

The Effect of Teachers' Social and Emotional Competencies on Students' Academic Achievement

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Abstract: The purpose of this study is to describe teachers through the lens of social-emotional learning (SEL) constructs and the impact that teachers' social and emotional competencies may have on student achievement. Data in this correlational study are collected through a survey measuring teachers' emotion regulation and relationship management skills, well-being, and school climate perceptions across teacher background characteristics and through student achievement data. Findings indicate that teachers' gender and racial identities influence relationship management skills and that there is a positive correlation between teachers' well-being and their emotion regulation skills. However, when examining teachers' results with their students' performance on math and reading benchmark assessment scores, there was no association between teachers' emotion regulation and relationship management skills, well-being, or school climate perceptions on student academic growth. Our results also emphasize the impact of the percentage of students in a school enrolled in the National School Lunch Program on students' academic performance. Finally, there is a discussion of SEL frameworks that focus on equity and how they could support students and teachers from traditionally marginalized backgrounds.

Keywords: emotion regulation; relationship management; teacher well-being; student achievement; social and emotional learning frameworks

Efecto de las competencias socioemocionales de los docentes en el rendimiento académico de los estudiantes

Resumen: El propósito de este estudio es describir a los docentes a través de la lente de los constructos del aprendizaje socioemocional (SEL, por sus siglas en inglés) y el impacto que las competencias socioemocionales de los docentes pueden tener en el rendimiento de los estudiantes. Los datos de este estudio correlacional se recopilaron mediante una encuesta que mide las habilidades de autorregulación emocional y de gestión de relaciones de los docentes, su bienestar y sus percepciones del clima escolar, considerando las características de su trayectoria profesional, así como datos sobre el rendimiento académico de los estudiantes. Los resultados indican que las identidades de género y raciales de los docentes influyen en las habilidades de gestión de relaciones, y que existe una correlación positiva entre el bienestar docente y sus habilidades de autorregulación emocional. Sin embargo, al examinar los resultados de los docentes junto con el desempeño de sus estudiantes en las evaluaciones de referencia de matemáticas y lectura, no se encontró asociación entre la autorregulación emocional, la gestión de relaciones, el bienestar o las percepciones del clima escolar de los docentes y el crecimiento académico de los estudiantes. Nuestros resultados también destacan el impacto del porcentaje de estudiantes inscritos en el Programa Nacional de Almuerzos Escolares sobre el rendimiento académico. Finalmente, se incluye una discusión sobre marcos de aprendizaje socioemocional centrados en la equidad y sobre cómo podrían apoyar tanto a estudiantes como a docentes de comunidades tradicionalmente marginadas.

Palabras clave: autorregulación emocional; gestión de relaciones; bienestar docente; rendimiento estudiantil; marcos de aprendizaje socioemocional

Efeito das competências socioemocionais dos professores no desempenho acadêmico dos alunos

Resumo: O objetivo deste estudo é descrever os professores sob a perspectiva dos construtos da aprendizagem socioemocional (SEL, na sigla em inglês) e o impacto que as competências socioemocionais dos professores podem ter no desempenho dos alunos. Os dados deste estudo correlacional foram coletados por meio de um questionário que mede as habilidades de autorregulação emocional e de gestão de relacionamentos dos professores, seu bem-estar e suas percepções sobre o clima escolar, considerando as características de sua trajetória profissional, bem como dados sobre o desempenho acadêmico dos alunos. Os resultados indicam que as identidades de gênero e raciais dos professores influenciam as habilidades de gestão de relacionamentos e que há uma correlação positiva entre o bem-estar docente e suas habilidades de autorregulação emocional. No entanto, ao examinar os resultados dos professores juntamente com o desempenho de seus alunos nas avaliações de referência de matemática e leitura, não foi encontrada associação entre a autorregulação emocional, a gestão de relacionamentos, o bem-estar ou as percepções de clima escolar dos professores e o crescimento acadêmico dos alunos. Nossos resultados também ressaltam o impacto da porcentagem de alunos matriculados no Programa Nacional de Alimentação Escolar sobre o desempenho acadêmico. Por fim, o estudo discute estruturas de aprendizagem socioemocional com foco na equidade e como elas podem apoiar alunos e professores de grupos tradicionalmente marginalizados.

Palavras-chave: autorregulação emocional; gestão de relacionamentos; bem-estar docente; desempenho estudantil; estruturas de aprendizagem socioemocional

The Effect of Teachers' Social and Emotional Competencies on Students' Academic Achievement

Extensive research exists on social and emotional learning (SEL; e.g., Durlak et al., 2011; Durlak et al., 2022; Taylor et al., 2017; Weissberg et al., 2015). SEL is a construct that encompasses a broad range of policies and practices that facilitate the development of skills in both children and adults, including the acquisition and application of knowledge, attitudes, and competencies that enhance personal development, cultivate interpersonal relationships, and lead to effective and ethical productivity (Weissberg et al., 2015). One leading voice in SEL, the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL), identifies five core competencies that youth can develop through SEL programming: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making (CASEL, 2024a). Fostering these SEL competencies can help in shaping students' overall development, contributing not only to their academic success but also to their ability to navigate their social environments and make informed decisions.

Scholars are recently considering how educators' own SEL skills might influence not only their students' SEL skills but also their students' academic performance (e.g., Aldrup et al., 2022; Jagers et al., 2019; Jennings et al., 2017; Rivers et al., 2013; Schonert-Reichl, 2017). However, we do not know which specific social and emotional competencies might have the strongest associations with student learning outcomes. Furthermore, we do not know whether certain other teacher attributes, such as their well-being and perceptions of school climate, moderate specific social and emotional competencies.

