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**Teachers' Perspective on Social and Emotional
Learning in Maltese Secondary Schools**

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A dissertation presented in the Faculty of Education at the University of Malta
for the degree of Master in Teaching and Learning (Spanish with Second and
Foreign Language)

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ABSTRACT

ANTONELLA BONDIN

Teachers' perspectives on Social and Emotional Learning in Maltese Secondary Schools.

The field of Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) has grown rapidly in recent years, yet local studies on SEL are limited. Evidence shows that effective SEL has positive outcomes on students' well-being. This study aims to identify secondary teachers' perspectives on SEL. Specifically, it explores teachers' knowledge and attitudes towards SEL, determines the use and feasibility of SEL in the classroom, studies the relationship between training and SEL implementation, examines the barriers to SEL implementation and the influence of the curriculum on teachers' implementation of SEL. In order to gain a better understanding of the current Maltese situation on SEL, an online questionnaire was distributed to three state schools. The responses were analysed using descriptive and inferential analysis through SPSS. Overall, the results indicate that the majority of teachers were familiar with SEL and believed in its importance for students' wellbeing. Though most teachers said they currently teach social and emotional skills, they think that PSCD teachers and counsellors are better equipped to do so since they believe they have more experience and training in teaching such skills. In addition, teachers feel that certain subjects are more practical than others to implement SEL. Another finding suggests that teachers who have received training on SEL are more likely to integrate SEL into their lessons. The results also show that there is a significant desire for additional training in SEL so that they feel competent enough to incorporate SEL into their subject. Moreover, the main challenges in implementing SEL, according to the teachers were the lack of available time designated for SEL, difficulty in addressing the different social and emotional needs of students and the lack of training sessions.

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Dedication

To Mum, Dad & Nigel

For their endless love, support, and encouragement

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List of Abbreviations and Acronyms

B.Ed (Hons) - Bachelor of Education (Hons)

CASEL - Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning

DRLLE - Directorate for Research, Lifelong Learning and Employability

ENRETE - Enhancing Resilience Through Teacher Education

FREC - Faculty Research Ethics Committee

MEDE - Ministry for Education and Employment

MREC - MEDE Research Ethics Committee

MGIEP - Mahatma Gandhi Institute of Education for Peace and Sustainable Development

NCF - National Curriculum Framework

NESET - Network of Experts on Social Aspects of Education and Training

NRC - National Research Council

OECD - Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

PATHS - Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies

PGCE - Postgraduate Certificate in Education

PSCD - Personal, Social and Career Development

PSD - Personal and Social Development

SAFE - Sequenced, Active, Focused, Explicit

SDG 4 - Sustainable Development Goal 4

SEL - Social and Emotional Learning

SPSS - Statistical Package for the Social Sciences

UNESCO - United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

VET - Vocational Education and Training

WEF - World Economic Forum

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Introduction

In the 21st century, children are facing a complex world where the living conditions have changed dramatically. Childhood and adolescence are two crucial developmental stages for adult life (Zins & Elias, 2007). During these periods, many children struggle with anxiety, depression, eating disorders, socioeconomic problems, school stress, bullying, social media bullying, and suicide (Zins & Elias, 2007). These issues can negatively impact students' social and emotional skills, academic performance, and life satisfaction (Zins & Elias, 2007; Greenberg et al., 2017).

Furthermore, 21st century technology has brought about new abilities. They are called 21st-century skills and considered to be "essential for adult success" (Greenberg et al., 2017, p.16). Greenberg et al. (2017) present a list of skills that children must acquire through their education "to deal with the inevitable challenges of everyday life" (p.16) in order to thrive. These skills include dealing with stress, working in groups, and getting along with others (Greenberg et al., 2017). "Education should be seen as an opportunity for students to develop a range of cognitive, personal, and social competencies" (Greenberg et al., 2017, p.16).

1.2 What is Social and Emotional Learning?

Over the past three decades, the concept of enhancing students' social and emotional competence has become increasingly pertinent. It became widely recognised that students should be taught academic skills while promoting their well-being in schools (Greenberg et al., 2017). This gave rise to the term *Social and Emotional Learning* (SEL). SEL is the process by which young people and adults "enhance their ability to integrate thinking, feeling, and behaving to achieve important life tasks" (Zins et al., 2004, p.6). Social and emotional education enables children to acquire social and emotional skills that will help them to be more successful in their adult life (CASEL, 2013). In addition, SEL enables children to

understand and manage their emotions and behaviours, demonstrate empathy and respect for others, make ethically responsible decisions, set positive goals, and build healthy relationships (Zins et al., 2004; CASEL, 2013).

In 2020, the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL), a well-known SEL organisation, updated its definition of SEL. It states

Social and emotional learning (SEL) is an integral part of education and human development. SEL is the process through which all young people and adults acquire and apply the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to develop healthy identities, manage emotions and achieve personal and collective goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain supportive relationships, and make responsible and caring decisions. (CASEL, 2020, p. 1)

CASEL's latest definition of SEL gave importance to educational equity as it helps celebrate students' identities by ensuring all students have access to SEL. It emphasises how "SEL and equity are interwoven" (Woolf, n.d., para.15). CASEL (2020) continues to describe how SEL

...advances equity and excellence through authentic school-family-community partnerships to establish learning environments and experiences that feature trusting and collaborative relationships, rigorous and meaningful curriculum and instruction, and ongoing evaluation. SEL can help address various forms of inequity and empower young people and adults to co-create thriving schools and contribute to safe, healthy and just communities. (p.1)

In addition, CASEL's (2020) definition emphasises that SEL interventions must be delivered in a supportive and safe environment. The environment is considered an important concept related to a much better and effective SEL programme (Zins & Elias, 2007). Apart from the students' academic education, schools are viewed as key settings for promoting health awareness and incorporating preventive measures and interventions (Roeser et al., 2000). Roeser et al.'s (2000) findings show that schools that provide non-comparative and non-competitive environments promote students' healthy development. A supportive school environment can "encourage students to explore and try new learning activities" while

providing opportunities for all students to address their personal needs and help them build healthy relationships with peers (Zins & Elias, 2007, p.3).

SEL encompasses extensive skillset. CASEL (2013, 2020) outlines five core SEL competencies that should be the foundation of any SEL programme. These include: (i) self-awareness; (ii) self-management; (iii) social awareness; (iv) relationship skills; and (v) responsible decision-making. These SEL skills can be taught using different approaches. Some approaches include using direct instruction to teach SEL skills, such as showing videos about SEL; using a cooperative learning approach to practice SEL skills, such as problem-solving, teamwork, relationships, and communication; and integrating SEL with other academic areas (CASEL, 2020). The latter is considered by research to be the most effective approach of teaching SEL (Zins & Elias, 2007).

SEL programmes should be intertwined with the school's curriculum (CASEL, 2013). However, some administrators and school staff consider SEL programmes to be add-ons (Greenberg et al., 2003). SEL includes many subtopics, such as relationships, drugs, violence, and abuse, which are taught as a single fragment in some schools. However, stand-alone lessons on topics related to socio-emotional skills shift the purpose of SEL. As a result, SEL loses its collective effectiveness (Zins & Elias, 2007; Greenberg et al., 2003).

1.3 Benefits of Social and Emotional Learning

Effective SEL programmes lead to positive outcomes in the well-being of individuals. SEL programmes can improve student competence, increase academic achievement, and reduce the likelihood of future behavioural and emotional problems (CASEL, n.d.). Socio-emotional skills help students feel motivated, believe in themselves and their success, overcome obstacles wisely, and build strong, healthy relationships (Zins & Elias, 2007). In addition, SEL is more beneficial when introduced earlier in life, especially during childhood and adolescence (McClelland et al., 2017; Yeager, 2017). During these periods, the child goes through a critical period of change, and the introduction of SEL helps the child's development immensely (Giedd et al., 1999). Consequently, SEL has the potential to serve as a foundation to “support

a public health approach to education” (Jones & Doolittle, 2017, p.7) which can both prevent problems and promote positive outcomes.

Investing in public health produces cost-effective results in the short and long term (WHO, 2014). Effective SEL programmes can be "economically efficient" (Yeager, 2017, p.74). Research has shown that effective SEL programmes add more value to society than the actual cost of the programme (Zins & Elias, 2007). Thus, investing early in social and emotional skills development and mental health of students can help reduce crime, violence, substance abuse, and misconduct, which are the greatest drag on the nation's economy at a later point in time (Yeager, 2017).

Furthermore, the social-emotional well-being of teachers is as important as students' (Schonert-Reichl, 2017). Likewise, teachers need to develop their own social-emotional skills to improve their well-being and cultivate their students' social, emotional, and academic development (Schonert-Reichl, 2017). Schwarzer & Hallum (2008, as cited in Schonert-Reichl, 2017) argue that the teacher's high stress levels contribute to lower job satisfaction, poor teaching, and poor student outcomes.

1.4 Focus of Study

Numerous studies have shown that effective SEL programmes have positive effects on young people and adults (Durlak et al., 2011). The purpose of this study is to examine the perspectives of Maltese middle and secondary school teachers on SEL. Specifically, their views, thoughts, opinions, related training opportunities, practical challenges, and whether they incorporate SEL into their teaching. The Maltese curriculum does not currently incorporate an established SEL programme as part of the required curriculum to be taught in schools. SEL is, therefore, considered to be more of an optional learning instruction to be implemented by either the school or the teacher. The Master's programme in Teaching and Learning does not include a course or study-unit devoted to SEL. This casts doubt on the ability of these newly qualified teachers to effectively incorporate SEL into their teaching. Existing research does not give voice to teachers who play a prominent role in SEL instruction. Due to

the absence of SEL programmes embedded in the curriculum, it is crucial to understand how SEL is being addressed informally in Maltese schools.

Thus, the main research question of the study is:

RQ1: What are the views of Maltese secondary school teachers about SEL?

More specifically the following four research questions are answered in this study:

RQ2: Do teachers include SEL in their teaching subjects?

RQ3: Do teachers believe they are equipped or trained to teach SEL?

RQ4: What kind of challenges do they encounter?

RQ5: Do they think that SEL should be a key goal of the Maltese educational system?

The main research question aims to gather the views of the Maltese secondary school teachers on SEL. This research question primarily highlights the importance of understanding teachers' knowledge and attitudes towards the implementation of SEL. The second research question investigates teachers' familiarity with SEL, the implementation of SEL, its practicality and the responsible personnel. The third research question focuses on teachers' training on SEL. It aims to determine how many teachers were provided with training and assess their satisfaction with their knowledge on SEL and their confidence in teaching SEL. The fourth research question explores the challenges that are impeding teachers from implementing SEL in their classrooms. The final research question investigates whether teachers consider SEL as an important educational concept and explores what can be improved in relation to SEL and Maltese education.

The study was conducted through a quantitative research design, in which numerical data was collected to explain phenomena of interest (Aliaga & Gunderson, 2002). As this study is aimed at collecting data on teachers' attitudes and beliefs about SEL, this type of data does not "naturally exist in quantitative form" (Sukamolson, 2007, p.3) to be quantitatively collected. Therefore, in this study, a research instrument, specifically a questionnaire, was developed to convert attitudes and beliefs into quantitative data, which is then statistically analysed (Sukamolson, 2007).

1.5 Overview of chapters

Following this introductory chapter, Chapter 2 presents the literature on SEL. Specifically, it examines SEL frameworks, SEL programmes, and the implementation process of SEL. In addition, the study discusses the importance of teachers' own SEL, SEL training, challenges associated with integrating SEL in the classrooms, and major criticisms of SEL. Chapter 3 provides a description and overview of the methodology used to conduct this study by examining the main research instrument, namely the questionnaire, justifying the selection of participants and presenting the data collection method. It also presents the process of the data analysis, its' validity and reliability, the study's limitations, and ethical considerations. Chapter 4 presents the results of the data analysis conducted in response to the questionnaire. In Chapter 5, the main findings are discussed through relevant literature findings. Finally, Chapter 6 concludes the study by exploring possible implications, limitations, and recommendations for potential future research.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

The concept of SEL has been written about since ancient times. Plato, a Greek philosopher, “proposed a holistic curriculum that requires a balance of training in physical education, the arts, math, science, character, and moral judgement” (Edutopia, 2011, para.5). He expressed that “by maintaining a sound system of education and upbringing, you produce citizens of good character” (Plato as cited in Edutopia, 2011, para.5). The term *Social and Emotional Learning* has been around for 27 years after being introduced at a Fetzer Institute meeting in 1994. Together with researchers, educators, and child advocates, the Fetzer Institute sought to identify effective strategies to address concerns about ineffective school programmes and help students improve their overall social and emotional competence in school (Weissberg et al., 2015, Greenberg et al., 2003). At that time, the Fetzer Institute defined SEL as a conceptual framework to stimulate young people with social, emotional, and academic competence (Weissberg et al., 2015, Greenberg et al., 2003).

Over the years, the SEL field has gained considerable interest. This is primarily due to the amount of research that demonstrates the importance and benefits of SEL for students. Children and adolescents can be vulnerable to mental health difficulties because they are exposed to many physical, emotional, and social changes, including violence, anxiety, depression, abuse, and poverty (WHO, 2020). Therefore, promoting well-being and protecting our children from adverse situations and risk factors is a critical part of helping them thrive in this complex world (WHO, 2020). Schools should teach students important life skills in addition to academic content if they want to prepare students for the real world (Mahoney et al., 2018).

This chapter aims to provide a clearer understanding of SEL through selective reference to the most pertinent literature. The chapter is divided into four sub-sections. In the first section, we discuss international SEL frameworks and SEL in Malta. The second section focuses on evidence-based SEL programmes, its’ benefits, the implementation process, the Sequenced,

Active, Focused, Explicit (SAFE) approach and the target audience. In the third section, we examine the role of teachers in supporting SEL in their classrooms, focusing on their training in SEL and the challenges that they face when implementing SEL in their teaching. The last section focuses on the most common criticisms SEL faces.

