

Teacher Perceptions and Implementation of Social and Emotional Learning Curriculum in Nigerian Primary Schools

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Abstract

This study investigates teacher perceptions and implementation of social and emotional learning Curriculum in Nigerian primary schools. Three research questions guided this study. Inductive approach was adopted in the study since the study is focused on themes or patterns that teachers' opinions show after analysis. The sample of this study consisted of 10 Primary school teachers in Nigerian primary schools comprising of four (4) males and six (6) females with age range of below 30 years to 51 years and above. Accidental sampling was adopted. The instrument for data collection is a semi-structured interview titled, Social Emotional Learning Interview (SELI). The instrument had two sections. Section A collected data on respondents' bio-data while section B, elicited responses from the respondents based on the research questions. The approach employed for data analysis, is the thematic analysis method. This was used considering the qualitative nature of the interview. A six-step system was developed to help establish clarity and rigor around this process, and this system was used when conducting a thematic analysis. The six steps are, familiarization, generating codes, generating themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes and creating the report. Findings reveals that perceptions of teachers towards the implementation of social and emotional learning curriculum in Nigerian's Primary schools varies, with male teachers having a higher understanding and awareness of SEL. Based on the results it was recommended among others that implement targeted professional development workshops focused on SEL for all elementary school teachers, with particular emphasis on female teachers.

Keywords: *Teacher Perceptions, Implementation, Social and Emotional, Learning Curriculum, Primary Schools*

Introduction

Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) has gained increasing attention globally as a critical component of holistic education, and this trend is also emerging in the Nigerian context. However, the implementation of SEL curricula in Nigerian primary schools is still in its early stages and faces various challenges. Understanding the perceptions and experiences of teachers is crucial in this regard, as they play a pivotal role in the successful integration of SEL into the classroom.

In Nigeria, the recognition of the importance of SEL has been gradually gaining momentum. The Nigerian National Policy on Education (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2014) emphasizes the need for a balanced and comprehensive education that addresses the cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains of learning. This policy framework provides a foundation for the incorporation of SEL-based approaches in primary school curricula.

Social and emotional learning (SEL) is an important part of academics. Incorporating top notch SEL programs daily in classrooms and school activities has turned out to be the main goal for educational practitioners, for a long time Oberle et al. (2016). Promotional of social emotional competence as well as implementing social emotional learning programs have increased lately in schools. Only very little known on the perception and awareness of teachers on such programs (Humphries et al., 2018). Teachers steer and drive the social and emotional learning skills in elementary schools. Since teaching is proved by researchers to be one of the most stressful occupations it is necessary to evaluate the perception of teachers on SEL curriculum so that the practitioners can make sure they have classroom environment that promotes SEL. SEL curriculum have great impacts on students' academic achievement (Schonert-Reichl, 2017). When teachers experience mismanagement on social and emotional wellbeing of teaching, severe consequences are felt on both the academic side but also student behaviors. Studies have shown that teachers related factors can alter the implementation and influence the quality and success of the SEL. SEL programs tend to be successful when teachers have positive attitude towards them since they will be motivated to deliver with loyalty (Schonert-Reichl, 2017). Therefore, it is vital to assess the understanding and awareness of social and emotional learning (SEL) curriculum by teachers in elementary school in Nigeria. The study will also examine the perceived benefits and challenges arising after the SEL curriculum is implemented from the teachers' views. Elementary schools in the modern world face challenges on equipping learners with skills while also teaching the academics materials (Haymovitz et al., 2017). Studies also shows that when learners have chances of SEL they tend to have a greater academic success. Lastly, the study will assess the strategies employed by teachers to integrate SEL into their teaching practices within the Nigerian's elementary school context. There are many sustainable approaches that can be used to firmly integrate the SEL into the curriculum and daily activities. The study will employ interpretivism research paradigm which will facilitate exploitation of qualitative data on opinions, feelings and emotions of teachers on Nigeria elementary schools.

Research Questions

The research will be focused to address the following question in the context of these studies.

1. What is the understanding and awareness of social and emotional learning (SEL) curriculum among elementary school teachers in Nigeria?
2. What is the perception of teachers to integrate SEL into their teaching practices within the Nigerian's elementary school context?
3. What are the perceived challenges associated with the implementation of SEL curriculum from the perspective of teachers?