This article contributes to the literature on educators' social and emotional competencies in three ways. First, we provide a descriptive assessment of the strength of teachers' emotion regulation (an emotional competency) and relationship management (a social competency) skills from an urban school district, and we describe how the strength of these skills varies based on teachers' background characteristics. Moreover, we assess teachers' professional well-being and their perceptions of their schools' climate, determining whether these facets influence teachers' social and emotional competencies. This overview of teachers' skills and perceptions helps to reveal which kinds of teachers may have stronger social and emotional competencies. Second, we test whether teachers' emotion regulation and relationship management skills, professional well-being, or perceptions of school climate are related to student achievement. Specifically, we examine the correlation between these teacher attributes and student test data while controlling for the school characteristic of their percentage of students enrolled in the National Student Lunch Program. Finally, we interpret results through current critiques of traditional SEL programs and practices. For example, we draw on the literature of transformative and abolitionist SEL frameworks to better understand the implications of our results.

Literature Review

Before describing our study, we review existing literature related to social and emotional learning, including studies on adult SEL and how educators' background characteristics may influence their social and emotional competencies, studies that describe how teacher well-being and school climate relate to student learning outcomes, and studies that describe and critique the impact of traditional SEL programs.

Adult SEL Development and Measurement

Adult SEL can be defined as the process of “learning and discussion that supports adults to continue to grow and model social and emotional competencies as well as the structures and practices that promote adult well-being” (CASEL, 2024b, para. 1). The importance of teachers’ SEL skills has been articulated (e.g., Aldrup et al., 2022; Jagers et al., 2019; Jennings et al., 2017; Rivers et al., 2013; Schonert-Reichl, 2017), as adult SEL skills are important for nurturing positive teacher-student interactions, creating a supportive learning environment, supporting students’ SEL growth, and promoting teachers’ own well-being. However, Blewitt et al. (2018) noted that in their review of studies, the authors of the reviewed studies did not report teacher qualifications and experience consistently, making it difficult to determine if specific teacher characteristics had an impact.

Additionally, it may not be sufficient to only increase teachers’ knowledge of SEL practices, as teachers also need to develop their own social and emotional competencies and well-being (Schonert-Reichl, 2017). An important aspect of understanding teachers’ development is how to measure their social and emotional competencies. Therefore, Aldrup and colleagues (2020) developed a tool to assess teachers’ application of these competencies, specifically in the domains of emotion regulation and relationship management. These competencies are particularly important for teachers because emotion regulation is related to teachers’ problem-solving skills and cognitive reappraisal of situations, and relationship management is related to teachers’ communication and conflict management skills (Aldrup et al., 2020). Their findings revealed that pre-service teachers tended to score higher in both emotion regulation and relationship management than in-service teachers, emphasizing the importance of ongoing support for teachers to refine their competencies throughout their careers (Aldrup et al., 2020). In measuring adult social and emotional competencies, it may be beneficial to determine if diverse groups of teachers have varying expertise and professional development needs beyond pre-service and in-service status. Therefore, examining differences in skills based on other teacher characteristics, such as gender and racial identities, may help to contextualize teachers’ experiences and their need for support.

Gender differences in certain social and emotional competencies have been documented, with research indicating that women often outperform men in areas related to emotional intelligence, empathy, and responsible decision-making (e.g., Allemand et al., 2015; D’Amico & Geraci, 2022, Ross et al., 2019; Wright et al., 2018). For example, Allemand et al. (2015) discussed how although boys and girls have similar development in their empathy across their adolescent years, girls still ultimately have higher levels of empathy. Additionally, Wright et al. (2018) found that women had an advantage over men in emotion recognition ability and could be explained by women’s strength in emotional awareness. Finally, D’Amico and Geraci (2022) found that boys generally overestimate their emotional abilities compared to girls. These findings suggest that gender identity may influence how teachers approach and implement SEL practices, and investigating these gender-based differences could provide more insight into how to support all teachers in developing social and emotional competencies. Gender identity also intersects with teachers’ other demographic factors, such as their racial identity. For example, Wells and Archibald (2023) found that school counselors who are women of Color may face additional challenges in the school settings because of their intersectional racial and gender identities, impacting their ability to engage in self-care.

Racial identity is another factor that could influence teachers’ social and emotional competencies and SEL experiences. While teachers of Color may be underrepresented in schools in the United States (Gist & Bristol, 2022), they have diverse cultures and social norms that they add to the school environment (Madsen et al., 2019). Importantly, Kohli (2018) described how schools can have hostile racial climates for teachers of Color through acts of color blindness and racial microaggressions. In a systematic literature review, Bettini et al. (2022) described how by “centering

and norming Whiteness, schools devalue novice teachers of color and the assets they bring to schools” (p. 529). Further, Bettini and colleagues described how novice teachers of Color often abandoned practices they valued (e.g., Achinstein & Ogawa, 2011; Choi, 2018) and are marginalized based on their racial identity (e.g., Scott, 2020). A hostile racial school climate can also yield negative consequences for the well-being of teachers of Color. Experiencing racial microaggressions, for example, can lead to increased physical health issues (Nadal et al., 2017), mental health issues (Torino et al., 2019), and psychological trauma (Nadal et al., 2019). When teachers experience distress, it can impair their ability to effectively model and teach SEL competencies to students (Schonert-Reichl, 2017).

Teacher Well-Being, School Climate, and Student Achievement

Teacher well-being can be defined as “teachers’ responses to the cognitive, emotional, health and social conditions pertaining to their work and their profession” (Viac & Fraser, 2020, p. 18) and includes their job satisfaction and engagement (Collie et al., 2015). Importantly, developing teachers’ social and emotional skills can improve their well-being, decrease stress and burnout, and improve their classroom practices (e.g., Brackett et al., 2010; Jennings et al., 2017; Rivers et al., 2013). Additionally, Santoro and Price (2021) describe structural supports to improve teachers’ well-being, such as ensuring that school leaders protect teachers’ time, commit to racial and social justice to affirm teachers’ identities, and create a culture of respect, trust, and open communication. Moreover, researchers have explored the association between teachers’ well-being and student academic outcomes (e.g., Granziera et al., 2023; Turner et al., 2021). For example, Granziera et al. (2023) found that in schools where teachers had higher levels of emotional exhaustion, there were also lower averages in student achievement. However, in a systematic review, Dreer (2023) described how there were few studies that employed causal methodologies to explore the relationship between teacher well-being and both teacher and student outcomes. To better understand teachers’ experiences, it would also be helpful to consider the broader context in which teachers work and determine to what extent the school climate may impact their well-being (Dreer, 2022).