2.2 International SEL Frameworks and the Maltese local contribution to SEL

2.2.1 SEL Frameworks

CASEL's Framework

The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) is an American organisation that is considered a leader in SEL research, practices, policy, and frameworks (CASEL, 2013; CASEL, 2020). It aims to establish evidence based SEL programmes in the student curriculum, from preschool through secondary school (CASEL, 2013). By providing a platform for high-quality scientific research, CASEL also hopes to promote further studies and science related to SEL and to establish effective SEL programmes (Weissberg et al., 2015; Elias et al., 1997). There are several different frameworks on SEL, but the most dominant framework in this field is that of CASEL (2013, 2015, 2020).

Recently, CASEL's well-known framework has been updated "to pay close attention to how SEL affirms the identities, strengths and experiences of all children, including those who have been marginalised in our education systems" (Niemi, 2020, para. 2). This enhanced vision for SEL emphasises "its ability to advance educational equity and excellence" (Woolf, n.d., para. 2), and gave importance to systemic SEL. This approach creates equitable learning conditions that actively engage all students in enhancing their academic, social, and emotional competencies (Woolf, n.d.). In addition, it also highlights that the systemic SEL approach focuses on providing safe, supportive, and engaging environments for children and young adults (Woolf, n.d.).

The CASEL framework (2020) expresses the basis for establishing and implementing SEL, the key environments that help promote SEL, and the results achieved with SEL (see Figure 1). Figure 1 represents the CASEL Framework Wheel, which demonstrates the five core competencies known as the CASEL-5. These five competencies are considered essential skills for SEL and can be taught in several ways across different settings. (CASEL, 2020).



Figure 1: CASEL's Framework

The CASEL-5 include:

- **Self-awareness:** understanding one's behaviour, emotions, and values; recognising one's strengths and limitations; having confidence and a sense of purpose.
- **Self-management:** the ability to understand and manage emotions, thoughts, and behaviours in various scenarios; set and achieve life goals and aspirations; manage stress; and motivate oneself.
- **Social Awareness:** empathy with others, understanding of historical and social norms for behaviour in various settings, and recognising family, school, and community supports and resources.

- **Relationship Skills:** the ability to establish and maintain healthy relationships in which communication, listening, cooperation, collaboration, negotiation, offering and seeking help and guidance are valued.
- **Responsible Decision Making:** the ability to make respectful and constructive decisions; examine ethical standards; and assess the benefits and consequences of various situations for personal, social, and collective well-being. (CASEL, 2020)

According to CASEL (2020), SEL is most beneficial when incorporated into the curriculum, the whole school culture, the school's policies and practices, as well as through collaboration with the community and families. In Fig.1, the five competencies are organised around four key settings: Communities, Families and Caregivers, Schools, and Classrooms. These settings individually influence student learning and development. However, when all environments work together harmoniously, they can help build stronger social-emotional learning, foster student voices, create supportive school environments, and promote family engagement (CASEL, 2020).

Additional Frameworks

CASEL's framework is arguably the most well-known and most widely used. However, there are other major institutions that have developed SEL frameworks. Many international organisations, such as the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) consider SEL valuable for the development of children and hence, are investing in SEL for students, teachers, and communities. Like UNESCO and the OECD, the World Economic Forum (WEF) has developed publications that emphasise the importance of SEL. All three organisations agree that students should develop cognitive, social, and emotional skills (United Nations, 2015; Chernyshenko, 2018; World Economic Forum, 2016).

In 2015, UNESCO set the Education 2030 Agenda to achieve educational goals for the next 15 years. Specifically, Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4) ensures "inclusive and equitable quality education and promotes lifelong learning opportunities for all" (United Nations, n.d.,

Overview section, Fig.1). Additionally, UNESCO Mahatma Gandhi Institute of Education for Peace and Sustainable Development (UNESCO MGIEP, 2017) developed the Libre programme to inspire and channel SEL more consistently with SDG 4.7 aspirations. UNESCO MGIEP developed Libre as a "flagship initiative to design an SEL curriculum" (Mochizuki, & Chatterjee, n.d., para.20) by using an "integrated brain approach to education" (UNESCO MGIEP, 2017, p.1). The Libre curriculum is designed to train students in four core SEL skills which are: (i) mindfulness; (ii) empathy; (iii) compassion; and (iv) critical inquiry (Rautela & Chatterjee Singh, 2019).

The World Bank (2018) has developed a Step-by-Step toolkit for an SEL programme for children aged 6 to 17. This framework focuses on six skills that are remarkably similar to CASEL-5. These skills include: (i) Self-awareness; (ii) Self-regulation; (iii) Social awareness; (iv) Positive communication; (v) Determination; and (vi) Responsible decision-making (The World Bank, 2018). This Step-by-Step Toolkit includes several practical lessons, teaching materials, information on key concepts, tricks and tips for teachers, and a frequently asked questions section to educate and guide teachers (The World Bank, 2018; Mejía, 2016). The teacher guide for the Step by Step Toolkit emphasises that "it takes a socially and emotionally skilled person to teach social and emotional skills" (Mejía, 2016, p.7). This places importance on the teacher's own social and emotional skills.

In the European context, the European Commission Network of Experts on Social Aspects of Education and Training (NESET) has also developed a framework. Its framework includes clusters of competencies similar to CASEL-5. The NESET framework introduced four competency clusters, namely (i) Self-awareness, (ii) Self-management, (iii) Social awareness, and (iv) Social management (Cefai et al., 2018b). This framework demonstrates the European Commission's effort to promote SEL as an important component of European education. It focuses on intrapersonal and interpersonal competencies, resilience, and academic learning-oriented skills (Cefai et al., 2018b).

Most of these frameworks focus on two core sets of personal competencies: intrapersonal and interpersonal. The intrapersonal competencies can "influence how students apply themselves in school and other settings" (National Research Council, 2012, p.4). Some

examples of intrapersonal competencies are attitudes and behaviours such as self-discipline, self-esteem, self-motivation, working independently, perseverance, and emotional regulation (National Research Council, 2012). In comparison, interpersonal competencies are "skills needed to relate to other people" (National Research Council, 2012, p. 4). These include collaboration, conflict resolution, communication, and leadership. Specifically, the National Research Council (NRC, 2012) categorises interpersonal, intrapersonal, and cognitive competencies as crucial skills to succeed in school, work, and life.

2.2.2 SEL in Malta

The Maltese National Curriculum Framework

In recent years, gaining qualifications and passing exams have become the primary purpose of school attendance (Cowburn & Blow, 2017). As Kevin Bonello, the former president of the Malta Union of Teachers, states,

This country's obsession with examinations and certificates has forced teachers to concentrate on oceans of content instead of skills. As a consequence, even those with qualifications are likely to lack the skills to adapt to new situations and to face tests for which they cannot do their usual rote learning (Bonello as cited in Borg, 2016).

The *National Curriculum Framework for all* (NCF) does not list the enhancement of students' social and emotional competencies as one of the main objectives of the Maltese curriculum (Ministry for Education and Employment, 2012). Specifically, the NCF aims to provide quality education for all learners where they can accomplish their full potential, reduce the percentage of early school leavers, encourage students to embark on higher education streams, and encourage lifelong learning (Ministry of Education, Employment and Family, 2012). The Maltese curriculum does not include a SEL programme within its framework (Ministry for Education and Employment, 2012). The curriculum focuses mainly on the academic aspect. However, the curriculum briefly mentions and acknowledges the importance of various SEL aspects, including a safe environment for students' well-being, developing healthy relationships, being an active citizen, developing empathy and moral

development. However, at the same time, it also recommends that "at least 55% of the time is dedicated to Maltese and English, Mathematics, Science and Technology" (Ministry for Education and Employment, 2012, p. 64). This means that NCF prioritises the academic curriculum.

Some social and emotional skills reappear in the cross-curricular themes and a number of subjects. These subjects include Religion and Ethics Education, Health and Physical Education, and Visual and Performing Arts (Ministry of Education, Employment and Family, 2012). Three cross-curricular themes include skills similar to CASEL's-5 skills. These include (i) Education for Diversity: teaching self-awareness, social change, and communicating for diversity; (ii) Education for Entrepreneurship, Creativity, and Innovation: teaching personal, interpersonal, cognitive, and practical skills; and (iii) Learning to Learn and Cooperative Learning: teaching social learning, personal learning and cognitive learning (Ministry for Education and Employment, n.d.).

PSCD

About 35 years ago, the Personal and Social Development (PSD) was introduced in Maltese secondary schools. PSD is part of the Maltese curriculum as a compulsory subject with two 40-minute sessions of PSD per week (Cefai, 2015). In these sessions, students can develop intrapersonal and interpersonal skills covering topics such as self-awareness, decision making and problem solving, self-expression, behaviour, dealing with peer pressure and healthy relationships (Ministry of Education, 2005). In 2017, the subject PSD was renamed Personal, Social and Career Development (PSCD) since the subject of careers had gained increased interest. The main objective of these PSCD sessions is to prepare students mentally for the challenges and responsibilities of life by improving their knowledge, skills and attitudes in a supportive and healthy environment (Ministry of Education, 2005; Cefai, 2015).

In Maltese secondary schools, it is assumed that teachers of PSCD, Social Studies, Home Economics, Religion and Ethics teach skills related to Social and Emotional Education in their lessons (Cefai, 2015). School, school staff, and parents have all praised PSCD as an important part of school life (Cefai, 2015; Borg & Triganza Scott, 2009). Since PSCD sessions are student-

centred, the teacher takes the role of a facilitator while students can be more experiential and express themselves more freely than in any other academic lesson. Students found the subject enjoyable, helpful, and not stressful as there was no formal assessment (Borg & Triganza Scott, 2009). Bonanno's (2011) study demonstrated that PSCD has a positive impact on students, especially in self-control and empowerment. However, having PSCD as a stand-alone subject fails the purpose and effectiveness of SEL (Zins & Elias, 2007; Greenberg et al., 2003). Therefore, the skills taught in PSCD sessions must also be embedded in the syllabus of other academic subjects so that students are continuously exposed to socio-emotional skills which will lead to more beneficial outcomes (Mahoney et al., 2018).

2.3. SEL programmes

2.3.1 Evidence-based SEL programmes

Nowadays, the field of SEL has a more extensive empirical base as research has grown significantly. As a result of this growth, SEL programmes, techniques, and strategies are becoming increasingly available. Evidence supporting the positive effects and benefits of SEL comes from rigorous research and evaluations of programmes conducted worldwide.

Evidence-based SEL programmes demonstrate numerous desirable positive outcomes. Improved academic achievement and significantly reduced behaviour problems are among the most prominent benefits (Durlak et al., 2011). Other outcomes have also been reported in the literature, including (i) improved attitudes about the self and others; (ii) improved relationships; (iii) enhanced student health; (iv) reduction in problem behaviours, use of alcohol and drug use, in violence and aggression; (v) positive effects on citizenship; (vi) workforce readiness; (vii) higher school and graduation attendance; and (viii) making responsible decisions (Schonert-Reichl, 2017; Greenberg et al., 2003; Durlak et al., 2011; Zins et al., 2007; Belfield et al., 2015; Zins & Elias, 2007; Greenberg et al., 2017).

Benefits of SEL

Advocates of SEL believe the benefits could be experienced in the short-term and even for a longer period of time (Greenberg et al., 2017; Mahoney et al., 2018). Mahoney et al. (2018) examined four large-scale meta-analyses of outcomes for students participating in school based SEL programmes. These studies come from three different countries; Netherlands (Sklad et al., 2012), United Kingdom (Wiglesworth et al., 2016), and two studies from the United States (Durlak et al., 2011; Taylor et al., 2017). Particularly, the meta-analyses by Durlak et al. (2011) and Wiglesworth et al. (2016) address the short-term effects of SEL on students.

The meta-analysis study by Durlak et al. (2011) is based on 213 schools with 270,034 students, ranging from kindergarten to high school. This study has received considerable attention from educators and even policymakers (Mahoney et al., 2018). It examines the impact of school based SEL programmes on students' behaviour and academic achievements (Durlak et al., 2011). It also discusses the implications of its findings for “educational policies and practice” (Durlak et al., 2011, p.406).

The study has two significant findings. The first finding states that students who participated in the SEL programme “showed significantly more positive outcomes with respect to enhanced SEL skills, attitudes, positive social behavior, and academic performance, and significantly lower levels of conduct problems and emotional distress” (Mahoney et al., 2018, p.20). The second finding indicates that students who participated in the SEL programme showed an 11 percentile-point increase in achievement than those who did not participate (Mahoney et al., 2018). This percentile gain indicated that SEL programmes are an educational benefit. These results show that SEL programmes significantly improve students' skills, behaviours, and attitudes (Mahoney et al., 2018). However, after the programmes ended, follow-up assessments showed that the gain decreased. Nevertheless, the gains remained statistically significant for at least six months after the programme intervention. This suggests that SEL programmes work best when students are continuously exposed to them. Durlak et al. (2011) also found that classroom teachers are effective, thus outside personnel are not necessary for the SEL programmes.