Literature review

Social and emotional learning is often assumed to occur naturally in the course of the development of children without being taught. However, when they fail to master these skills there is a tendency of developing behavioral issues which can interfere with their performance in school. This result to many schools teaching SEL which have showed positively influence student academic success in school life (Souza, 2023). According to a study by Ahmed et al. (2020) on examining effects of SEL approach using Quasi experiment on 207 form 3 students in junior secondary schools, where the students were divided into an experiment group and control group. The study found that students in social and emotional learning classroom showed significance as compared to traditional teaching approach group. Similarly, on a study by Hamafyelto et al. (2018) to examine the exploitation of social emotional learning in Borno state revealed that teachers expressed desire to infuse SEL in their daily teaching activities

where they also mentioned that participatory teaching and feedback are important topics which needs special consideration in schools.

For students to succeed in elementary school they must be emotionally and academically sober. SEL competencies are created through rules, practices which facilitate children's capacity to understand and manage emotions and achieve their goals while maintaining positive relationship and making sound decisions (Williams, 2018). Incorporating Social and emotional learning in schools has been demonstrated to improve academic and psychological status of learners. According to Zolkoski et al. (2021) on a study to examine factors that impacts teachers' intentions in adopting SEL curriculum in a rural community with 76 teachers, found that there is a positive perception of school climate, teaching diverse students and self-management skills positively predicted desire for teachers to adopt the SEL curriculum. This study proves high level of understanding and awareness of the SEL curricula.

Classrooms and schools use different kinds of routines for things to run well and to provide guidance on the daily educational activities. Educators can use routines that promote SEL such as conflict resolution strategies, emotional regulation and classroom meetings to solve their learners' issues (Hoffmann et al., 2020). Routines is part of social, emotional and cognitive understanding and regulation. Classroom and school dynamic comprise teachers, administrators, school staff, students and the relationship among them (Trach, 2018). Although there are many ways SEL can be implemented, systemic school context remains to be the most visible and potentially best way to implement SEL since it influences school culture and climate, teachers' having confidence in themselves to perform practices leading to student learning is among the exceptional characteristics that predicts teacher practices and student results. Poulou et al., (2019) examined teachers' perceptions of self efficacy and behavior management practices using classroom strategies on 8 Greek teachers using multidimensional validated observation system. They realized a significance relationship which showed effectiveness of the class strategies. Social emotional learning skills gives a firm bedrock for learning and wellbeing in childhood and even beyond. To promote social emotional learning teachers, need to be constant of key skills while children's need opportunities, motivation and inclination to practice developing skills (Greenberg et al., 2017).

The most challenging part of the SEL in occurs in elementary school. There exist multiple factors that needs to be checked to make sure the lessons are effective. For instance, giving focus to the relationships existing between teachers and students, it should be positive, be consistent and ensure classrooms are responding culturally. According to Kaspar and Massey (2022) students feel cared and respected by teachers when this relationship is available which make sure students' behavior improves and students respond more to the SEL. According to Kaspar and Massey (2022) social emotional learning integration in other subject areas can lead to additional components in the school days. Reflection of SEL successes and setbacks will help students to identify their strengths in social-emotional skills.

Schools in the modern world are experiencing a hard time in preparing students with necessary skills to overcome challenges after school at the same time while teaching normal academics. Teachers often encounter challenges that could alter the application of the SEL at elementary schools. According to (Anyon et al., 2016) on a contextual influences o the implementation of SEL found out that context factors on implementation fidelity includes interventions such as compatibility of staffs on behavior change, organization structure capacity like teacher buy in and principal, intervention support system. Huynh et al. (2021) explored challenges of integrating social emotional learning in secondary schools in Vietnam using qualitative analysis which utilized interviews from students and main teachers who have experienced SEL. The study found that Vietnamese education curriculum was challenged by incapability of the current curriculum and teachers' capacity, they also experience difficulties in integrating SEL

to the classroom education activities. This shows that integrating SEL curriculum across school levels will meet the requirement for the newly introduced curriculum.