School climate can be defined as “patterns of people’s experiences of school life and reflects norms, goals, values, interpersonal relationships, teaching and learning practices, and organizational structures” (National School Climate Council, 2007, p. 4). In addition to school climate influencing teachers’ well-being (e.g., Dreer, 2022), researchers have also found that a school’s climate significantly impacts student outcomes (e.g., Maxwell et al., 2017; Shindler et al., 2016). For example, Thapa et al. (2013) describe how a “sustained positive school climate is associated with positive child and youth development, effective risk prevention and health promotion efforts, student learning and academic achievement, increased student graduation rates, and teacher retention” (p. 369). Although the relationship between teacher well-being, school climate, and student outcomes highlights the importance of fostering supportive environments that support both teachers and students, a gap in the literature is assessing teachers’ social and emotional competencies, in addition to measuring their well-being and perceptions of school climate, to determine how these facets impact student outcomes.

Impact and Critique of Traditional SEL Programs

The impact of traditional SEL programs on student outcomes is well documented. Implementing SEL initiatives in schools has been shown to significantly improve students’ social and emotional competencies, as well as engagement in learning and academic outcomes, and these positive effects have lasting impacts (e.g., Blewitt et al., 2018; Corcoran et al., 2018; Durlak et al., 2011; Durlak et al., 2022; Taylor et al., 2017). For example, in a meta-analysis, Durlak et al. (2022) found that SEL programs help students to increase their personal and social skills, social behaviors,

and academic achievement. In terms of students' growth in their academic achievement, Taylor et al. (2017) described in a meta-analysis that they found a positive mean effect of 0.33 for SEL interventions across students' grades and test scores after a follow-up period of 195 weeks. Students were also more likely to graduate high school and attend college. Moreover, Corcoran et al. (2018) found positive effect sizes of 0.25 in reading and 0.26 in math in their review of 40 studies on pre-K-12 students.

Importantly, Taylor et al. (2017) discussed how quality implementation of SEL initiatives is required to see such positive impacts. Moreover, while Taylor et al. (2017) also state how their positive findings held true across students' racial groups and socioeconomic statuses, Durlak et al. (2022) discussed that studies on school-based SEL have been inconsistent in their reporting of student sociodemographic characteristics, making it difficult to draw conclusions on SEL interventions based on students' race and ethnicity or their socioeconomic background.

While traditional SEL programs have yielded positive outcomes for students, scholars have increasingly critiqued these frameworks for their failure to account for racial and cultural contexts, particularly in ways that may reinforce Whiteness as the normative standard for emotional and behavioral expression (Drake & Oglesby, 2020; Kearl, 2022; Simmons, 2021). For example, Kearl (2022) argues that many current SEL models are structured to prioritize the comfort and emotional regulation of White educators rather than addressing the psychological and emotional needs of students of Color. This dynamic could result in the minimization or dismissal of students' experiences with racial microaggressions and systemic injustice, encouraging students to conform to dominant expectations rather than challenge them. Simmons (2021) also offers a powerful critique, warning that without an explicit anti-racist and anti-oppressive orientation, SEL can function as "white supremacy with a hug" (para. 11). In particular, she notes that when SEL is framed as a set of soft skills for future employability, it often promotes unspoken norms such as "talking white, dressing white, and acting white" (para. 13), thereby reinforcing dominant White cultural standards as prerequisites for social and professional success.

These critiques highlight how SEL may implicitly discourage students from acknowledging or responding to racism, instead focusing narrowly on their individual behavior and emotional regulation skills. This practice of ignoring racial or cultural considerations is reflected in what Drake and Oglesby (2020) and Kearl (2022) identify as color-evasiveness, which is an approach that minimizes racial identity, histories of oppression, and structural inequality in favor of emphasizing universal traits like grit, perseverance, and a growth mindset. When SEL encourages students to build resilience without acknowledging the racialized adversity they may have faced, it risks obscuring systemic problems and barriers that traditionally marginalized youth may face, placing the burden on the student to change rather than their broader environments.

In response to some of these critiques, other scholars have sought to expand the traditional definition and practices of SEL to include a focus on educational equity and create more just schools and communities. This perspective, known as transformative SEL, emphasizes the need to address systemic inequalities and promote social justice through SEL practices (Jagers et al., 2019). However, other scholars argue that even transformative SEL could be improved to better address the needs of diverse student and educator populations. Examples include expanding traditional and transformative SEL frameworks through abolitionist teaching structures (DeMartino et al., 2022) and antiracist approaches (Mayes et al., 2022).

Summary and Research Focus

Extant literature provides evidence that teachers' social and emotional competencies are associated with student achievement. However, it does not yet provide a clear understanding about (1) the specific social and emotional competencies that teachers possess and whether these vary by

teacher and school characteristics, or (2) teachers' social and emotional competencies that may be most strongly associated with student academic achievement.

The purpose of this study is to explore teachers' social and emotional skills, well-being, and perceptions of school climate to help determine whether these aspects relate to student learning. The research questions guiding this correlational study are as follows: 1) How do emotion regulation skills, relationship management skills, well-being, and perceptions of school climate vary by teachers' demographic characteristics? 2) To what extent do teachers' emotion regulation and relationship management skills, well-being, and perceptions of school climate predict student academic growth?

Methods

In this quantitative study, we employed a correlational design to examine teachers' social and emotional competencies, well-being, and school climate perceptions and how these relate to student achievement in one school district. This study received IRB approval from the host institution and the collaborating school district. For the setting of this study, we draw on teacher survey and administrative data from a large, urban school district on the West Coast that serves about 34,000 K-12 students across 85 schools. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2024), in this school district, approximately 17% of families have an income below the poverty level and 68% are students of Color, the largest groups being Hispanic or Latino (27%) and Black or African American (22%). The school district offers professional development on SEL and related topics throughout the school year, including on social emotional learning, anti-racism and restorative justice, a caring school community, and culturally responsive teaching. Some of the professional development sessions were created by the school district, and some were offered by third-party providers. It is important to note that while professional development topics include anti-racism, for example, there is no indication that the school district adopted transformative, abolitionist, or anti-racist SEL frameworks and practices across the district.