Sklad et al. (2012) and Taylor et al. (2017) focused on the long-term effects of SEL on students. The research study by Sklad et al. (2012) and Taylor et al. (2017) found that the long-term SEL effects were not as strong as the immediate results. It is not surprising that studies that conduct educational interventions have stronger short-term effects than long-term effects (Mahoney et al., 2018). As outlined in Greenberg et al. (2003), "short-term preventive interventions produce short-lived results" (p.470). For this reason, advocates and educators recommend SEL programmes to be implemented on a continuous basis throughout preschool and secondary schools to maximise outcomes (Mahoney et al., 2018; Wissberg et al., 2015). Another study concluded that SEL programmes lasting nine months or longer produce better student outcomes than the shorter SEL interventions (Catalano et al., 2002). Furthermore, Taylor et al. (2017) pointed out that the best way to predict how strong students' long-term gains are, was to look at "the strength of their short-term SEL gains" (Mahoney et al., 2018, p.22). Students who showed strong immediate gains in their socio-emotional skills tended to be better at maintaining their SEL knowledge (Mahoney et al., 2018).

Commonalities between the major findings of all four meta-analyses are reflected in their main results. The four studies found that students who participated in SEL programmes showed "greater gains in SEL competencies and academic performance" (p.20) relative to the students who did not participate in SEL programmes (Mahoney et al., 2018). Durlak et al. (2011) and Wigglesworth et al. (2016) measured their results by synthesizing data collected after students completed SEL programmes, while Taylor et al. (2017) and Sklad et al. (2012) measured their results by using data collected during different follow-up periods (Mahoney et al., 2018). In addition, the four studies addressed the following six areas: (i) SEL skills; (ii) Academic performance; (iii) Attitudes; (iv) Positive social behaviours; (v) Conduct problems; and (vi) Emotional distress. Overall, across all four meta-analyses, it was concluded that both short-term and long-term interventions had positive outcomes on academic, behavioural, emotional, and attitude aspects of students from around the world (Mahoney et al., 2018).

RESCUR

RESCUR is a project coordinated by the University of Malta with other universities. It has designed a resilience curriculum based on the challenges that many European children face in their early years. It targets explicitly vulnerable children such as Roma children, children with disabilities, gifted children, refugee, immigrant and ethnic minority children who are more at risk of "early school leaving, absenteeism, school failure, social exclusion and mental health problems amongst others" (Cefai et al., 2015, p.3). The curriculum aims to develop and equip students with the knowledge, skills and tools needed to overcome any obstacle in life. It aims to promote SEL, resilience skills, positive behaviour and relationships, well-being, mental health, and academic achievement. A pre-intervention and post-intervention were conducted on the effectiveness of this programme in the early years, where it showed an improvement in resilience skills, learning engagement, and prosocial behaviour (Cefai et al., 2018a).

2.3.2 Implementation Process

SEL programmes are more likely to succeed if they are well planned and implemented (Cefai et al., 2015). Teacher training, quality of materials, available support, and readiness are all issues that must be considered in the planning and implementation phases (Greenberg et al., 2003; Cefai et al., 2015; Weare & Nind, 2011). SEL programmes that are effectively implemented through research-based practices can lead to long-lasting improvements in various areas of students' lives (Greenberg et al., 2017; Niemi, 2019). According to Kress & Elias (2006) an effective SEL programme "should begin in preschool and continue through high school" (p.595). This is because students are most sensitive and vulnerable during this time. Evidence shows that although SEL is associated with many positive outcomes, it is common for schools and organisations to see less strong results than the outcomes they expected (Jones et al., 2018). This could be due to ineffective or inconsistent implementation practices (CASEL, 2013).

A considerable number of research emphasises the importance of effective implementation. Durlak et al. (2008) found that implementation practices had a major impact and influenced programme outcomes in over 500 studies. Studies like Durlak et al. (2011) suggested how high-quality implementation in SEL programmes is associated with better student outcomes. Studies in which implementation was not a problem showed improvements in all six assessed SEL skills and academic achievement outcomes (Durlak et al., 2011). Similarly, in a study conducted with Promoting Alternative THinking Strategies (PATHS) programme, implementation fidelity was associated with greater improvements in several SEL outcomes, including problem-solving and social skills (McClelland et al., 2017). On the other hand, low-quality implementation negatively affects teacher morale and student engagement (Elias, 2009). Studies that had problems implementing SEL programmes showed significant effects on only two of the six assessed SEL competencies and an improvement in academic performance outcomes (McClelland et al., 2017). As Jones et al. (2018) state, "implementation plays a critical role in shaping outcomes" (p. 1).

Effective programme implementation requires good planning and careful selection of programmes or strategies that best fit students (Jones et al., 2018). Schools are "complex and idiosyncratic places" filled with diverse individuals (Ainscow, 2016, p.78), and what works in one school may not work in another. Therefore, each school should personalise the SEL programme to cater to the specific needs of its students. The SEL programmes should be created and evaluated by "students, parents, educators, and community members as partners in planning, implementing and evaluating SEL efforts" (Zins & Elias, 2007, p.2). When schools implement SEL programmes, they should also invest in well-designed assessments to help monitor SEL instruction (Shriver & Weissberg, 2020).

There are a significant number of SEL programmes available to schools; however, most of them have not been evaluated to determine their quality and impact and effectiveness on students. According to CASEL (2013), it is not enough to select a strong SEL programme. This is because the implementation process and support for the programme are equally important. CASEL (2013) presents a systematic framework that assesses and evaluates the quality of classroom based SEL programmes. One of the main goals of the CASEL guide (2013) is to provide adequate information for educators to select and implement the right SEL

programme for their school. The CASEL guide (2013) is also helpful for researchers evaluating SEL programmes, programme developers looking to improve their SEL programmes, and even policymakers to select the best educational practices.

The Theory of Action guides CASEL's SEL Framework to support the implementation of high quality SEL programmes. This Theory of Action was developed from years of field testing. Specifically, CASEL (n.d.) identifies four key elements that guide quality SEL implementation and sustainability. These include: (i) Build foundational support and plan; (ii) Strengthen adult SEL competencies and capacity; (iii) Promote SEL for students; and (iv) Reflect on data for continuous improvement (CASEL, n.d.).

In a study of SEL programmes, McClelland et al. (2017) analysed several SEL interventions to determine which had the most significant impact on children. Nevertheless, they realised that due to the large number of available strategies, it was difficult to determine the most effective one (McClelland et al., 2017). However, they suggested three strategies that should be followed for a more successful SEL intervention. The first strategy states that an effective SEL intervention must include SEL training for teachers (McClelland et al., 2017). There is an emphasis on developing SEL skills in children and providing regular mentoring to teachers. The second strategy is to embed SEL skills directly into daily activities. The third strategy suggests that SEL should include family engagement so that children can develop SEL skills both at home and school (McClelland et al., 2017).

SAFE approach

The study by Durlak et al. (2011) indicated that SEL programmes must be well-designed and well-implemented. In their study, they used the programme SAFE. The acronym SAFE stands for four main features of the programme: sequential, active, focused, and explicit programme (Durlak et al., 2011). According to several studies, the acronym SAFE represents the most effective tool for testing high-quality SEL instruction (CASEL, 2015; CASEL, 2020; Durlak et al., 2011). SAFE includes a series of well-coordinated and connected activities to promote skill development (**S**equenced), use participatory learning such as role-playing so that it helps

students master new skills (**Active**), focus on improving personal and social skill development (**Focused**), and have activities that explicitly target social-emotional skills (**Explicit**) (CASEL, 2015; Durlak et al., 2011; Greenberg et al., 2017; Taylor et al., 2017; CASEL, 2020). Several articles have recommended this programme to obtain best practices for any SEL programme (Durlak et al., 2011; Taylor et al., 2017).

2.3.3 Targeted audience

Regardless of their diverse backgrounds and demographic group, all children will benefit from SEL programmes (Shriver & Weissberg, 2020; Taylor et al., 2017). This shows that students who have participated in SEL have achieved positive developmental outcomes regardless of their different socioeconomic status, race, family background, and geographic context (Taylor et al., 2017; Greenberg et al., 2003). Furthermore, SEL programmes should be made available to all children, not just those who already exhibit negative behaviours or are at higher risk of mental health problems, school failure, and social exclusion (Zins & Elias, 2007; Shriver & Weissberg, 2020). However, the fact that there is no differential impact on different groups of students does not mean that SEL is ‘one size fits all’. Researchers, educators, and programme developers must develop and implement SEL programmes in response to student needs (Taylor et al., 2017).

Teaching SEL from the earliest years is associated with happy and productive future adults (Jones et al., 2015). Most SEL programmes such as Step-by-Step (The World Bank, 2018) and Libre (UNESCO MGIEP, 2017) offer a curriculum for ages 6 to 17 years, as it is the most effective time to promote SEL skills (Jones et al., 2015; Zins & Elias, 2007). This is because the child is going through a developmental transformation during this period (Giedd et al., 1999).

Early Childhood

Early childhood is defined as the period that “spans the pre-natal period to eight years of age” (p.11) and is “the most intensive period of brain development throughout the lifespan” (WHO

& UNICEF, 2012, p. 11). During this period, the child undergoes rapid growth and development in four major areas of development (Grantham-McGregor et al., 2007), including physical, cognitive, linguistic, and socio-emotional development (Gouri, 2020). As it is the most important stage for human development it needs a lot of attention and adequate care (WHO & UNICEF, 2012; Gouri, 2020). Introducing SEL early in a child's life is extremely important because it helps young children acquire the skills, they will need for success later in health, social, academic, and cognitive areas (Zins & Elias, 2007). Research shows that young children who participate in SEL programmes are more likely to improve their behaviour due to progressive brain development, structure, and function (McClelland et al., 2017). Therefore, promoting SEL skills in early childhood is essential for a successful childhood and adult life.

Adolescence

Furthermore, Spear (2000, cited in Sebastian, 2015) described adolescence as the period of "physical, psychological and social transition between childhood and adulthood" (p.2). This period significantly impacts teenagers' adulthood as they begin to explore, learn, and take advantage of new opportunities. During adolescence, teens are most vulnerable and behavioural, or health difficulties are likely to impact their future negatively (Yeager, 2017). Reijntjes et al. (2011) examined how peer victimisation can lead to internalising problems (e.g., anxiety, depression, loneliness) and externalising problems (e.g., aggression, lack of self-control, truancy, delinquency). It has also been shown that adolescents who have been victims of bullying during adolescence may become more depressed, aggressive, and delinquent later in life (Reijntjes et al., 2011; Sebastian et al., 2010).

Puberty marks the beginning of adolescence and dramatic transformation. During this time, a considerable amount of neural development occurs as adolescents experience biological changes and psychosocial changes (Sebastian et al., 2010; Yeager, 2017; Roeser et al., 2000). Pubertal maturation involves changes in hormone levels, such as cortisol, dehydroepiandrosterone (DHEA-S), estradiol, oxytocin, and testosterone (Yeager, 2017). These hormones have been linked to social and emotional functioning (Yeager, 2017).

Although it has been shown to be more effective in the early years, introducing SEL during adolescence helps teenagers improve their skills and mindsets. An adolescent's behaviour and relationships can be affected by psychosocial changes, and minor problems like rejection can be extremely upsetting (Yeager, 2017; Sebastian et al., 2010). Teenagers can find these new demands overwhelming, and SEL instruction can help them deal with and manage their difficulties in a safe, respectful, and positive school environment (Yeager, 2017). Therefore, having SEL embedded with the curriculum will prevent many of the problems teenagers face at this critical stage.

2.4. Teachers and SEL

Schonert-Reichl's (2017) article discusses how teachers' chronic work stress and exhaustion affect students' SEL. The Oberle & Schonert-Reichl (2016) study on teacher burnout and student stress, found that teachers' job stress "is linked to the students' physiological stress regulation" (p.30). Thus, stressed teachers negatively impact students' outcomes, especially their physical well-being and health (Schonert-Reichl, 2017). However, this article did not conclude in which direction this occurs. This article points out that having teachers' promoting SEL in students is not enough to implement SEL (Schonert-Reichl, 2017). This is because, as Collie's (2017) study confirms, teachers with higher social and emotional competence "tend to experience greater well-being and motivation, implement SEL more effectively, and promote positive academic, social, and emotional outcomes among their students" (p.12).

Studies such as of Roeser et al. (2013) and Jennings et al. (2013) examined the effect and impact of mindfulness training on teachers. Mindfulness training helped the teachers promote their well-being, health, and social and emotional competence (Roeser et al., 2013). Studies on mindfulness have shown its effectiveness, particularly in promoting self-awareness and self-management skills (Roeser et al., 2013; Jennings et al., 2013). Jennings et al. (2013) found that teachers who participated in the study showed improved well-being and health, reduced stress, depression, anxiety, and improved relationships with students.

2.4.1 Teachers' training on SEL

In addition to the implementation process, teacher training on SEL is another important key process for an effective SEL programme (Payton et al., 2000). According to Buchana et al.'s (2009) research on teachers' knowledge, views, and practices in SEL classrooms, teachers needed training because of the current demand for improving students' social and emotional skills. To provide students with the social and emotional support they need and to help them develop these skills, teachers must have comprehensive knowledge and competence on SEL (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). The best way teachers can successfully implement SEL is through prior and ongoing training in this area.

Ee & Cheng (2013) suggested that "training is associated with both the quality and quantity of implementation" (p.67). Furthermore, they stated that pre-service teachers and in-service teachers should be provided with SEL training to enhance teacher competency (Ee & Cheng, 2013). However, research has found that despite considerable attention given to SEL, very little has been done to develop and train SEL in preservice and inservice educational settings (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009; Waajid et al., 2013). However, Alvarez's (2007) study showed that teachers who received behavioural and emotional training positively improved their classroom experiences because they felt they had sufficient training to create a positive classroom setting, implement strategies to manage students' aggressive behaviour, and promote a positive learning environment. In addition, Schonert-Reichl et al. (2015) recommended the importance of including SEL training in pre-service teacher education "to prepare teachers to address dimensions relevant to SEL" (p.408).