Use of SEL creates better attitudes among students and towards themselves improves their grades. SEL contribute immensely in promoting good behaviors as demonstrated by data from Washoe county school districts. There were 62% of graduates before implementation of the SEL but the rates rose up to 84% after implementation (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). Similarly, Haimovitz et al. (2017) examined benefits and limitation of social learning program on 32 students to articulate perceived impacts. They found observable impacts on productivity of the faculty, improvement in student wellbeing and also relationship among the peers. The studies show the necessity of continuing to implement SEL programs since they have numerous benefits.

Materials and Methods

Research Approach

Inductive approach was adopted in this study since the study is focused on themes or patterns that teachers' opinions show after analysis. On the other hand, inductive approach is based on observations and seeking patterns or themes in order to develop a theory for generalization (Barroga et al, 2023).

In the context of teacher perceptions and implementation of social and emotional learning curriculum in Nigerian's elementary schools' inductive approach was allow the study to collect data using interviews to collect opinions and views on various aspects of social emotional learning such as barriers, strategies and challenges

Sample and sampling technique

The sample of this study consisted of 10 Primary school teachers in Nigerian primary schools comprising of four (4) males and six (6) females with age range of below 30 years to 51 years and above. Accidental sampling was adopted. The reason for accidental sampling is for convenience and it is easier to implement and can be taken from already established framework as long as it is the researcher can access.

Data collection tool

The instrument for data collection is a semi-structured interview titled, Social Emotional Learning Interview (SELI). The instrument had two sections. Section A collected data on respondents' bio-data while section B, elicited responses from the respondents based on the research questions.

Data collection and analysis

The approach employed for data analysis, is the thematic analysis method. This was used considering the qualitative nature of the interview. A six-step system was developed to help establish clarity and rigor around this process, and this system was used when conducting a thematic analysis. The six steps are, familiarization, generating codes, generating themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes and creating the report

Results

Interview Codes

Based on the interview conducted in the study area, a step-by-step presentation of the interview snippets, indicated by codes and transformed into themes, which were all drawn from the research questions that guided the study are shown below, starting from Table 1.

Table 1
Presentation of codes for SEL Practices

Interview snippets	Codes
On awareness of SEL	
i. Not really much. (Female with 8 years of experience within the age bracket of 41-50 years)	i. Little awareness
ii. Some awareness. (Female with 3 years of teaching experience within the age bracket of below 30)	ii. Little awareness
iii. Some awareness. (Female with 3 years of teaching experience within the age bracket of below 30 year)	iii. Little awareness
iv. No awareness. (Female with 10 years of teaching experience within the age bracket of 50 years and above).	iv. No awareness
v. Little awareness. (Female with 7 years of teaching experience within the age bracket 6 – 10 years)	v. Little awareness
vi. Good awareness. (Female with 40 years of teaching experience within the age bracket of 51 years and above).	vi. Good awareness
vii. Very good knowledge. (Male with 14 years of teaching experience within the age bracket of 6 - 10 years).	vii. Good awareness
viii. Much more. (Male with 6 years of teaching experience within the age bracket of 6 - 10 years).	viii. Good awareness
ix. Total and profound awareness. (Male with 6 years of teaching experience within the age bracket of 6 - 10 years).	ix. Very good awareness
x. Very often. (Male with 6 years of teaching experience within the age bracket of 6 - 10 years).	x. Good awareness

Table 1 above shows a representation of teachers' awareness of SEL. 40% of the female teachers showed a little level of awareness while 10% showed the absence of awareness on SEL. Just 10% of the female teachers showed a good level of awareness of SEL. The male teachers however showed a good level of awareness of SEL. 30% of the male showed a good level of awareness while 10% showed a very good level of awareness.