The sample for the study consists of teacher observations in the collaborating school district from the 2023-2024 school year. Our survey collected data that measured teachers' emotion regulation and relationship management competencies, their levels of professional well-being and perceptions of school climate, and their background characteristics. We then linked the survey data to district administrative data on the teachers' schools and the students they taught, including math and reading benchmark assessment scores.

Data Sources and Measures

The first data source was a survey administered to K-8 teachers in the school district from March to April 2024. Participants were compensated with \$10 Amazon gift cards. Out of the 1,429 teachers who were contacted, 269 completed the survey with a response rate of 19%. Each teacher received a personalized link through their district e-mail account which permitted their responses to be connected to administrative records.

The survey combined elements of two existing instruments: 1) Test of Regulation in and Understanding of Social Situations in Teaching (TRUST; Aldrup et al., 2020) to measure emotion regulation and relationship management and 2) Panorama Education's Teacher and Staff Survey (Panorama Education, 2024) to measure well-being and school climate. We also added demographic items on grade level taught, years of experience, professional development attendance, teaching credential status and pathway, gender identity, racial identity, and ethnicity. Finally, the school district provided the percentage of students enrolled in the National School Lunch Program (NSLP)

at each participant's school, an important contextual factor that can relate to student achievement (Sirin, 2005).

The Test of Regulation in and Understanding of Social Situations in Teaching (TRUST) is a "theory-based situational judgment test measuring teachers' knowledge about strategies for emotion regulation and relationship management in emotionally and socially challenging situations with students" (Aldrup et al., 2020, p. 1). The two competencies TRUST measures are emotion regulation and relationship management (Gross, 1998). In the emotion regulation and relationship management subtests, respondents are presented with scenarios that are "emotionally relevant for teachers (emotion regulation, eight scenarios) or pertain to the quality of the teacher-student relationship (relationship management, nine scenarios)" (Aldrup et al., 2020, p. 5). Each scenario is followed by four reactions, and respondents rate the effectiveness of each response on a five-point scale. For emotion regulation, they rate how well each response would help them feel better (32 items), while for relationship management, they assess how well each response would help build or maintain a positive teacher-student relationship (36 items). The scale ranges from 1 (very ineffective) to 5 (very effective). Among the sample of pre-service ($n = 107$) and in-service teachers ($n = 239$) in Germany, the mean score for the emotion regulation subtest was 22.29 for in-service teachers and 25.19 for pre-service teachers out of a possible 33 points. For the relationship management subtest, the mean score was 23.90 for in-service teachers and 25.33 for pre-service teachers out of a possible 38 points. Aldrup et al. (2020) also assessed the validity and reliability of TRUST. For convergent and discriminant validities, authors report that the TRUST emotion regulation and relationship management subtests were correlated with subtests of the Mayer-Salovey-Caruso Emotional Intelligence Test. For criterion validity, Aldrup et al. (2020) reported that TRUST scores correlated with in-service teachers' job satisfaction, providing their students with more emotional support, and having a more positive relationship with their students. Finally, when controlling for teachers' age and gender, results for convergent, discriminant, and criterion validities indicated that female participants scored higher than male participants in relationship management. Invariance was not assessed based on racial or ethnic differences. For reliability of the emotion regulation subtest, Cronbach's α was satisfactory both when calculated based on the individual items and pairwise comparisons (33 items and pairwise comparisons; $\alpha = 0.83$) and at the scenario level (seven scenarios; $\alpha = 0.72$). The reliability was also satisfactory for the relationship management subtest based on the 38 individual items and pairwise comparisons ($\alpha = 0.82$) and on the eight scenarios ($\alpha = 0.71$; Aldrup et al., 2020).

Finally, Panorama Education's (2024) Teacher and Staff Survey provided survey items on well-being and school climate. Developers of these survey items did not publish information regarding their reliability and validity. However, using the data from the present study's sample, we calculated Cronbach's α for well-being (14 items; $\alpha = .886$) and for school climate (9 items; $\alpha = .877$). The well-being items ask about their feelings about work, how effective they feel at their job, how much their work matters, and how satisfied they are with their job. The school climate items ask about student enthusiasm, trust in teachers, teacher-student and student-student relationships, teacher attitudes, and the overall working environment. Participants rated their well-being and perceptions of school climate on a Likert scale from 1 to 5 (with 5 as the most positive rating).

The second data source is i-Ready Diagnostic math and reading benchmark assessment scores. Used by more than 13.5 million students nationwide, i-Ready is a suite of products created by the educational technology company Curriculum Associates (2024). i-Ready Diagnostic is a computer-delivered diagnostic assessment administered at three points throughout the school year in math and reading. We collected data on K-8 students' growth from the beginning until the end of the school year, from Fall 2023 to Spring 2024. We focus on whether students met their personalized target math and reading growth goals set by i-Ready.

Analytic Approach

Using cross-sectional teacher survey data and their students' standardized test scores, the variables in this study include the following: 1) Teacher emotion regulation scores, 2) Teacher relationship management scores, 3) Teacher well-being scores, 4) Teacher perception of school climate, 5) Teacher demographics (gender identity, racial identity, ethnicity, grade level taught, teaching credential status and pathway, years of experience, and attendance of professional development related to SEL), 6) National School Lunch Program participation of teachers' schools, 7) Student target math growth, and 8) Student target reading growth.