Moreover, schools can take the initiative and provide their teachers with training and workshops on SEL. As accurately stated by Chernyshenko (2018), when SEL is not embedded in the curriculum, "for the majority of students, their development remains a matter of luck, depending on whether this is a priority for their teacher and their school" (p.3). The school environment is a crucial setting for SEL, and thus, providing training to in-service teachers is beneficial both for teachers and students (CASEL, 2020). It helps enhance teachers' understanding of SEL, its importance and how it can be applied to the classroom.

The study by Askeff-Williams & Cefai (2014) on mental health showed that a considerable proportion of Australian and Maltese teachers were not confident in their ability to promote mental health in their classrooms. Accordingly, they indicated that "they need support to develop their capabilities in this field" (Askeff-Williams & Cefai, 2014, p.70). Specifically, Maltese teachers scored lower than Australian teachers on "three outcome factors, namely, Knowledge, Teaching Resources and providing Parenting Support" (Askeff-Williams & Cefai, 2014, p.2). These three factors indicated the areas in which Malta needs to improve, and specifically, this study will determine whether there has been an improvement in knowledge. Askeff-Williams & Cefai (2014) concluded their study by expressing the importance of teachers needing support "to build upon their existing capacities for successfully engaging with school change in order to promote students' mental health" (p.70).

In addition, teachers who had implemented RESCUR, a project that developed a resilience curriculum, were trained. Prior to the start of the scholastic year, teachers attended a 3-day workshop on implementing the RESCUR programme. During this workshop, teachers were provided with resources that needed to be used during the implementation of the programme. The resources included mindfulness activities, teachers' guide, a parents' guide, activities guide and posters. (Cefai et al., 2018a)

Furthermore, between 2016 and 2018, the University of Malta, together with five other European universities, participated in the Enhancing Resilience Through Teacher Education (ENRETE) project, a two-year project aimed at establishing a European Masters in Resilience. Overall, this project aimed to create learning environments that foster resilience and growth in learners by providing them with learning contexts, tools, and resources that facilitate their academic and social and emotional learning, and enhancing social inclusion and active citizenship (Cefai et al., 2017). Specifically, the project aimed to develop a series of modules to train teachers to address children's social and emotional needs and develop resilience. The modules aimed to develop teachers' competence in addressing the academic, social and emotional needs of students, particularly those who are vulnerable, such as immigrants, learners from ethnic and linguistic minorities, learners from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds, learners with learning difficulties and others with diverse educational needs (Cefai et al., 2017). As part of the ENRETE pilot project, a 20-hour training

workshop was held in Malta, attended by around twenty teachers from state primary and secondary schools. While this project provided teachers with the opportunity to become experts in students' social and emotional competence, it was not available to all educators. Furthermore, there is no further information on whether this project was successful or whether it will be introduced as a course of study at the University of Malta.

2.4.2 Challenges teachers face with SEL implementation

In Bhalla's study (2019), teachers reported challenges in implementing SEL in their classrooms. They cited two major constraints in implementing SEL: time and curriculum (Bhalla, 2019). Regarding the time constraint, teachers reported how they feel pressured to complete the syllabus on time, and it does not motivate them "to experiment with their pedagogy and integrate SEL learning in their teaching" (Bhalla, 2019, Challenges section). In addition, certain curricula are highly focused on the academic aspect, so teachers automatically feel the need to prioritise the academic aspect (Bhalla, 2019). This may lead to teachers feeling unmotivated and unbothered to integrate SEL into their teaching.

The lack of recognition of SEL teaching in the Maltese curriculum and policies makes it difficult for teachers to implement SEL properly. As mentioned earlier, the SEL programme should be interwoven with the school curriculum; however, no SEL programme is embedded in the Maltese curriculum. Even though there is an increased awareness on the importance of SEL in Malta, there is still the need for reform to align frameworks and guidelines with SEL teaching. A collective change is not possible unless this problem is addressed from the root, i.e., frameworks and policies.

Another challenge highlighted in Bhalla's study (2019) is the lack of training. Teachers showed concern that they are not knowledgeable enough in the area, and as a result, they do not feel confident enough to implement it in class. As Bhallas' survey (2019) suggested, to implement SEL effectively, teachers should be adequately equipped to teach SEL. Therefore, all programmes must provide training and support to all educators.

Jones & Bouffard (2012) also discussed limited staff training as one of the limitations of SEL instruction. Several studies have addressed teachers feeling inadequately trained and ill-prepared to teach social and emotional skills to their students (Askill-Williams & Cefai, 2014; Schonert-Reich et al., 2015; Walter et al., 2006). It has been reported that teachers often "receive little training in how to promote SEL skills, deal with peer conflict, or address other SEL-related issues" (Jones & Bouffard, 2012, p.8). Jones & Bouffard (2012) also remarked that pre-service teachers were only trained in basic skills such as behaviour management, and in-service support is also limited. The article by Waajida et al. (2013) also explained that teachers typically receive minimal to no formal training on the importance of incorporating social-emotional learning into the classroom.

2.5. Criticism

Although the SEL movement has seen a rapid increase in recent years, educational leaders and prominent scholars have concerns about this rapid increase in interest (Shriver & Weissberg, 2020; Jones et al., 2017). The main concerns relate to the actual definition of SEL (Shriver & Weissberg, 2020, p. 52) and whether parents, teachers, and others know what SEL is, how important it is, and what its benefits are (McShane, 2019). Starr (2019), a long-time proponent of SEL, warns that SEL can mean "many things" to many people and this concern was raised by many SEL activists (para.4). Therefore, the term SEL can undoubtedly be misunderstood and even misused to exploit its popularity or due to lack of knowledge (Shriver & Weissberg, 2020).

The second criticism is that SEL is overrated (Hess, 2017). Shriver & Weissberg (2020) described it as a "panacea for problems" (p.53) such as violence, depression, achievement gaps, and low-test scores. More research should be done to find the best way of assessing and monitoring the impact and value of SEL programmes (Shriver & Weissberg, 2020). Hess (2017) stated that he was not concerned with studies showing the benefits of effective programs, but he still believes "there is a long way to go before research 'proves' that social and emotional learning works " (para. 5).

The third critique at SEL is also by Starr (2019), and it focuses on developers and their products on SEL. Developers, both non-profit and for-profit, produce and sell SEL products such as materials and tools designed to improve SEL in schools (Starr, 2019). Some of them are well-intentioned groups that do excellent SEL work. However, there are also developers who sell appealing SEL products to schools solely for profit. They market their SEL products as if there is a "step-by-step formula to create a healthier social and emotional environment for kids and teachers" (Starr, 2019, para.5). This raises scepticism on the quality and consistency of each SEL programme.

2.6. Conclusion

SEL is gaining more popularity than ever because of the many research findings that show the benefits of SEL on students. As Durlak et al. (2011) noted, schools should promote students' cognitive, social and emotional development. Some schools still have limited resources and are under intense pressure to improve academic performance by implementing SEL programmes. However, SEL is not a discrete programme made for a specific number of people, nor is it a mental health service or a 45-minute session. As Starr (2019) says, SEL "must be woven into all the interactions within a school community" (para.8).

In searching for information specifically on Maltese teachers' views of SEL in secondary schools, the researcher found a dearth in the literature. This is partially because the Maltese curriculum does not follow a specific SEL programme. Therefore, to understand teachers' perspectives on SEL, the researcher has linked to global literature that explores the field of SEL. Thus, this study explores teachers' perspectives; particularly, their familiarity with SEL, their attitudes towards SEL, their training and challenges. This will help contribute knowledge and literature, while also better understanding the Maltese scenario with regards to SEL.

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter aims to explain the research method of this quantitative study regarding the views of Maltese teachers on Social and Emotional Learning. This chapter will present the choice of research design and research method. It will also describe the research tool chosen and created for the study, while also outlining its strengths and weaknesses. Additionally, this chapter will discuss the sampling method and the procedure for data collection. This will be followed by a discussion on the data analysis. Furthermore, this chapter will focus on the validity and reliability of this research. This chapter will conclude with a brief discussion on the limitations of this study, challenges encountered and ethical considerations.

3.2 Research design

The evidence on the role of SEL in Maltese schools is quite scarce. This study aims to identify secondary school teachers' perspectives on Social and Emotional Learning. The influence of a range of factors on SEL was explored to determine the current situation of SEL in participating Maltese schools. The study intended (i) to examine teachers' knowledge and attitudes towards SEL in the classroom, (ii) to determine the use of SEL in the classroom, (iii) to determine the relationship between teacher training on SEL and SEL implementation, (iv) to determine perceptions regarding the practicality of implementing SEL in the classroom, (v) to examine the barriers of SEL implementation, and (vi) to examine the influence of the curriculum on teachers' SEL implementation.

This study sought to answer the following main research question:

RQ1: What are the views of Maltese secondary school teachers about SEL?

More specifically through the following four research questions:

RQ2: Do teachers include SEL in their teaching subjects?

RQ3: Do teachers believe they are equipped or trained to teach SEL?

RQ4: What kind of challenges do they encounter?

RQ5: Do they think that SEL should be a key goal of the Maltese educational system?

There are various research methods that can be used, but the method chosen to be most effective for this study was a quantitative approach. Quantitative research explains phenomena by “collecting numerical data that are analysed using mathematically based methods (in particular statistics)” (Aliaga & Gunderson, 2002, p.14). This approach has quantifiable data that can be generalised from the sample population to the entire population within certain conditions and parameters (Macdonald & Headlam, 2008). It also seeks to understand the relationships between two variables within a population (Creswell, 2003). As this study specifically aims to determine teachers’ perceptions of SEL, a quantitative research design best complemented the study as it quantifies variables such as opinions, behaviours, and attitudes and uses quantifiable data to present the facts and reveal patterns and correlations (Aspers & Corte, 2019). Therefore, a quantitative approach was most effective for this study as it obtained numerical data to better visualise and compare facts regarding the participants’ opinions.

On the other hand, qualitative research is used “to gain an in-depth understanding of human behaviour, experience, attitudes, intentions, and motivations, on the basis of observation and interpretation, to find out the way people think and feel” (Ahmad et al., 2019, p.2829). Although qualitative data provides deeper insight than a quantitative approach, this study aimed for a general overview of teachers’ perceptions of SEL. While qualitative research provides detailed information on a topic by uncovering people’s thoughts (Aspers & Corte, 2019), quantitative research produces numerical data that is statistically analysed to maximise interpretation, understanding and use (Aliaga & Gunderson, 2002).

3.3 Research method

Quantitative methods predominantly used by researchers include surveys, interviews, observations, experiments, and semi-structured formal interviews (Ahmad et al., 2019). In this study, the researcher has considered the use of a questionnaire as the most effective tool as they are used to describe certain aspects of a population, including the study of relationships between variables (Kraemer, 1991). Since this study aims to identify the perspectives of a particular population and better understand their views by observing certain relationships between variables, a questionnaire seemed most appropriate to explore the aims of this study.

Questionnaires are an effective tool for collecting, organising and analysing data (De Vaus, 2014). Specifically, they aim to determine participants' beliefs, attitudes, behaviours, opinions, factual knowledge, intentions, and expectations (Gürbüz, 2017; Young, 2016; Pinsonneault & Kraemer, 1993). In this research, the questionnaire investigates teachers' views regarding various aspects of SEL. Particularly, whether they believe it is an essential part of education and whether they feel responsible for students' SEL. Also, whether they feel trained to do so and what challenges they experience in doing so.

In particular, this study opted to do an online questionnaire administered through Google Forms. Due to COVID-19, it was not possible to physically enter the schools. Therefore, online questionnaires were recommended. Online questionnaires are quick, time-efficient, and reliable (Young, 2016; Wimmer & Dominick, 2014; Greenfield, 2002; Silverman, 2004; Bell, 2010; Muijs, 2004). They are the fastest and most efficient method of collecting information from multiple respondents (Gürbüz, 2017). This study did not choose to use a qualitative research tool such as interviews because the study needs to gather the collective views of a large number of participants. As time was one of the main constraints in this study, choosing an online questionnaire as the research method meant that the researcher would reach multiple respondents within several weeks (Gürbüz, 2017; Young, 2016). In addition, this study needs to collect data that can be quantified or measured in order to present the results

in the form of numerical data that is quicker to understand, visualise, and compare. Also, online questionnaires are accurate and reliable as the participant is in control of their answers compared to interviews (Gürbüz, 2017) and since it is online, they can fill it in at their own convenience.

However, choosing a questionnaire as a research method has its limitations. Questionnaires have a fixed format; therefore, the researcher cannot go into depth (Bell, 2010; Sarantakos, 2013). In addition, it is not possible to determine whether the questions have been understood correctly. As a result, there is a risk that the participant may not understand the question or give a random answer, leading to measurement error (Young, 2016, Dörnyei, 2007). To reduce this risk, the researcher used simple, direct, and specific language, and the questions were informed by the literature review, particularly influenced by two main questionnaires which include a questionnaire conducted by Education Week Research Center (2015) titled *Social And Emotional Learning: Perspectives from America's Schools. Findings From A National Survey* and also the questionnaire conducted by Buchanan et al. (2009) for their research study.

3.4 Development of data collection instrument

The questionnaire consisted of seventeen questions designed to help the researcher identify the teachers' perspectives on SEL (refer to Appendix A). The questions presented were short and direct, and only included the necessary questions so that the participants can understand them better (Dillman, 2000; Fink, 2003, Foddy, 1993; Holbrook et al., 2006). The questions were worded simply by using specific terms and avoiding vague words (Dillmann, 2000; Foddy 1993; Holbrook et al., 2006). The use of complex vocabulary in the questions may make the respondents feel not competent enough, and participants may answer more with "don't know" (Foddy, 1993) or give socially desirable answers (Lietz, 2010). Participants may discontinue the questionnaire if it is too long, which would result in a low number of responses (Gürbüz, 2017). However, even though one should keep the number of questions to a minimum, an insufficient number of questions will negatively affect the results (Gürbüz, 2017).