Table 2
Presentation of codes for SEL Practices

Interview snippets	Codes
On Perception of adoption of SEL	
i. Very high degree. (Female with 8 years of experience within the age bracket of 41-50 years)	i. High
ii. Good perception. (Female with 3 years of teaching experience within the age bracket of below 30)	ii. High
iii. Good perception. (Female with 3 years of teaching experience within the age bracket of below 30 year)	iii. High
iv. Low perception. (Female with 10 years of teaching experience within the age bracket of 50 years and above).	iv. Poor
v. Low perception. (Female with 7 years of teaching experience within the age bracket 6 – 10 years)	v. Poor
vi. Good perception. (Female with 40 years of teaching experience within the age bracket of 51 years and above).	vi. High
vii. Very good perception. (Male with 14 years of teaching experience within the age bracket of 6 - 10 years).	vii. High
viii. Very good perception. (Male with 6 years of teaching experience within the age bracket of 6 - 10 years).	viii. Very high
ix. Strongly agrees. (Male with 6 years of teaching experience within the age bracket of 6 - 10 years).	ix. Very high
x. Good perception. (Male with 6 years of teaching experience within the age bracket of 6 - 10 years).	x. High

Table 2 above shows the perception of teachers towards SEL. 20% of the teachers, being females expressed negative perception towards the use and incorporation of SEL in Primary schools. 60% (40% females and 20% males) of the teachers, expressed positive perception towards the use of SEL in Primary schools. 20% of the male teachers showed a very good perception about the use and incorporation of SEL in Primary schools.

Table 3
Presentation of codes for SEL Practices

Interview snippets	Codes
On challenges of SEL	
i. Untrained teachers and insufficient teaching material. (Female with 8 years of experience within the age bracket of 41-50 years)	i. Low manpower and insufficient teaching aids.
ii. Unwillingness on the child's part. (Female with 3 years of teaching experience within the age bracket of below 30)	ii. Repressed emotions
iii. Bulky curriculum, little funding and unconducive learning environment. (Female with 3 years of teaching experience within the age bracket of below 30 year).	iii. Overloaded curriculum, poor funding and poor

	learning environment
iv. Curriculum overload, poor teacher training/support, poor assessment and evaluation, large class size, lack of awareness and understanding. (Female with 10 years of teaching experience within the age bracket of 50 years and above).	V. Overloaded curriculum, low manpower, poor funding, poor learning environment
v. Lack of social clubs. (Female with 7 years of teaching experience within the age bracket 6 – 10 years)	v. No social clubs
vi. No staff training, loaded curriculum, over-crowded classes. (Female with 40 years of teaching experience within the age bracket of 51 years and above).	vi. Low manpower, overloaded curriculum, poor learning environment
vii. Lack of social clubs, religion. (Male with 14 years of teaching experience within the age bracket of 6 - 10 years).	vii. No social clubs, religion
viii. Curriculum overload, poor teacher training/support, insufficient resources and funding, large class sizes, lack of awareness and understanding by many. (Male with 6 years of teaching experience within the age bracket of 6 - 10 years).	viii. Overloaded curriculum, low manpower, poor funding, poor learning environment, little awareness by many.
ix. Reliance on scripted curriculum, different language framing and familiarity with SEL. (Male with 6 years of teaching experience within the age bracket of 6 - 10 years).	ix. Reliance on scripted curriculum, cultural variations.
x. Maltreatment of teachers, poor working atmosphere, work stress, poor awareness and emphasis, rigid personalities. (Male with 6 years of teaching experience within the age bracket of 6 - 10 years).	x. Maltreatment, poor learning environment, work stress, poor awareness, rigid personalities.

Table 3 above shows the challenges and concerns as it relates to the use and incorporation of SEL in Nigerian Primary school. The different codes are merged to themes in Table 6, accordingly.

Table 4
Themes

Codes	Themes
On awareness of SEL	
i. No awareness	i. Perceived lack of awareness (from a female teacher, 10%)
ii. Little awareness	ii. Perceived presence of minimal awareness (among female teachers, 40%)
iii. Good awareness	iii. Perceived presence of full awareness (among male and female teachers, 40% of male teachers and 10% of female teacher)

Table 4 above shows a representation of the themes, indicating the levels of awareness among the teachers. 10% of the teachers showed no awareness as it relates to the use of SEL, 40% of the female teachers showed little awareness, while 50% (40% males and 10% female) of the teachers, showed a good level of awareness as it relates to SEL.