Data analysis was conducted using Stata 17 and includes both descriptive and inferential statistics. First, we provide descriptive details about the participants in the study. We then conduct inferential statistical tests (i.e., *t*-tests, ANOVA) to determine differences in mean scores for emotion regulation, relationship management, well-being, and school climate perceptions based on participants' demographic characteristics. Finally, we conduct a series of univariate regression analyses to determine the following: how participants' background characteristics are associated with emotion regulation, relationship management, well-being, and school climate; how emotion regulation, relationship management, well-being, and school climate are associated with each other; and how students' math and reading growth are associated with emotion regulation, relationship management, well-being, school climate, and participants' demographic characteristics.

Data Validation Processes

Our survey's response rate of 19% is somewhat lower than what is typically expected in survey research. For example, a 2022 meta-analysis by Wu et al. found that the average online survey response rate was 44.1%. Recognizing the possibility of non-response bias, we examined response rates by school. Response rates varied from 0%, in the case of a couple of schools, up to 43%. These instances, however, do not represent the majority of schools in our analysis. Most schools' response rates fell within a few percentage points of 19%. Furthermore, there were no school-level student demographics associated with response rates. Because the focus of this analysis was on individual teachers' perceptions and their students' outcomes, rather than drawing any conclusions at the school level, we concluded that our response rate was appropriate for analysis.

Respondents were included in our analyses when they answered at least half of the survey items for a given construct: 257 respondents for emotion regulation, 230 respondents for relationship management, 269 respondents for well-being, and 269 respondents for school climate. When individuals opted not to respond to a particular demographic item, they were excluded from that particular inferential statistical test or regression (see "Prefer not to say or no response" responses in Table 1). Aside from these restrictions, we retained all responses to ensure that the full range of educator perspectives was represented in this work. Because this survey was administered online and there were no open-response items, we have no concerns about misinterpretation or incorrect entry of data. Importantly, none of the surveys were completed in an unusually short amount of time, suggesting that responses were genuine.

Participants

Table 1 shows the demographic characteristics of the study's participants, including their gender identity, racial identity, ethnicity, grade level taught, teaching credential status and pathway, years of experience, and attendance of professional development related to SEL.

Table 1
Participants' Demographic Characteristics

Characteristic	<i>n</i> (% of sample)
Gender Identity	
Woman	166 (61.7%)
Man	48 (17.8%)
Non-binary/third gender	9 (.03%)
Prefer not to say or no response	46 (17.1%)
Racial Identity	
African American/Black	39 (14.5%)
Asian American/Asian	25 (.09%)
Native American/American Indian or Alaska Native	7 (.03%)
White	100 (37.2%)
Two or more races	31 (11.5%)
Prefer not to say or no response	67 (24.9%)
Ethnicity	
Hispanic/Latino	51 (19.0%)
Not Hispanic/Latino	171 (63.6%)
Prefer not to say or no response	47 (17.5%)
Racial Identity x Ethnicity	
Non-White x Hispanic/Latino	20 (7.4%)
Non-White x Not Hispanic/Latino	81 (30.1%)
White x Hispanic/Latino	19 (7.1%)
White x Not Hispanic/Latino	80 (29.7%)
Prefer not to say or no response to one or both items	69 (25.7%)
Grade Level Taught	
Kindergarten – 2 nd grade	52 (19.3%)
3 rd – 5 th grade	57 (21.2%)
6 th – 8 th grade	78 (29.0%)
High School	5 (.02%)
Other	30 (11.1%)
Prefer not to say or no response	47 (17.5%)
Teaching Credential Status	
Emergency Permit	34 (12.6%)
Preliminary	43 (16.0%)
Clear	143 (53.2%)
Other	9 (.03%)
Prefer not to say or no response	40 (14.9%)
Teaching Credential Pathway	
Traditional	128 (47.6%)
Teacher Residency	13 (.05%)
Intern	47 (17.5%)

Characteristic	<i>n</i> (% of sample)
Other	23 (.09%)
Prefer not to say or no response	58 (21.6%)
Years of Experience	
1 to 5 years	57 (21.2%)
6 to 10 years	64 (23.8%)
11 to 15 years	41 (15.2%)
16 to 20 years	34 (12.6%)
21 or more years	38 (14.1%)
Prefer not to say or no response	35 (13.0%)
Professional Development Attendance*	
Zero sessions	63 (23.4%)
At least one session	206 (76.6%)

*Professional development sessions, which were of varying duration, included the following topics: social emotional learning, anti-racism and restorative justice, a caring school community, and culturally responsive teaching.

Results

Teacher Demographic Characteristics as Predictors of Emotion Regulation and Relationship Management

Participants had a mean emotion regulation score of 24.87 out of 33 points ($n = 257$, $SD = 4.67$) and a mean relationship management score of 25.62 out of 38 points ($n = 230$, $SD = 5.14$). We found differences in relationship management scores based on gender and racial identities. For this analysis and all others, we compared participants who identified as White with those who identified as teachers of Color. We chose to combine all teachers of Color into a single group for our analysis because we did not find statistically significant within-group differences among non-White teachers. Participants who identified as women or non-binary/third gender ($n = 171$) had higher relationship management scores ($M = 26.57$, $SD = 4.54$) than those who identified as men ($n = 45$, $M = 22.67$, $SD = 6.08$), and participants' relationship management skills were higher for those who identified as White ($n = 97$, $M = 27.22$, $SD = 4.30$) compared those who identified as teachers of Color ($n = 99$, $M = 24.76$, $SD = 5.33$). However, there were no significant differences in participants' emotion regulation or relationship management skills across all other demographic characteristics. Table 2 shows the results of a regression analysis of both emotion and relationship management skills for gender identity, racial identity, ethnicity, teaching credential status and pathway, years of experience, professional development attendance, and NSLP.

Participants were asked about the grade level they primarily teach across five bands: Grades K-2, Grades 3-5, Grades 6-8, Grades 9-12, or Other (e.g., Instructional coach, teacher of multiple grades, teacher on a special assignment, and substitute teacher). An ANOVA was conducted and showed that grade level taught did not yield significantly different results for either emotion regulation or relationship management.