Gürbüz (2017) stated, “poorly organised questions confuse respondents” (p.152). A well-organised questionnaire increases reliability; otherwise, participants’ responses are compromised, which in turn calls into question the quality of the research. In addition, the researcher adopted the “funnel” technique, in which questions are asked from the general to the specific (Gürbüz, 2017). Moreover, the opening questions are easy to answer and not threatening to the participants. When participants find the opening questions “easy and pleasant to answer, they are encouraged to continue” (Crawford, 1997, Opening questions section).

Most of the questions in the questionnaire are closed-ended questions. In this type of question, the participant is limited to certain answers. Closed-ended questions are beneficial to both the researcher and the participants because the questions can be answered more quickly, the choices can clarify the meaning of the question, the answers are easier to compare, and the coding and statistical analysis processes are made easier (Hyman & Sierra, 2016). The participants had three types of closed-ended questions: multiple-choice questions, yes/no format questions, and Likert-type questions. In addition, the “Other” category was chosen for participants to add their own responses. Thus, no possible information will be left out (Gürbüz, 2017).

Rating scales were used to allow “the respondent to choose one of several options indicating the level of agreement or opinion on an item” (Muijs, 2004, p.47). This study used the Likert type question, a numerical scale that includes several categories, usually between three and seven. This traditional rating scale requires participants to respond according to their level of agreement with the given statement. This scale includes five categories like (“strongly agree”, “agree”, “neutral”, “disagree”, “strongly disagree”). The more categories included, the more difficult it becomes for the respondent to make distinctions (Muijs, 2004).

The questionnaire also contained open-ended questions, which have the advantage of allowing the participant to formulate his or her answer freely. This allows the researcher to discover their opinions through their answers, and these can include responses which the researcher did not think about before (Muijs, 2004). These open-ended questions are important because they hold the written statements, which are the most reliable source to

determine each participant's attitudes, beliefs, behaviours and characteristics (Gürbüz, 2017). Although open-ended data are usually treated qualitatively, in this research, the data was analysed quantitatively by counting the word frequencies (Young, 2016). On the other hand, closed-ended questions generate quantitative data that was analysed statistically (Young, 2016). In this study, the number of open-ended questions was kept to a minimum because of their time-consuming nature (Muijs, 2004). Also, most open-ended questions in this questionnaire required a short answer, except for the last questions that allowed the participants to express themselves in writing.

The seventeen questions presented in the questionnaire (refer to Appendix A) are based on the literature review and the research questions. The questionnaire consists of four sections so that the questions are clear and focus on the main objectives of the research. The first section (Q1- Q5) aimed to collect background information about the participants: their gender, teaching experience, subject taught, school and qualifications. Questions on the demographics of the respondents help to obtain information on their background.

Section two (Q6, Q7, Q12 - Q15) identified knowledge and attitudes towards SEL. Particularly, Question 6 and Question 7 determined how familiar teachers are with SEL and whether they see it as important for student well-being. Question 12 and Question 13 focused on the satisfaction of knowledge and who is responsible for teaching SEL. Question 14 identified social validity and determined whether it is practical to implement SEL in lessons. Question 15 suggested who currently involves SEL skills in their lessons, which also answered research question 2: Do teachers include SEL in their teaching subject?

Section three (Q8-Q11) revealed teacher training related to research question 3. Specifically, it focused on teachers' training; whether they had training on SEL, the type of training, topics covered, and their confidence in teaching SEL after training. Section four (Q16-Q17) determined SEL challenges and recommendations. Question 16 investigated the challenges teachers face; specifically, by answering research question 4. Lastly, Question 17 aims to allow teachers to express their recommendations, opinions and general views on SEL.

3.5 Population Selection

In this study, the questionnaire aimed to draw inferences about a particular type of population by examining a sample from that population (Young, 2016). A population is a group of objects or people in which the researcher is interested (Groves et al., 2009) and “the group of people we want to generalise to” (Muijs, 2004, p. 15). The participants in this study are subject teachers (excluding PSCD), who teach in one of the three participating middle and secondary state schools in Malta. The opportunity to participate was given regardless of their age, gender, and years of teaching experience.

The study focused on teachers because previous studies have concluded that they are effective in teaching social and emotional skills (Durlak et al., 2011). However, PSCD teachers were excluded from participating in this study due to similarities in the learning outcomes of some PSCD topics (Ministry for Education and Employment, 2015). Therefore, specifically the focus of this study was not on PSCD teachers but on teachers teaching other subjects. The curriculum for other subjects does not include the teaching of social and emotional skills as part of the subject. In this study, the researcher wanted to know how many teachers with definite academic learning outcomes include teaching social and emotional competencies.

A non-probability sampling technique was used in this study, specifically purposive sampling. The researcher initially requested access to twenty-two schools; however, since the pandemic caused many additional challenges in schools, the Ministry for Education and Employment (MEDE) restricted the number of studies per school. For this study, MEDE allowed access to three schools from three different state colleges consisting of one Middle school and two Secondary schools, namely: Rabat Middle School from St. Nicholas’ College, Mrieħel Secondary School from St. Theresa College, and Pembroke Secondary School from St. Clare College. The disadvantage of purposive sampling is that it limits the ability to generalise to the entire population (Barratt et al., 2014; Creswell, 2014). Therefore, this study cannot make any significant assumptions, and results should always be interpreted with caution considering the participating sample.

3.6 Data collection

The researcher requested permission from the Heads of Schools to conduct the study by e-mailing them a consent form (refer to Appendix B). After obtaining consent, the researcher made the online questionnaire accessible and sent an e-mail to the Heads of Schools to forward to their teachers. This e-mail contained a summary (refer to Appendix C) of the study and an attached detailed information letter (refer to Appendix D) with an online link to the questionnaire. The Heads of Schools were the intermediary for all e-mails between the researcher and the teachers. In addition, there was a follow-up of several reminders to encourage participation. The questionnaire was estimated to be 6 minutes long, and it was available online for eleven weeks, from March 18th through June 4th. Initially, the questionnaire was to be available for eight weeks; however, because the response rate was much lower than expected, the researcher decided to extend the questionnaire for a few more weeks to increase the response rate.

In this data collection, the researcher offered an incentive to encourage responses (Cobanoglu & Cobanoglu, 2003). In this research, participants have a chance to win a €50 voucher from TrilogY LTD. Participants who wanted to take part in this incentive had to send their details (name and e-mail address) to the e-mail address provided so that the winner could be contacted. By sharing their personal details for participation in the prize-giving, participants did not remain completely anonymous; however, participation was optional, and their responses could not be tracked in any way through their details. Those who wished to remain fully anonymous could opt out of the incentive. The e-mails received from participants were accessed once data collection was completed.

3.7 Data analysis

Once the period in which the questionnaire was available online had ended, the data was coded for statistical analysis and entered into a spreadsheet. The coding of data consisted of translating each response option into a numerical value starting at 1. Open-ended questions and multiple-choice questions with text responses required independent coding. The

spreadsheet with the data was then transferred to Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) for the descriptive and inferential analysis of the data.

All the data was analysed using SPSS. In the first phase of analysis, the researcher performed Descriptive Statistics as it analyses one variable at a time (Patel, 2009). Specifically, the researcher used frequency tables to analyse the collected data. The results are presented in a table with percentages. Descriptive statistical analysis is used for sample groups to acquire a better understanding of the population (Gürbüz, 2017). In addition, it is commonly used as it provides the “basis for more advanced statistical techniques” (Gürbüz, 2017, p.155).

In the second phase of analysis, the researcher performed Inferential Statistics. This is used to study the relationships between variables and helps make predictions, conclusions, and generalisation of a population (Tyagi, 2021). The variables in this questionnaire are categorical; therefore, the Chi-square test was used to analyse the association between two categorical variables. The results are also presented in tables with percentages. In addition, the last question required a short answer, and a brief Thematic Analysis was carried out. Its responses were read for content analysis and the data was coded into similar themes.

3.8 Validity and Reliability

Assessing the validity and reliability of the data collection tool is important in evaluating the quality of a study (Heale & Twycross, 2015). Price et al. (2015) described validity as the “extent to which the scores from a measure represent the variable they are intended to” (p.92) in a quantitative study. Heale & Twycross (2015) suggested three main types of validity to ensure a trustworthy quantitative study, namely content validity, construct validity and criterion validity.

This study implemented content validity to assess whether the content of the questionnaire “covers all relevant parts of the subject it aims to measure” (Middleton, 2020, para.13). In this study, content validity ensured that the questionnaire matches the measuring teachers’ perspective on SEL by developing the questionnaire “on relevant existing knowledge” (Middleton, 2020, para.10). To address this, the questionnaire of this study was based on

findings from the literature related to SEL. The questionnaire was designed based on Education Week Research Center's (2015) survey named *Social and Emotional Learning: Perspectives from America's Schools. Findings From A National Survey* by Education Week Research Center (2015) and on Buchanan and colleagues' (2009) survey. Considering both instruments have previously been used to collect information about teachers' perspectives on SEL, both questionnaires were used as literature references. Unfortunately, a pilot study was not conducted due to limitations in gaining participants as well as time constraints. This was considered upon presentation of results and research conclusions.

The second measure of the quality of a quantitative study is reliability (Heale & Twycross, 2015). Reliability refers to the internal consistency of an instrument (Cohen et al., 2007; Heale & Twycross, 2015). The internal consistency ensures that this research measurement is accurate because it reflects the coherence of "results across factors within a test" (El Hajjar, 2018, p.31). In such study, a test-retest reliability test could have confirmed the internal consistency of the study; however, due to time constraints, this was not possible.

3.9 Challenges and limitations

Several problems and challenges were encountered in conducting this study. The first challenge was that the number of participants was not as large as originally anticipated due to the Covid-19 pandemic, which limited the number of participating schools. Furthermore, this research was turned down by two assigned schools due to a high number of research studies being conducted in the same school. Thus, obtaining permissions and having access to participants was a big challenge. Consequently, due to the small sample size, the data collected cannot be generalised to a larger scale. Therefore, this limitation was considered when analysing the results and deriving their implications. Moreover, participation had to be voluntary to not put additional pressure on teachers during this particularly difficult time. A voluntary response sample is considered by some as a biased sampling method as there is a tendency for people who have strong opinions and interest in that particular topic to be the most likely to participate in the questionnaire (*Survey Sampling Bias*, 2012).

Communication was another major challenge. The researcher had to rely on the Heads of Schools, as they were the intermediaries between the researcher and the teachers. However, e-mails and reminders were not immediately sent to the teachers. This problem is understandable, especially during this difficult time when Heads of Schools have other important tasks that need to be prioritised. However, the lack of e-mail reminders meant that few respondents took part in the questionnaire, and for this reason, the questionnaire was left online for longer than originally planned. This undoubtedly led to delays in the overall research process.

Moreover, one of the main problems that this research may have been having socially desirable responses. Holtgraves (2004) confirmed that social desirability refers to the “tendency to respond in self-report items in a manner that makes the respondent look good rather than to respond in an accurate and truthful manner” (p. 161). This can lead to data that “inaccurately reflect respondents’ actual behaviours” (Lietz, 2010, p. 252). Lietz (2010) identified three possibilities of socially desirable responses that participants may rely on: taking a position that is most preferred by society, giving answers that show the ideal rather than admitting ignorance due to social prestige and fear of being identified. To minimise these effects, the researcher ensured that the questionnaire is anonymous as it is more likely that participants will answer truthfully (Sheperis, n.d.).

3.10 Ethical considerations

The researcher had to reflect and address several types of ethical issues when completing this study. This research followed the requirements of the code of ethics of the University of Malta and, a research proposal was submitted for ethical clearance and accepted by the Faculty Research Ethics Committee (FREC). Additionally, another form was submitted to request permission to carry out research in state schools by the MEDE Research Ethics Committee (MREC). This was approved by the Directorate for Research, Lifelong Learning and Employability within the Ministry of Education and Employment.

In addition, the research had to consider two important ethical issues: obtaining permission from the Head of Schools and obtaining consent from participants. The researcher sent an e-mail with a permission letter informing the Heads of Schools about the study and seeking their consent. Once the principals gave consent to the researcher by responding to the e-mail, the principal was the intermediary between the teachers and the researcher. The principal then forwarded an e-mail to the teachers that contained the information letter for the participants (refer to Appendix D). This letter had information about the purpose of the study and data collection, who was eligible to participate, benefits and consequences, confidentiality, ethical clearance, incentive information and the declaration of consent. By completing the questionnaire, the participants agreed to the information letter and consented to participate in the questionnaire.

Furthermore, the questionnaire was anonymous. As it was an online questionnaire, the instrument used did not collect IP address; therefore, the responses remained anonymous. Participation in the study was voluntary, and there were no negative consequences for participants if they did not complete the questionnaire. The questions were worded in such a way that they were not offensive. However, if participants felt offended, they could have withdrawn at any time by simply closing the browser window. Their responses were then not recorded. Finally, all data collected in this research study was used solely for this data collection process and after the study was concluded, all data collected was deleted. Participants could contact the researcher to request the results.

3.11 Conclusion

This chapter outlined and justified the methodology implemented in this study. Due to the nature of the study, the researcher opted for a quantitative approach. An online questionnaire was used, as it allowed data to be obtained from a large sample of the population. The participants were non-PSCD teachers, who taught in one of the three participating schools. This chapter also provided an overview of the data collection procedure. Specifically, the researcher conducted Descriptive Statistics and Inferential Statistics and the results were analysed using SPSS. In addition, this chapter presented the

study validity and reliability, its limitations, and ethical considerations. In the following chapter, the results of the data analysis are presented in light of the research questions.