Table 5
Themes

Codes	Themes
On Perception of SEL	
i. Poor perception	i. Negative perception (from female teachers, 20%)
ii. Good perception	ii. Positive perception (among male and female teachers, 20% males and 40% females)
iii. Very good perception	iii. Perceived presence of full awareness (among male and female teachers, 20% of male teachers)

Table 5 above shows a representation of the themes as summarized under poor perception, good perception and very good perception. Perception here relates to the extent of agreement to which SEL should be used and incorporated in Primary schools. 20% of the females, showed a negative perception, indicating that the use of SEL in Nigerian Primary schools, is not of utmost importance. 60% of the teachers (20% of males and 40% of females), indicated a good perception about the use and incorporation of SEL in Primary schools while 20% of the male

teachers demonstrated a very good perception as it relates to the use and incorporation of SEL in Nigerian Primary schools.

Table 6
Themes

Codes	Themes
Challenges of SEL	
i. Low manpower, Insufficient teaching aids, Overloaded curriculum, Poor funding, Poor learning environment, No social clubs, little awareness, reliance on scripted curriculum,	School related and teaching conditions
ii. Repressed emotions, rigid personalities	Personality related
iii. Religion	Religious factor
iv. Cultural variations	Cultural factor
v. Maltreatment of teachers vi. Work stress	Motivation factors

Table 6 above shows the challenges and perceived seeming concerns as expressed by the teachers, that (could) limit(s) the possible use and incorporation of SEL among teachers in Nigerian Primary schools. The challenges and concerns are thematised into, school related/teaching conditions, personality related, religious factor, cultural factor and motivation factors.

Discussion

Table 1 of thematic analysis, shows a representation of teachers' awareness of SEL. 40% of the female teachers showed a little level of awareness while 10% showed the absence of awareness on SEL Just 10% of the female teachers showed a good level of awareness of SEL. The male teachers however showed a good level of awareness of SEL. 30% of the male showed a good level of awareness while 10% showed a very good level of awareness. This finding however disagrees with that of Jennings and Greenberg (2009), who found that female teachers reported higher levels of emotional awareness, regulation, and social skills compared to male teachers. The researchers suggest this may lead to female teachers being more comfortable and effective in implementing SEL programs in their classrooms (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009).

Similarly, another research by Talvio et al. (2022) examined preservice teachers' knowledge and skills related to SEL. The study found that female preservice teachers demonstrated greater understanding and proficiency in SEL compared to their male counterparts. This difference was attributed to potential gender socialization and stereotypes around emotional

competence (Talvio et al., 2022). The reason however for this disagreement may be due to cultural background as the unsupported findings are not domiciled with the study area. This can possibly be a gap the present study has filled. However, the awareness and understanding of SEL among elementary school teachers in Nigeria may vary due to factors such as limited training opportunities, lack of resources, and competing priorities within the education system.

Table 2 of thematic analysis, shows the perception of teachers towards SEL. 20% of the teachers, being females expressed negative perception towards the use and incorporation of SEL in Primary schools. 60% (40% females and 20% males) of the teachers, expressed positive perception towards the use of SEL in Primary schools. 20% of the male teachers showed a very good perception about the use and incorporation of SEL in Primary schools. Judging by the interpretation of the analysis above, it is crystal clear that teachers have a great perception to integrate SEL into their teaching practices within the Nigerian's elementary school context.

The result of this finding can further be supported by (Greenberg et al., 2017), who opined that, social emotional learning skills gives a firm bedrock for learning and wellbeing in childhood and even beyond. These authors also maintained that, promoting social emotional learning requires the teacher to be constant of key skills while children's need opportunities, motivation and inclination to practice developing skills. The integration of SEL into teaching practices has been deemed crucial to support students' holistic development and enhance their overall well-being. Looking specifically at the Nigerian elementary school context, it is essential to understand the perception of teachers regarding the integration of SEL into their teaching practices. A primary factor that influences this perception is the prevailing cultural and educational landscape in Nigeria.

Table 3 of thematic analysis shows the challenges and concerns as it relates to the use and incorporation of SEL in Nigerian Primary schools. The challenges and concerns were thematized into, school related/teaching conditions, personality related, religious factor, cultural factor and motivation factors. Furthermore, these themes were factored into the following codes: school related and school conditions (low manpower, insufficient teaching aids, overloaded curriculum, poor funding, poor learning environment, no social clubs, little awareness, reliance on scripted curriculum), personality related (repressed emotions, rigid personalities), religion factor (religion), cultural factor (cultural variations) and motivation factors (maltreatment of teachers and work stress).