Table 2*Univariate Regression Analysis on Emotion Regulation and Relationship Management*

Construct	Estimate (<i>SE</i>)	Adjusted Estimate for NSLP (<i>SE</i>)
Model 1 Dependent Variable: Emotion Regulation ⁺		
Gender identity ^a	-1.301 (.851)	-1.154 (.849)
Racial identity ^b	-1.145 (.650)	-.991 (.682)
Ethnicity ^c	-1.021 (.764)	-.909 (.826)
Teaching credential status ^d	-1.433* (.651)	-1.259 (.665)
Teaching credential pathway ^e	-.421 (.669)	-.427 (.689)
Years of experience ^f	.782 (.738)	.318 (.733)
Professional development ^g	1.052 (.813)	1.287 (1.190)
National School Lunch Program ^h	-1.588 (1.099)	
Model 2 Dependent Variable: Relationship Management ⁺⁺		
Gender identity ^a	-3.904*** (.965)	-3.677*** (.925)
Racial identity ^b	-2.459*** (.685)	-2.558*** (.682)
Ethnicity ^c	-.519 (.863)	-.882 (.908)
Teaching credential status ^d	-1.182 (.765)	-.835 (.759)
Teaching credential pathway ^e	.444 (.750)	.139 (.760)
Years of experience ^f	1.234 (.915)	.499 (.870)
Professional development ^g	2.148* (1.088)	1.945 (1.242)
National School Lunch Program ^h	1.716 (1.420)	

* $p < .05$, *** $p < .001$ *Note.* Robust standard errors (*SE*) used. ⁺Emotion regulation scale is 0 to 33 points.⁺⁺Relationship management scale is 0 to 38 points. ^a0 = Woman and non-binary/third gender, 1 = Man. ^b0 = White, 1 = Not White. ^c0 = Not Hispanic/Latino, 1 = Hispanic/Latino. ^d0 = Clear license, 1 =

Emergency, Preliminary, or Other. ^e 0 = Traditional or Residency, 1 = Intern or other. ^f 0 = 1 to 5 years of experience, 1 = 6 or more years of experience. ^g 0 = Did not attend any professional development, 1 = attended at least one professional development. ^h Percentage of students at each participant's school who are in the NSLP.

Teacher Demographic Characteristics as Predictors of Well-being and School Climate

Across the total sample ($n = 269$), participants' well-being ($M = 3.15$, $SD = .70$) and perceptions of school climate ($M = 3.06$, $SD = .71$) were average. An analysis of gender identity yielded significant results. Those who identified as men ($n = 48$) had higher well-being scores ($M = 3.46$, $SD = .56$) than those who identified as women or non-binary/third gender ($n = 175$, $M = 3.28$, $SD = .60$). There were no significant differences in well-being or perceptions of school climate across all other demographic characteristics. Table 3 shows the results of a regression analysis of both well-being and school climate for gender identity, racial identity, ethnicity, teaching credential status and pathway, years of experience, professional development attendance, and NSLP.

Table 3

Univariate Regression Analysis on Well-being, School Climate, and Participants' Demographics

Construct	Estimate (<i>SE</i>)	Adjusted Estimate for NSLP (<i>SE</i>)
Model 1 Dependent Variable: Well-being ⁺		
Gender identity ^a	.183* (.093)	.251** (.094)
Racial identity ^b	.101 (.084)	.107 (.089)
Ethnicity ^c	-.134 (.095)	-.136 (.099)
Teaching credential status ^d	-.107 (.078)	-.104 (.082)
Teaching credential pathway ^e	.003 (.085)	-.033 (.090)
Years of experience ^f	-.057 (.079)	-.086 (.082)
Professional development ^g	.691*** (.108)	.000 (.142)
National School Lunch Program ^h	-.111 (.156)	
Model 2 Dependent Variable: School Climate ⁺		
Gender identity ^a	.030 (.097)	.094 (.010)
Racial identity ^b	.018 (.088)	.066 (.093)
Ethnicity ^c	-.020 (.113)	-.001 (.115)

Construct	Estimate (<i>SE</i>)	Adjusted Estimate for NSLP (<i>SE</i>)
Teaching credential status ^d	-.100 (.086)	-.077 (.089)
Teaching credential pathway ^e	.068 (.089)	.049 (.094)
Years of experience ^f	-.063 (.097)	-.130 (.097)
Professional development ^g	.646*** (.107)	-.055 (.143)
National School Lunch Program ^h	-.092 (.146)	

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$. *Note.* Robust standard errors (*SE*) used. ^aWell-being and climate use a Likert scale of 1 to 5. ^a0 = Woman and non-binary/third gender, 1 = Man. ^b0 = White, 1 = Not White. ^c0 = Not Hispanic/Latino, 1 = Hispanic/Latino. ^d0 = Clear license, 1 = Emergency, Preliminary, or Other. ^e0 = Traditional or Residency, 1 = Intern or other. ^f0 = 1 to 5 years of experience, 1 = 6 or more years of experience. ^g0 = Did not attend any professional development, 1 = Attended at least one professional development. ^hPercentage of students at each participant's school who are in the NSLP.

Participants were asked about the grade level they primarily teach across five bands: Grades K-2, Grades 3-5, Grades 6-8, Grades 9-12, or Other (e.g., Instructional coach, teacher of multiple grades, teacher on a special assignment, and substitute teacher). To analyze whether the grade level that participants taught had a relationship with well-being or school climate, ANOVAs were conducted. A one-way ANOVA demonstrated that the effect of grade level was statistically significant for well-being, $F(4, 217) = 3.55, p = .008$. Scheffe post hoc test results revealed that teachers in Grades K-2 had significantly lower well-being scores ($M = 3.17, SD = .61$) compared to teachers who held other teacher assignments ($M = 3.58, SD = .47$).

A one-way ANOVA demonstrated that the effect of grade level was statistically significant for perceptions of school climate, $F(4, 217) = 2.61, p = .037$. Scheffe post hoc test results revealed that teachers in Grades 6-8 had significantly lower perception of school climate scores ($M = 3.06, SD = .70$) compared to teachers in Grades 3-5 ($M = 3.40, SD = .51$) but only at the $p < .1$ level.