Chapter 4: Results and Data Analysis

4.1 Introduction

This research was conducted to identify teachers' perceptions about SEL. The results intend to inform and provide recommendations about the local scenario with regard to SEL. Evidence shows that SEL is very beneficial to the well-being of all students; however, in doing so, it is also important to understand teachers' views on the subject, especially since they are the ones implementing SEL in the classroom. In addition, the research questions led towards a quantitative methodology. An online questionnaire was chosen so that information could be collected from a large number of participants. The participants were teachers (non-PSCD teachers), who taught in one of the three participating state schools. The data collected was used for a descriptive and inferential statistical analysis.

In this chapter, the findings obtained from the online questionnaire are analysed and presented. In the following sections, we will analyse the questions asked per subject and also compare them across subjects using the chi-square test to examine whether two categorical variables are associated. Some of the variables analysed through chi-square test include gender, qualifications, subject taught, school, teaching experience, familiarity with SEL, importance of SEL, current involvement of SEL, responsible personnel for teaching SEL, training, institutions providing training, preparedness, satisfaction, and practicality. In all the presented results analysis and compiling of research findings, the following criteria were maintained: The null hypothesis assumes that variable 1 is not associated with variable 2. It is accepted if the p-value exceeds the level of significance (0.05). The alternative hypothesis indicates variable 1 is associated with variable 2. It is accepted if the p-value is less than the level of significance (0.05).

4.2 Respondents demographics

4.2.1 Gender

A total of 76 teachers participated in this study out of the three participating schools, the majority (73.7%) of the participants were females, and the other 26.3% were males.

4.2.2 School

Teachers were asked to indicate the school in which they are currently teaching. 47.4% of respondents were teachers at STC Mrieħel Secondary School, 28.9% were teachers at SCC Pembroke Secondary School and the other 23.7% were teachers at G.C. Rabat Middle School.

4.2.3 Experience

The number of years of teaching experience varies among the teachers who responded to the questionnaire (Table 1). Around 47% of teachers have worked as teachers for less than 10 years, while 43% have worked as teachers for between 11 and 25 years. At the other end of the spectrum, 9.2% were long-time veterans, having worked in the field for more than 26 years. Most participants had between 16 to 20 years of teaching experience (21.1%). 18.4% of teachers had between 3 to 5 years of teaching experience, while 17.1% reported having 11 to 15 years of teaching experience.

		Frequency	Percentage
Teaching Experience	Less than a year	3	3.9%
	1-2 years	6	7.9%
	3-5 years	14	18.4%
	6-10 years	13	17.1%
	11-15 years	9	11.8%
	16-20 years	16	21.1%
	21-25 years	8	10.5%
	More than 26 years	7	9.2%

Table 1: Number of years teaching

4.2.4 Subject Taught

The teachers were asked to list which subject they taught. Table 2 shows a vast list of different subjects taught by the participating teachers. Some subjects were grouped; Languages (English, Maltese, Spanish, Italian, French), Sciences (Maths, Science, Physics, Biology), Social Sciences (History, Geography, Social Studies), Technological Studies (ICT, Design & Technology), and Vocational, Education and Training (VET) subjects (VET Hospitality, VET Media Literacy, Hairdressing & Beauty). The category 'Option subject' includes subjects that secondary students take as an option in Year 9, which were not specified.

Table 2 shows that the majority (35.5%) of the participating teachers teach language subjects. This was followed by teachers who taught Science (17.1%), Social Sciences (11.8%), Home Economics (9.2%), Option subjects (9.2%), VET subjects (5.3%), Technological Studies (5.3%), Religion (2.6%), P.E. (2.6%), and Ethics (1.3%).

		Frequency	Percentage
Subject Taught	Languages	27	35.5%
	Sciences	13	17.1%
	Social Sciences	9	11.8%
	Home Economics	7	9.2%
	Option subjects	7	9.2%
	VET subjects	4	5.3%
	Technological subjects	4	5.3%
	Religion	2	2.6%
	P.E.	2	2.6%
	Ethics	1	1.3%
	Total	76	100.0%

Table 2: Subjects taught

4.2.5 Teaching degree

Teachers were also asked what course they completed to become a qualified teacher (Table 3). The majority (46.1%) of the teachers completed the Bachelor of Education (B. Ed) (Hons) course followed (39.5%) by participants that completed the Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) course. 5.3% had a Master’s degree. The rest (9.2%) followed another course which was not specified.

		Frequency	Percentage
Course	B. Ed (Hons)	35	46.1%
	PGCE	30	39.5%
	Other	7	9.2%
	Masters	4	5.3%

Table 3: Type of course completed by teachers

4.3. Knowledge and Attitudes

4.3.1 Familiarity with SEL

SEL has gained considerable interest in recent years due to the evidence implying the importance and countless benefits SEL has for students (Durlak et al., 2011). General awareness has led to SEL becoming an increasingly prominent part of conversations about student well-being and academic achievement. Respondents were asked to share their views on how familiar they are with SEL and how important they believe SEL is to students. Question 6 (refer to Appendix A) was asked to confirm whether the teachers were knowledgeable about SEL. Respondents were asked to rank their familiarity with SEL on a five-point Likert scale, where 1 is “Not familiar at all” and 5 is “Very familiar”.

Table 4 shows how familiar teachers were with the term SEL respective of their gender. Around 66% of the participants indicated that they were moderately or very familiar with the term SEL. Around 26.3% of the teachers considered themselves somewhat familiar with SEL. Conversely, only around 8% of the participants claimed that they are slightly or not familiar at all with this term. This means that the vast majority (93.4%) were familiar with the concept of SEL, some more than others. However, the other 6.6% expressed that they are not familiar

at all with SEL. Moreover, there is no significant gender discrepancy since the p-value (0.568) exceeds the 0.05 level of significance.

			Gender		
			Female	Male	Total
How familiar are you with the term SEL?	Not familiar at all	Count	5	0	5
		Percentage	8.9%	0.0%	6.6%
	Slightly familiar	Count	1	0	1
		Percentage	1.8%	0.0%	1.3%
	Somewhat familiar	Count	13	7	20
		Percentage	23.2%	35.0%	26.3%
	Moderately familiar	Count	22	8	30
		Percentage	39.3%	40.0%	39.5%
	Very familiar	Count	15	5	20
		Percentage	26.8%	25.0%	26.3%
	Total	Count	56	20	76
		Percentage	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

$$X^2(4) = 2.940, p = 0.568$$

Table 4: Teachers' familiarity with the term SEL by Gender

Table 5 shows how familiar teachers were with the term SEL irrespective of their type of teaching degree. Teachers who completed either the B.Ed (Hons) or PGCE scored 45% receptively because they thought they were well acquainted with the term SEL. On the other hand, only 5% of the teachers with Master's degree considered themselves very familiar. 60% of those who are not familiar with SEL have completed a PGCE course, and 40% have completed other courses. However, due to the small sample size, the results cannot confirm that this is the case. Also, there is no significant degree discrepancy since the p-value (0.719) exceeds the 0.05 level of significance.

How familiar are you with the term SEL?		What course did you complete in order to become a qualified teacher?				Total
		B. Ed (Hons)	PGCE	Masters	Other	
Not familiar at all	Count	0	3	0	2	5
	Percentage	0.0%	60.0%	0.0%	40.0%	100.0%
Slightly familiar	Count	1	0	0	0	1
	Percentage	100%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%
Somewhat familiar	Count	11	7	1	1	20
	Percentage	55.0%	35.0%	5.0%	5.0%	100.0%
Moderately familiar	Count	14	11	2	3	30
	Percentage	46.7%	36.7%	6.7%	10.0%	100.0%
Very familiar	Count	9	9	1	1	20
	Percentage	45.0%	45.0%	5.0%	5.0%	100.0%
Total	Count	35	30	4	7	76
	Percentage	46.1%	39.5%	5.3%	9.2%	100.0%

$\chi^2(12) = 10.996, p = 0.529$

Table 5: *Familiarity with SEL by teaching degree*

4.3.2 Importance of SEL for the students' well-being

The teachers were also questioned about whether they think SEL is important for the student's well-being. This question was asked to examine Maltese teachers' opinion on its importance, especially as a SEL programme is not part of the current Maltese curriculum. Respondents were asked to rank how much they agree that SEL is important for the student's well-being on a five-point Likert scale, where 1 is "Strongly disagree" and 5 is "Strongly agree."

In Table 6, the strong majority (94.7%) of the respondents reported that they agree or strongly agree on the importance of SEL for students. Slightly over two-thirds (68.4%) of the teachers expressed strong agreement. On the other hand, 1.3% believed that SEL is not important, and 3.9% had a neutral opinion. None of the teachers voted "Strongly disagree". This shows that the teachers are aware and recognise the benefits SEL has on students. Additionally, both the female and the male participants reported around 95%, respectively, agreeing or strongly

agreeing on the importance of SEL in the student’s well-being. Moreover, there is no significant gender discrepancy since the p-value (0.380) exceeds the 0.05 level of significance.

			Gender		
			Female	Male	Total
Do you think SEL is important for the student’s well-being?	Disagree	Count	1	0	1
		Percentage	1.8%	0.0%	1.3%
	Neutral	Count	2	1	3
		Percentage	3.6%	5.0%	3.9%
	Agree	Count	12	8	20
		Percentage	21.4%	40.0%	26.3%
	Strongly agree	Count	41	11	52
		Percentage	73.2%	55.0%	68.4%
Total	Count	56	20	76	
	Percentage	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	

$$X^2(3) = 3.079, p = 0.380$$

Table 6: Teachers’ views on the importance of SEL for the students’ well-being by Gender

Furthermore, Table 7 shows a positive association between familiarity with the term SEL and the importance of SEL for students’ well-being. From the participating teachers who reported being very familiar with SEL, 95% indicated that they strongly agree that SEL is important for the students’ well-being. Moreover, this association is significant since the p-value (0.003) is less than the 0.05 level of significance. Hence, the findings indicate that teachers who are familiar with the term SEL tend to agree on the importance of SEL and its positive outcomes on the students.

Do you think SEL is important for the student's well-being?

How familiar are you with the term SEL?		Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree	Total
Not familiar at all	Count	1	0	1	3	5
	Percentage	20.0%	0.0%	20.0%	60.0%	100.0%
Slightly familiar	Count	0	0	1	0	1
	Percentage	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%	0.0%	100.0%
Somewhat familiar	Count	0	2	9	9	20
	Percentage	0.0%	10.0%	45.0%	45.0%	100.0%
Moderately familiar	Count	0	1	8	21	30
	Percentage	0.0%	3.3%	26.7%	70.0%	100.0%
Very familiar	Count	0	0	1	19	20
	Percentage	0.0%	0.0%	5.0%	95.0%	100.0%
Total	Count	1	3	20	52	76
	Percentage	1.3%	3.9%	26.3%	68.4%	100.0%

$\chi^2(12) = 29.773, p = 0.003$

Table 7: Teachers' views on the importance of SEL for the students' well-being by how familiar they are with the term SEL

4.3.3 Satisfaction with current knowledge on SEL

Respondents were asked to rank their satisfaction of knowledge on SEL on a 5-point Likert scale where 1 is "Very familiar" and 5 is "Very satisfied". This question was asked to understand how the participating teachers feel towards their knowledge on SEL. In this question, the teachers could choose more than one answer; therefore, the following percentages represent each option individually.

Table 8 shows that the majority (35.5%) of the teachers opted for the “Neutral” option. This establishes that teachers were unsure and could not pass judgement on their satisfaction. 28.9% of the teachers considered themselves satisfied with their knowledge, and another 10.5% considered themselves very satisfied. On the other hand, 18.4% expressed a lack of satisfaction with their knowledge on SEL, and the other 6.6% considered themselves very unsatisfied.

		Frequency	Percentage
Are you satisfied with your current knowledge and skills on SEL?	Very unsatisfied	5	6.6%
	Unsatisfied	14	18.4%
	Neutral	27	35.5%
	Satisfied	22	28.9%
	Very satisfied	8	10.5%

Table 8: Satisfaction on current knowledge of SEL

4.3.4 Implementation of SEL in lessons

Before starting the questionnaire, the participants were presented with the following definition of SEL: “Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) is the process through which children and adults understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions” (CASEL, 2013). Therefore, when indicating that they are contributing to SEL development, they are claiming to be conducting teachings related to understanding and managing emotions and set goals, showing empathy, establish relationships and make decisions. However, the extent, quality and impact of this implementation is yet to be investigated.

The teachers were also questioned about whether they were implementing SEL skills in their teaching. Table 9 shows that more than half (55.3%) of the participating teachers were

currently teaching SEL skills in their classrooms, whereas the remaining 44.7% were focusing on the academic aspect of the subject. It is important to note that although teachers claimed to be implementing SEL in the classroom, their responses do not determine how SEL is implemented, their teaching approaches, and whether it is indeed enhancing students' social and emotional growth. However, in their responses, they do indicate that teachers do not consider their teaching to be purely academic, and that some aspects of social and emotional teaching are also part of their pedagogy and teaching practices.

Also, Table 9 shows that all (100%) Religion and P.E. teachers consider their teaching to include aspects of SEL. Aside from the fact that the sample size of these two categories is small, this high percentage of Religion and P.E teachers implementing SEL may be due to the fact that both subjects convey values to students. Furthermore, a great majority (85.7%) of Option subjects' teachers consider their teaching to include aspects of SEL. A little over half of the Home Economics (57.1%) and Social Sciences (55.6%) teachers claimed that they include SEL in their lessons. Half of the VET subjects teachers claimed to include SEL, while less than half of the Languages (48.1%) and Technological subjects (25%) teachers consider their teaching including SEL. Moreover, there is no significant discrepancy since the p-value (0.248) exceeds the 0.05 level of significance.