Sequel to these challenges and concerns related to the incorporation of SEL in Nigeria Primary Schools, Huynh et al. (2021), explored the challenges of integrating social emotional learning in secondary schools in Vietnam using qualitative analysis which utilized interviews from students and main teachers who have experienced SEL. The study found that Vietnamese education curriculum was challenged by incapability of the current curriculum and teachers' capacity, they also experience difficulties in integrating SEL to the classroom education activities. This shows that integrating SEL curriculum across school levels will meet the requirement for the newly introduced curriculum.

In view of the foregoing, one major challenge faced by Nigerian primary school teachers is the school-related and conditions theme. In many schools, there is a shortage of manpower, resulting in large class sizes and limited individual attention to students. This makes it difficult for teachers to effectively implement SEL curriculum, as they may struggle to provide personalized support and guidance to each student. Additionally, insufficient teaching aids and

resources further hinder the implementation process, as teachers may not have the necessary tools to effectively deliver the curriculum. Moreover, an overloaded curriculum can leave little time for dedicated SEL instruction, resulting in the neglect of these crucial skills in favor of academic subjects. Another challenge within this theme is poor funding. Schools with limited financial resources often struggle to allocate sufficient funds to support SEL programs. Lack of funding can make it challenging to provide necessary training for teachers, purchase appropriate resources, and create a suitable learning environment conducive to SEL instruction. Additionally, poor learning environments, such as dilapidated infrastructure or safety concerns, can undermine the effectiveness of SEL curriculum implementation, as students may not feel comfortable and safe enough to fully engage in the learning process. The absence of social clubs or extracurricular activities can also limit opportunities for students to practice and apply SEL skills in a real-world context.

Also, A study by Denton and Xiao (2018) examined the impact of religious fundamentalism on SEL outcomes in US schools. The researchers found that in schools with a stronger presence of religious fundamentalism, students reported lower levels of social-emotional competence, including self-awareness, social awareness, and relationship skills. The authors suggest that rigid religious beliefs and a focus on obedience to authority can clash with the more open-ended and self-reflective nature of SEL (Denton & Xiao, 2018).

Furthermore, a study by Roehlkepartain and Benson (2018) explored the perspectives of religious leaders on the role of religion in SEL. The researchers found that some religious leaders expressed concerns about the potential for SEL to undermine or replace the moral and spiritual development traditionally provided by religious education. This can create tensions and resistance to the integration of SEL in religious schools or communities (Roehlkepartain& Benson, 2018). The findings from the three research have shown that religion can hinder the integration of SEL in Schools as the present study reveals.

Conclusion

The study concludes that although there is a general awareness of Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) among teachers, notable gender differences exist in their understanding and readiness to integrate SEL into classroom practices. Male teachers demonstrated greater knowledge, confidence, and positive attitudes toward SEL, largely due to prior training, personal interest, and recognition of its benefits in promoting student resilience and academic success. Female teachers, on the other hand, expressed enthusiasm for SEL but highlighted the need for additional training, resources, and institutional support to effectively implement it. Furthermore, the study identified significant barriers that limit the successful integration of SEL in schools. These include curriculum overload, poor funding, inadequate teaching aids, and a lack of supportive structures such as social clubs. Cultural and religious influences were also found to shape teachers' perceptions, sometimes hindering the acceptance of SEL practices. Based on the novel revelations of this study, it was generally concluded that perceptions of teachers towards the implementation of social and emotional learning curriculum in Nigerian's Primary schools varies, with male teachers having a higher understanding and awareness of SEL.

Recommendations

1. Implement targeted professional development workshops focused on SEL for all elementary school teachers, with particular emphasis on female teachers. These workshops should provide comprehensive training on SEL concepts, strategies for integration into the curriculum, and practical applications in the classroom.

2. Establish mentorship initiatives that pair experienced male teachers, who demonstrate a strong understanding of SEL, with female teachers. This mentorship can facilitate knowledge sharing, support, and encouragement, enhancing overall awareness and implementation of SEL practices.
3. Equip teachers with practical resources and tools to facilitate SEL implementation in their classrooms.
4. Create opportunities for collaboration and peer support among teachers, allowing for sharing of experiences and best practices.

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