Finally, as shown in Table 4, participants' well-being was predictive of their emotion regulation skills but not their relationship management skills. Perceptions of school climate were neither predictive of emotion regulation nor relationship management skills.

Table 4

Univariate Regression Analysis on Well-being, School Climate, and Social and Emotional Competencies

Construct	Estimate(<i>SE</i>)	Adjusted Estimate for Climate ⁺ (<i>SE</i>)	Adjusted Estimate for Climate ⁺ and NSLP (<i>SE</i>)
Model 1 Dependent Variable: Emotion Regulation ⁺			
Well-being ⁺	.149* (.065)	.172 (.089)	.259** (.094)
Climate ⁺	.082 (.071)		

Construct	Estimate(<i>SE</i>)	Adjusted Estimate for Climate ⁺ (<i>SE</i>)	Adjusted Estimate for Climate ⁺ and NSLP (<i>SE</i>)
Model 2 Dependent Variable: Relationship Management ⁺			
Well-being ⁺	.092 (.077)	.009 (.086)	.047 (.090)
Climate ⁺	.148 (.084)		

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$ *Note.* ⁺Scores are standardized. Robust standard errors (*SE*) used. NSLP = Percentage of students at each participant's school who are in the National School Lunch Program.

Emotion Regulation, Relationship Management, Well-being, and School Climate as Predictors of Student Growth

We operationalized student growth as the percentage of each participant's students who met their target growth goals on i-Ready math and reading diagnostic assessments. Results indicate students were less likely to meet their target growth goals in math and reading in schools with greater rates of NSLP participation. However, there were no significant differences in student achievement across all participant characteristics, as shown in Table 5.

Table 5
Univariate Regression Analysis on Math and Reading Growth

Construct	Estimate (<i>SE</i>)	Adjusted Estimate for NSLP (<i>SE</i>)
Model 1 Dependent Variable: Met Target Math Growth ⁺		
Emotion Regulation ⁺⁺	.014 (.016)	-.002 (.019)
Relationship Management ⁺⁺	.002 (.019)	-.007 (.018)
Well-being ⁺⁺	.007 (.015)	.010 (.019)
School Climate ⁺⁺	.002 (.015)	-.004 (.019)
Teaching credential status ^a	-.070 (.040)	-.035 (.039)
Teaching credential pathway ^b	-.021 (.037)	.009 (.038)
Years of experience ^c	.060 (.045)	.021 (.042)
Professional development ^d	.026 (.037)	.056 (.045)
Gender identity	-.005 (.044)	-.003 (.044)

Construct	Estimate (<i>SE</i>)	Adjusted Estimate for NSLP (<i>SE</i>)
Racial identity	-.091* (.039)	-.038 (.042)
Ethnicity	-.080 (.048)	-.069 (.052)
National School Lunch Program ^c	-.229*** (.059)	
Model 2 Dependent Variable: Met Target Reading Growth ⁺		
Emotion Regulation ⁺⁺	.002 (.012)	-.011 (.013)
Relationship Management ⁺⁺	-.016 (.014)	-.015 (.015)
Well-being ⁺⁺	-.009 (.013)	-.018 (.016)
School Climate ⁺⁺	-.004 (.012)	-.010 (.014)
Teaching credential status ^a	-.064* (.029)	-.033 (.028)
Teaching credential pathway ^b	-.009 (.032)	.018 (.030)
Years of experience ^c	.022 (.030)	.002 (.030)
Professional development ^d	.003 (.030)	.046 (.036)
Gender identity	-.002 (.033)	-.004 (.036)
Racial identity	-.014 (.030)	.032 (.031)
Ethnicity	-.075* (.034)	-.063 (.035)
National School Lunch Program ^e	-.214*** (.050)	

* $p < .05$, *** $p < .001$. *Note.* Robust standard errors (*SE*) used. ⁺Percent of each participant's students who met their target goal. ⁺⁺ Scores are standardized. ^a 0 = Clear license, 1 = Emergency, Preliminary, or Other. ^b 0 = Traditional or Residency, 1 = Intern or other. ^c 0 = 1 to 5 years of experience, 1 = 6 or more years of experience. ^d 0 = Did not attend any professional development, 1 = attended at least one professional development. ^e Percentage of students at each participant's school who are in the NSLP.

Discussion

This study contributes to the literature on SEL by focusing on teachers' competencies, specifically in the domains of emotion regulation and relationship management, as well as teachers' well-being and perceptions of school climate. By examining these four aspects across various teacher demographic groups, we highlight their potential implications for teachers' SEL development and student academic growth. The results of this study align with and expand upon the literature that emphasizes the role of teachers' SEL skills in promoting positive classroom environments and influencing student outcomes (Aldrup et al., 2022; Schonert-Reichl, 2017; Taylor et al., 2017).

In answering our first research question (How do emotion regulation skills, relationship management skills, well-being, and perceptions of school climate vary by teachers' demographic characteristics?), we found that participants exhibited average levels of emotion regulation and relationship management skills that were comparable to the original study's sample of in-service teachers (Aldrup et al., 2020). Average scores suggest that while the teachers in the present sample possess these competencies, there is room for further skill development. However, there were also certain groups of participants who demonstrated stronger scores in relationship management.

For example, gender identity emerged as a factor influencing the strength of relationship management scores in our sample, with women and non-binary/third-gender participants scoring higher than men. This difference based on gender identity aligns with the pilot study's sample (Aldrup et al., 2020) and with previous research indicating that women often outperform men in areas related to emotional intelligence and empathy (Allemand et al., 2015; D'Amico & Geraci, 2022; Ross et al., 2019; Wright et al., 2018). These results also might suggest that gender identity may play a role in shaping how teachers approach their implementation of SEL practices. Additionally, the higher well-being scores observed among male participants compared to their female and non-binary counterparts raise questions about the intersection of gender identity and well-being within the school context. Results also indicate that teachers' well-being was positively associated with their skills in emotion regulation. This finding warrants future exploration of what school factors may shape differences in well-being based on teachers' gender identity, especially given how participants in our sample all rated their school's climate similarly.