Subject Taught		Are you currently involved in teaching SEL skills in your classroom?		
		Yes	No	Total
Languages	Count	13	14	27
	Percentage	48.1%	51.9%	100.0%
Sciences	Count	7	6	13
	Percentage	53.8%	46.2%	100.0%
Social Sciences	Count	5	4	9
	Percentage	55.6%	44.4%	100.0%
Home Economics	Count	4	3	7
	Percentage	57.1%	42.9%	100.0%
Technological subjects	Count	1	3	4
	Percentage	25.0%	75.0%	100.0%
VET subjects	Count	2	2	4
	Percentage	50.0%	50.0%	100.0%
Option subjects	Count	6	1	7
	Percentage	85.7%	14.3%	100.0%
Religion	Count	2	0	2
	Percentage	100.0%	0.0%	100.0%
Ethics	Count	0	1	1
	Percentage	0.0%	100.0%	100.0%
P.E.	Count	2	0	2
	Percentage	100.0%	0.0%	100.0%
Total	Count	42	34	76
	Percentage	55.3%	44.7%	100.0%

$\chi^2(9) = 9.199, p = 0.419$

Table 9: Implementation of SEL in the classroom by subject

Furthermore, as stated in the literature review, the most effective period to promote SEL skills is from preschool to high school (Jones et al., 2015; Zins & Elias, 2007). This is because, during these periods, the child is going through a physical, cognitive, sexual, social, and emotional transformation. Table 10 shows that from the participating schools, more than half (55.3%) of the teachers claimed to be implementing SEL skills in their classroom. However, apart from having a low participating number, one cannot generalise this finding because this study excludes teachers who we know already have some involvement in SEL development for

example, during PSCD lessons. Moreover, there is no significant school discrepancy since the p-value (0.233) exceeds the 0.05 level of significance.

			Are you currently involved in teaching SEL skills in your classroom?		
			Yes	No	Total
School	STC Mrieħel Secondary School	Count	21	15	36
		Percentage	58.3%	41.7%	100.0%
	SCC Pembroke Secondary School	Count	9	13	22
		Percentage	40.9%	59.1%	100.0%
	G.C. Rabat Middle School	Count	12	6	18
		Percentage	66.7%	33.3%	100.0%
Total		Count	42	34	76
		Percentage	55.3%	44.7%	100.0%

$$X^2(2) = 2.917, p = 0.233$$

Table 10: Current implementation of SEL skills in class categorised by School

Table 11 shows that 23.8% of teachers with 16-20 years of experience reported most involvement of SEL in their teaching. On the other hand, 20.6% of teachers that have 3-5 years of experience reported no implementation of SEL. Moreover, there is no significant association between teaching experience and inclusion of SEL in lessons since the p-value (0.917) exceeds the 0.05 level of significance.

Are you currently involved
in teaching SEL skills in your
classroom?

			Yes	No	Total
Teaching Experience	Less than a year	Count	2	1	3
		Percentage	4.8%	2.9%	3.9%
	1-2 years	Count	4	2	6
		Percentage	9.5%	5.9%	7.9%
	3-5 years	Count	7	7	14
		Percentage	16.7%	20.6%	18.4%
	6-10 years	Count	8	5	13
		Percentage	19.0%	14.7%	17.1%
	11-15 years	Count	5	4	9
		Percentage	11.9%	11.8%	11.8%
	16-20 years	Count	10	6	16
		Percentage	23.8%	17.6%	21.1%
	21-25 years	Count	3	5	8
		Percentage	7.1%	14.7%	10.5%
	More than 26 years	Count	3	4	7
		Percentage	7.1%	11.8%	9.2%
Total		Count	42	34	76
		Percentage	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

$\chi^2(7) = 2.633, p = 0.917$

Table 11: Current implementation of SEL skills in class categorised by teaching experience

Table 12 shows that from the participants who claimed that they strongly agree that SEL is important for the student's well-being, 51.9% of them were currently implementing SEL in class. This suggests that there are challenges that are holding these teachers back from implementing SEL in their lessons. Whilst those participants who selected agreed option for the importance of SEL in students well-being, 75% are implementing SEL in their lessons, and the other 25% are not. In addition, Table 12 shows a positive association between the importance of SEL for student well-being and the current implementation of SEL in the classroom. Moreover, this association is significant since the p-value (0.040) is less than the 0.05 level of significance. Hence, findings indicate with confidence that teachers who believe

that SEL is important for student well-being are more likely to teach SEL skills in their classroom.

		Are you currently involved in teaching SEL skills in your classroom?		Total	
		Yes	No		
Do you think SEL is important for the student's well-being?	Disagree	Count	0	1	1
		Percentage	0.0%	100.0%	100.0%
	Neutral	Count	0	3	3
		Percentage	0.0%	100.0%	100.0%
	Agree	Count	15	5	20
		Percentage	75.0%	25.0%	100.0%
	Strongly agree	Count	27	25	52
		Percentage	51.9%	48.1%	100.0%
Total	Count	42	34	76	
	Percentage	55.3%	44.7%	100.0%	

$X^2(3) = 8.327, p = 0.040$

Table 12: Current implementation of SEL skills in class categorised by opinions on the importance of SEL

4.3.5 Personnel related to the implementation of SEL

This study also asked respondents to indicate who should be responsible for teaching social and emotional skills to their students. This question allowed teachers to choose more than one answer; therefore, the percentages below represent each option individually.

Table 13 depicts that the majority (81.6%) of the teachers expressed that PSCD teachers are the teaching professionals that should be responsible for student SEL in school. This was followed by counsellors (61.8%) and other subject teachers (47.4%). Several

participants chose the option “Other”, where 21.1% expressed that every teacher should be responsible regardless of the subject being taught. Other important stakeholders mentioned by participants to teach SEL included Ethics teachers, parents, School Management Team (SMT), and the combination of PSCD, Ethics and Religion teachers.

		Frequency	Percentages
Who do you think is responsible for teaching students' skills on SEL?	PSCD	62	81.6%
	Counsellor	47	61.8%
	Teacher (excl.PSCD)	36	47.4%
	Every teacher	16	21.1%
	Ethics teacher	1	1.3%
	Parents	1	1.3%
	SMT	1	1.3%
	PSCD, Ethics and Religion	1	1.3%

Table 13: Teachers' opinion on who is responsible for teaching SEL

4.4 Training

4.4.1 Training

There were several questions in this questionnaire that asked teachers if they had received SEL training, who provided it, what topics they discussed, and how confident they were after the training. These questions will determine certain aspects of teachers' training that will unveil the current local scenario on teachers' SEL training in the three participating schools.

Table 14 shows that most teachers (61.8%) received training related to students' SEL, whilst 38.2% reported having no relevant training. Table 15 shows that the group of participants with 16 to 20 years of teaching experience is the group who had the most training (25.5%).

On the other hand, the group of teachers with less than one year of teaching experience (2.1%) received the least training. Moreover, there is no significant relationship between experience and training since the p-value (0.420) exceeds the 0.05 level of significance.

		Frequency	Percentage
Have you received training on how to teach SEL?	Yes	47	61.8%
	No	29	38.2%

Table 14: How many teachers received training on SEL.

			Have you received training on how to teach SEL?		
			Yes	No	Total
Teaching Experience	Less than a year	Count	1	2	3
		Percentage	2.1%	6.96%	3.9%
	1-2 years	Count	4	2	6
		Percentage	8.5%	6.9%	7.9%
	3-5 years	Count	8	6	14
		Percentage	17.0%	20.7%	18.4%
	6-10 years	Count	7	6	13
		Percentage	14.9%	20.7%	17.1%
	11-15 years	Count	8	1	9
		Percentage	17.0%	3.4%	11.8%
	16-20 years	Count	12	4	16
		Percentage	25.5%	13.8%	21.1%
	21-25 years	Count	4	4	8
		Percentage	8.5%	13.8%	10.5%
	More than 26 years	Count	3	4	7
		Percentage	6.4%	13.8%	9.2%
Total	Count		47	29	76
	Percentage		100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

$\chi^2(7) = 7.084, p = 0.420$

Table 15: Teachers who received training categorised by teaching experience

Furthermore, Table 16 shows a positive association between familiarity with SEL, and training received on teaching SEL. This association is significant since the p-value (0.009) is less than

the 0.05 level of significance. Hence, findings indicate with confidence that teachers who have received training on teaching SEL in class tend to be more familiar with SEL.

			Have you received training on how to teach SEL?		Total
			Yes	No	
How familiar are you with the term SEL?	Not familiar at all	Count	0	5	5
		Percentage	0.0%	100.0%	100.0%
	Slightly familiar	Count	0	1	1
		Percentage	0.0%	100.0%	100.0%
	Somewhat familiar	Count	14	6	20
		Percentage	70.0%	30.0%	100.0%
	Moderately familiar	Count	17	13	30
		Percentage	56.7%	43.3%	100.0%
	Very familiar	Count	16	4	20
		Percentage	80.0%	20.0%	100.0%
	Total	Count	47	29	76
		Percentage	61.8%	38.2%	100.0%

$$X^2(4) = 13.423 \text{ p} = 0.009$$

Table 16: Teachers who received training categorised by how familiar they are with SEL

4.4.2 Provision of training

Furthermore, teachers were asked to determine who provided them with training throughout their teaching experience. There were multiple choices for this question; therefore, the following percentages represent each choice separately. From this question, it was observed (see Table 17) that from those who were provided by training, the majority of 35.5% said that training was attended at the University. The training provided by the school scores the second-highest percentage (30.3%), and another 22.4% of teachers expressed that they have attended other related courses. One teacher expressed that he/she carried out research on

SEL. While research can help one gain familiarity with the subject matter, it cannot be counted as professional training.

		Frequency	Percentage
Provision of training:	Not applicable	29	38.2%
	University	27	35.5%
	School	23	30.3%
	Course	17	22.4%
	Own research	1	1.3%

Table 17: *Provision of training*

4.4.3: Topics addressed in training

The questionnaire also invited teachers to select the topics addressed in training. The options for this question were based on CASEL’s widely known framework based on the five skills: Self-Awareness, Social-Awareness, Self-Management, Relationship Skills, and Responsible decision-making (CASEL, 2020). These five skills are considered core skills for SEL, and many international frameworks prioritise these five skills. This question allowed teachers to choose more than one response; therefore, the following percentages represent each option individually.

Table 18 suggests that nearly half (48.7%) of the participants reported that Self-Awareness is the topic most addressed in training. This topic focuses on possessing confidence and optimism and assessing one’s strengths, emotions, and thoughts (CASEL, 2020). This is followed by the topics of Relationship skills (46.1%), Social awareness (43.4%), Self-management (40.8%) and lastly Responsible decision making (27.6%).

		Frequency	Percentage
Topics addressed	Self-awareness	37	48.7%
	Relationship skills	35	46.1%
	Social awareness	33	43.4%
	Self-management	31	40.8%
	No training	30	39.5%
	Responsible decision making	21	27.6%

Table 18: *Topics addressed in training*

4.4.4 Preparedness with training

The following question focuses on how prepared teachers feel to teach SEL with their subjects after having attended training. Specifically, this question was asked to determine how prepared teachers feel after SEL training. This measures their preparedness and confidence to apply what they learned in training to their daily teaching. Those teachers that were not given any training fall under the category of “Not applicable”.

Table 19 shows that 23.7% of the participants claimed that they agree and strongly agree on how the training provided on SEL prepared them to teach SEL skills in their subjects. 23.7% of participants claimed that they did not feel that the training impacted their level of preparedness. 14.3% of teachers expressed that they disagree or strongly disagree that the training helped them feel prepared with enough skills to teach SEL.

		Frequency	Percentage
Do you feel that your training prepared you in involving SEL with the subject you teach?	Not applicable	29	38.2%
	Strongly disagree	1	1.3%
	Disagree	10	13.2%
	Neutral	18	23.7%
	Agree	10	13.2%
	Strongly agree	8	10.5%

Table 19: *Level of preparedness*

In addition, Table 20 determines the relationship with training and preparedness to teach SEL skills in with their subject. From participants who have undergone training, one can conclude that 38.3% agreed or strongly agreed that they are confident to teach SEL. Specifically, 17% of the participants strongly agreed that the training prepared them very well in involving SEL with the subject they teach. 23.4% of the participants expressed that the training was not useful to prepare them to teach SEL while 38.3% felt unaffected.

Moreover, Table 20 shows a positive association between training and feeling prepared with involving SEL in the subject taught. This association is highly significant since the p-value (0.001) is less than the 0.05 level of significance. Hence, findings indicate that individuals who receive training on SEL are more prepared and confident in implementing SEL in class.

			Have you received training on how to teach SEL?		
			Yes	No	Total
Do you feel that your training prepared you in involving SEL with the subject you teach?	Strongly disagree	Count	1	0	1
		Percentage	2.1%	0.0%	13.2%
	Disagree	Count	10	0	10
		Percentage	21.3%	0.0%	13.2%
	Neutral	Count	18	0	18
		Percentage	38.3%	0.0%	23.7%
	Agree	Count	10	0	10
		Percentage	21.3%	0.0%	13.2%
	Strongly agree	Count	8	0	8
		Percentage	17.0%	0.0%	10.5%
	Not applicable	Count	0	29	29
		Percentage	0.0%	100.0%	38.2%
Total	Count	47	29	76	
	Percentage	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	

$\chi^2(5) = 76.000, p = <.001$

Table 20: Teachers who received training categorised by how prepared they feel in teaching SEL

In addition, Table 21 shows the correlation between how prepared teachers feel with their training and who has provided the training. Around 52% reported that they agree or strongly agree that the University's training had adequately prepared them to address students' SEL. Only around 26% indicated that their school's training was useful to prepare them for SEL training; however, the other 26.1% disagreed. Most (47.8%) teachers reported that they feel neutral about the school's training. About 47% reported that they agree or strongly agree that the course they attended prepared them adequately. Moreover, this association is significant since the p-value (0.001) is less than the 0.05 level of significance. Hence results show that the training on SEL provided by the university makes teachers feel more prepared in teaching SEL.

