which involved a total of 375 teachers. The teachers' perceptions of SEL

were explored based on five main dimensions, namely educating all students, teacher self-reflection, school climate, professional learning in SEL and resources for student support. The findings indicated that the teachers' perceptions of SEL are at the moderate level. Also, the study found that female teachers had significantly higher mean scores than the male teachers, implying that female teachers were more concerned and supportive of SEL as compared to their counterparts. More so, there were significant differences in teachers' perceptions of SEL based on teacher qualification and type of school, no significant differences was recorded based on location of school and teaching experience. Though this study has its limitations in terms of sample size and scope of study, it cannot be denied that the study has to a certain extent shed some light into the teachers' perceptions of SEL in early childhood centres in China. It is the belief of the researchers that the findings of this study will motivate more research in this area as previous studies have revealed the relevance of SEL in enhancing social and emotional competencies of children in schools.

## Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study the following recommendations were made

- Any form of SEL programme implemented by teachers at the early education level should be culturally and contextually appropriate for children in Shanghai in the future.
- Emphasis on the relevance of SEL programmes in early childhood education should be adequately made by educational authorities to enhance its integration in classrooms by teachers
- Relevant educational authorities and school principals need to provide teachers continuous professional development to teachers to ensure SEL is embraced in their classrooms.

## References

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