We also found significant differences in relationship management skills among teachers based on their racial identity, with White participants scoring higher than participants of Color. This result resonates with existing literature highlighting the challenges that teachers of Color face, such as navigating racially hostile school environments and systemic inequalities (e.g., Bettini et al., 2022; Kohli, 2018; Nadal et al., 2017). The lower relationship management scores among teachers of Color may reflect the additional emotional and social burdens they carry in school settings that center and protect Whiteness and related values (Bettini et al., 2022; Kearl, 2022). These findings emphasize the importance of fostering inclusive and equitable school climates that support the well-being and professional development of all teachers, particularly those from traditionally marginalized racial and ethnic backgrounds, which aligns with SEL programs that promote transformative, abolitionist, and anti-racist practices (DeMartino et al., 2022; Jagers et al., 2019; Mayes et al., 2022).

Significantly, the study did not find significant differences in emotion regulation or relationship management skills across other demographic characteristics, such as grade level taught, years of teaching experience, or attendance in SEL-related professional development. This finding may suggest that these social and emotional competencies are relatively stable across different teaching contexts and demographic backgrounds.

To answer our second research question (To what extent do teachers' emotion regulation and relationship management skills, well-being, and perceptions of school climate predict student

academic growth?), an important finding is the lack of a direct significant impact of teachers' social and emotional competencies, well-being, or perceptions of school climate on student academic growth in math and reading. This result contrasts with some previous studies that have posited a link between teachers' SEL skills and well-being, school climate, and student achievement (e.g., Durlak et al., 2011; Granziera et al., 2023; Shindler et al., 2016; Taylor et al., 2017; Thapa et al., 2013).

However, this divergence from literature could be explained by several factors. For example, the impact of teachers' social and emotional competencies on student outcomes may be mediated by other factors that were not directly measured in this study, such as the quality of participants' instructional practices, the level of their classroom resources, or the broader socio-economic context in each participant's school. For example, the significant negative impact of higher NSLP participation on student growth emphasizes the pervasive influence of socio-economic factors on students' academic outcomes (Sirin, 2005). Moreover, when accounting for NSLP, the positive effect of professional development on participants' relationship management scores, well-being, and perceptions of school climate also disappeared. These findings suggest that while social and emotional competencies are important for creating supportive and effective learning environments, they may not be sufficient on their own to overcome the structural disadvantages faced by students in high-poverty contexts.

Policy Implications

While this study focused on the impact of teachers' emotion regulation and relationship management skills, well-being, and perceptions of school climate on student achievement, the findings related to racial and gender disparities suggest that a transformative, abolitionist, or anti-racist approach to SEL frameworks could be particularly beneficial in addressing the challenges faced by diverse teacher populations (DeMartino et al., 2022; Jagers et al., 2019; Mayes et al., 2022). For teachers of Color, who may experience systemic inequities and implicit biases within the school system, these frameworks could not only improve their relationship management skills but also empowering them to advocate for their students and themselves (Kearl, 2022). Integrating these SEL frameworks into teacher professional development and school-wide policies could therefore be a strategy for promoting both teacher well-being and SEL skill development, particularly for teachers from traditionally marginalized backgrounds. Additionally, SEL professional development could include components that directly promote teachers' well-being, such as stress management techniques, mindfulness practices, and access to mental health resources.

Given the significant relationship between teachers' emotion regulation skills and their well-being found in this study, as well as the importance of school climate in shaping student outcomes described in the literature, schools and school districts could prioritize developing supportive work environments that strengthen positive relationships and collaboration among staff. Particularly, policies that promote a healthy work-life balance could significantly enhance both teacher well-being and SEL skill development. For example, school districts could create opportunities for teacher peer support and professional learning communities focused on SEL. Districts could also have school administrators focus on creating a culture of trust and communication among teachers and school leaders, committing social and racial justice that affirms all teachers' identities, protecting teachers' time (Santoro & Price, 2021).

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

It is important to acknowledge limitations that may impact the generalizability and interpretation of the findings. The correlational design of the study limits the ability to draw causal inferences from participants' emotion regulation and relationship management competencies, well-being, and school climate scores on student outcomes. Specifically, given the correlational design of

the study, as well as our small sample size and sizable proportion of missing data, we take into account the differences we found across gender and racial identities with caution. For example, it is possible that our measurement tool, TRUST, that was developed in Germany, may not fully reflect the school context in the United States, impacting how certain participants responded to classroom-based scenarios. It is also possible that a higher survey completion rate in the school district or a larger sample size in general may impact the associations we found. Therefore, future research is warranted to address these limitations. For example, researchers could consider expanding the current research by surveying multiple school districts across varying geographical contexts. Longitudinal studies that track changes in participants could also provide a better understanding of how teachers' social and emotional competencies, well-being, and perceptions of school climate develop over time. Finally, researchers could explore how teachers' social and emotional competencies vary across school districts that employ different types of SEL frameworks, such as those that have a more intentional focus on transformative, abolitionist, and anti-racist SEL frameworks, and how these frameworks influence teachers' SEL development, well-being, and classroom practices, particularly for teachers from traditionally marginalized racial and ethnic backgrounds.

Conclusion

This study offers insight into teachers' social and emotional competencies of emotion regulation and relationship management, well-being, and perceptions of school climate across different demographic groups. Results suggest that while teachers possess these competencies, participants' gender and racial identities yielded variations in their relationship management skills. Despite these findings, the study did not find a direct link between teachers' social and emotional competencies, well-being, and perceptions of school climate with student academic growth, contrasting with some previous research. This suggests that while SEL skills are important for creating positive classroom environments, they may not be sufficient to overcome the broader socio-economic challenges that impact student outcomes. The findings from our study support the adoption of transformative, abolitionist, and anti-racist SEL frameworks to support teachers' professional development and well-being, particularly for those from traditionally marginalized backgrounds. Additionally, fostering collaborative work environments that prioritize teacher well-being is important for enhancing both SEL skill development and overall school climate.

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