Do you feel that your training prepared you in involving SEL with the subject you teach?		Training provision					Total
		University	School	Course	Not applicable	Own research	
Strongly disagree	Count	0	0	1	0	0	1
	Percentage	0.0%	0.0%	5.9%	0.0%	0.0%	
Disagree	Count	7	6	1	0	0	10
	Percentage	25.9%	26.1%	5.9%	0.0%	0.0%	
Neutral	Count	6	11	7	0	1	18
	Percentage	22.2%	47.8%	41.2%	0.0%	100.0%	
Agree	Count	7	2	4	0	0	10
	Percentage	25.9%	8.7%	23.5%	0.0%	0.0%	
Strongly agree	Count	7	4	4	0	0	8
	Percentage	25.9%	17.4%	23.5%	0.0%	0.0%	
Not applicable	Count	0	0	0	29	0	29
	Percentage	00.0%	00.0%	00.0%	100.0%	00.0%	
Total	Count	27	23	17	29	1	76

$\chi^2(20) = 114.363, p = 0.001$

Table 21: Teacher’s confidence in involving SEL in the lesson based on how the training was provided

4.4.5 Satisfaction with current knowledge on SEL provided by training

Table 22 shows that around 74.1% of the teachers who were provided with training on SEL by the university are satisfied or very satisfied with their current knowledge on SEL. 65.2% of the teachers who had their schools providing them with training feel satisfied or very satisfied with their knowledge. Also, 41.1% of teachers who attended a course reported that they are satisfied or very satisfied with their current knowledge. On the other hand, from those who did not have training, only 6.9% feel satisfied with their knowledge, 44.8% feel neutral, and the remaining 48.2% feel unsatisfied or very unsatisfied.

Furthermore, Table 22 shows a positive association between those who provided the training and the satisfaction of their current knowledge and skills on SEL. Moreover, this association

is highly significant since the p-value (0.001) is less than the 0.05 level of significance. Hence, it can be said that teachers who receive training on SEL provided by either the University, schools or external courses are more satisfied with their knowledge and skills on SEL. Teachers who were not given training tend to be very unsatisfied with their knowledge.

Are you satisfied with your current knowledge and skills on SEL?

Training provision		Very unsatisfied	Unsatisfied	Neutral	Satisfied	Very satisfied	Total
		University	Count	0	2	5	15
	Percentage	0.0%	7.4%	18.5%	55.6%	18.5%	100.0%
School	Count	0	3	5	9	6	23
	Percentage	0.0%	13.0%	21.7%	39.1%	26.1%	100.0%
Course	Count	0	3	7	4	3	17
	Percentage	0.0%	17.6%	41.2%	23.5%	17.6%	100.0%
Not applicable	Count	5	9	13	2	0	29
	Percentage	17.2%	31.0%	44.8%	6.9%	0.0%	100.0%
Own research	Count	0	0	0	1	0	1
	Percentage	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%	0.0%	100.0%
Total	Count	5	14	27	22	8	76

$\chi^2(16) = 40.959, p = 0.001$

Table 22: Satisfaction of SEL knowledge by training provision

4.4.6 Training and SEL implementation

Table 23 shows whether participants who currently teach social and emotional skills in their classrooms were influenced by how prepared they felt after the SEL training. Results show that from participants who agreed or strongly agreed that the SEL training prepared them, the majority claim to be implementing SEL skills in their classrooms. The majority of teachers who did not feel that training prepared them effectively to teach SEL, still claimed to be teaching SEL regardless of ineffective training. Further, for those teachers who felt unsure post-training and were unable to pass judgement on the level of preparedness, as they opted for the “Neutral” option, most claimed to teach social and emotional skills. The majority of

teachers who did not receive training do not teach social-emotional skills. Moreover, this association is significant since the p-value (0.009) is less than the 0.05 level of significance. Hence, findings indicate that individuals who felt that the training prepared them to teach SEL, claimed to be implementing SEL in their lessons.

		Are you currently involved in teaching SEL skills in your classroom?			
		Yes	No	Total	
Do you feel that your training prepared you in involving SEL with the subject you teach?	Strongly disagree	Count	0	1	1
		Percentage	0.0%	100.0%	100.0%
	Disagree	Count	6	4	10
		Percentage	60.0%	40.0%	100.0%
	Neutral	Count	14	4	18
		Percentage	77.8%	22.2%	100.0%
	Agree	Count	6	4	10
		Percentage	60.0%	40.0%	100.0%
	Strongly agree	Count	7	1	8
		Percentage	87.5%	12.5%	100.0%
	Not applicable	Count	9	20	29
		Percentage	31.0%	69.0%	100.0%
Total	Count	42	34	76	
	Percentage	55.3%	44.7%	100.0%	

$\chi^2(5) = 15.356, p = 0.009$

Table 23: Current implementation of SEL skills in class categorised by how prepared teachers feel after the training

Table 24 shows that 70.6% of the participants who claimed that they are currently implementing SEL skills in their lessons attended a Course on SEL, whereas the remaining 29.4% are not implementing SEL skills in their lessons. The SEL implementation in Maltese schools is not regulated by a set programme, and therefore, when claiming that teachers are implementing SEL, they include skills such as showing empathy, maintaining positive

relationships, making responsible decisions, understanding and managing emotions, and setting and accomplishing positive goals. Also, 70.4% of the teachers who were provided training by the University are currently teaching SEL skills. Of those respondents who have had in-service training, more than two-thirds (69.6%) are currently involving SEL skills in their classrooms. However, those who claimed that they did not receive training, 69% confirmed that they are not teaching SEL. Moreover, this association is significant since the p-value (0.009) is less than the 0.05 level of significance. Hence, findings indicate that teachers who are given training by university, schools and courses on SEL tend to teach it in class. Whilst teachers who are not given training tend to not include SEL skills in their lessons.

		Are you currently involved in teaching SEL skills in your classroom?				
		Yes	No	Total		
Training provision	University	Count	19	8	27	
		Percentage	70.4%	29.6%	100.0%	
	School	Count	16	7	23	
		Percentage	69.6%	30.4%	100.0%	
	Course	Count	12	5	100.0%	
		Percentage	70.6%	29.4%	100.0%	
	Not applicable	Count	9	20	29	
		Percentage	31.0%	69.0%	100.0%	
	Own research	Count	1	0	1	
		Percentage	100.0%	0.0%	100.0%	
	Total		Count	42	34	76

$\chi^2(4) = 13.493, p = 0.009$

Table 24: Current implementation of SEL skills in class categorised by who provided the training to teachers

4.5 Social Validity

4.5.1 Practicability of SEL in class

The questionnaire asked teachers to rank how practical it is to implement SEL in their lessons on a 5-point Likert scale where 1 is “Not practical at all” and 5 is “Very practical”. Table 25 provides details regarding participants’ views on the practicality of implementing SEL in their lessons. Over half (57.9%) of the participants reported that their subject is practical and very practical to implement SEL within the academic topics. Another 32.9% of the teachers have a neutral opinion on how practical their subject is, and the other 9.2% think that it is not practical to implement SEL.

		Frequency	Percentage
How practical is it to implement SEL in your lesson?	Not practical at all	3	3.9%
	Not practical	4	5.3%
	Neutral	25	32.9%
	Practical	26	34.2%
	Very practical	18	23.7%

Table 25: *The practicality to include SEL in the lessons*

In addition, Table 26 shows teachers’ beliefs on how their subject can affect how practical it is to implement SEL in the lesson. Participating teachers who teach VET subjects, Ethics and P.E., all think it is very feasible to include social and emotional skills in their subject. Moreover, this association is significant since the p-value (0.012) is less than the 0.05 level of significance. However, as there are various subjects with few participants each, generalising is limited. Table 26 shows that teachers do indeed believe that certain subjects are more practical than others for the implementation on SEL.

Subject Taught		How practical is it to implement SEL in your lesson?					Total
		Not practical at all	Not practical	Neutral	practical	Very practical	
Languages	Count	0	2	12	11	2	27
	Percentage	0.0%	7.4%	44.4%	40.7%	7.4%	100.0%
Sciences	Count	2	1	3	4	3	13
	Percentage	15.4%	7.7%	23.1%	30.8%	23.1%	100.0%
Social Sciences	Count	1	0	4	4	0	9
	Percentage	11.1%	0.0%	44.4%	44.4%	0.0%	100.0%
Home Economics	Count	0	0	2	4	1	7
	Percentage	0.0%	0.0%	28.6%	57.1%	14.3%	100.0%
Technological subjects	Count	0	1	2	1	0	4
	Percentage	0.0%	25.0%	50.0%	25.0%	0.0%	100.0%
VET subjects	Count	0	0	0	0	4	4
	Percentage	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%	100.0%
Option subjects	Count	0	0	2	0	5	7
	Percentage	0.0%	0.0%	28.6%	0.0%	71.4%	100.0%
Religion	Count	0	0	0	2	0	2
	Percentage	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%	0.0%	100.0%
Ethics	Count	0	0	0	0	1	1
	Percentage	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%	100.0%
P.E.	Count	0	0	0	0	2	2
	Percentage	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%	100.0%
Total	Count	3	4	25	26	18	76
	Percentage	3.9%	5.3%	32.9%	34.2%	23.7%	100.0%

$\chi^2(56) = 82.737, p = 0.012$

Table 26: *The practicality to include SEL in the lessons by subject*

4.6 Barriers to implementing SEL in lessons

Teachers were asked to indicate the challenges they face in relation to SEL. This question allowed teachers to choose more than one response; therefore, the percentages below represent each option individually. Table 27 provides details from participants' views on the challenges that hinder the implementation of SEL in classrooms. Around 63% of teachers

indicated that their biggest challenge is that their main priority is the subject they teach, which leaves them very limited time to focus on SEL. The second biggest challenge (57.9%) is that students have many different social and emotional needs.

These are followed by the lack of training or knowledge about SEL, indicating a high percentage of 42.1%. Other challenges mentioned included difficulties with parents (18%), school lacking adequate resources or support for SEL (11.8%), and students not interested in learning about SEL (10.5%).

		Frequency	Percentage
What are the greatest challenges you face with respect to students' SEL?	The main priority is the subject taught, leaving limited time for SEL	48	63.2%
	Students have many different types of social and emotional needs	44	57.9%
	Lack of training or knowledge about SEL	32	42.1%
	Parents do not feel comfortable with the teaching of SEL	14	18.4%
	The school lacks adequate resources or support for SEL	9	11.8%
	Students are not interested in learning about SEL	8	10.5%

Table 27: Challenges for implementing SEL in the classroom

4.7 Recommendations and additional comments

The last question was a voluntary open-ended question that asked participants to comment on recommendations they would make regarding the teaching of SEL. This question was asked to conclude the questionnaire by asking teachers to freely comment on what should be done in relation to the teaching of SEL. Although this question was voluntary, 79% of the participants chose to respond.

The results were varied; however, several common themes included ‘training’, ‘awareness’, ‘time’, ‘curriculum’, ‘pre-service training’, ‘importance of SEL’ and ‘professionals’. Each theme encompasses common ideas, which will be explained in further detail.

Training: The most common recommendation is that teachers should receive Continuous Professional Development (CPD), specifically additional training on SEL. Teachers said that they should have the opportunity to further their education, for example, by taking courses to increase their knowledge in relation to teaching SEL. A teacher commented that

Whatever the subject taught, teachers should be trained to be sensitive to the social and emotional needs of students who in turn should be taught how important it is to show empathy and respect in all the situations they might find themselves in.

Another teacher commented on how “teachers should be given the opportunity to attend courses to further enhance their knowledge regarding social and emotional learning”.

Awareness: The second most frequent word was awareness. Teachers commented that there should be more awareness on this topic.

Time: Teachers indicated that time plays a critical role as they feel constrained by the academic curriculum, and no extra time is available for SEL. They expressed that they feel pressured because there is too much academic content to complete.

Curriculum. Some expressed that the education department is too focused on subject content and lacks certain life skills and values that are most needed to foster good citizenship.

Preservice training: Some recommended that training on SEL should be introduced as a compulsory subject in university courses that train student-teachers. This will help future teachers to acquire the right skills and gain knowledge on the subject. This will eventually have a significant positive impact on classes as more teachers will be competent to teach SEL. One teacher expressed

More training during the University course as I think that my job as a teacher is not only to teach them Geography but also to teach them how to make decisions, how to manage time and how to be more self-aware.

Importance of SEL: From the results, the majority of teachers believed that SEL is crucial. Some comments continue to emphasise the link between SEL and positive student outcomes. Some commented that SEL should be part of every teacher's daily lesson plan and that it should be integrated into all years of instruction in all subjects. Another teacher adds how schools are not only responsible for knowledge delivery but also for helping students become healthy and valued members of society.

Professionals: Some commented that the education department should provide more professionals such as counsellors, psychologists and psychotherapists who should preferably be present in the school daily to provide continuous support.

Also, in the final question, some participants took the opportunity to add their own opinions on SEL. One teacher commented

Our students are living thinking feeling human beings. They go through numerous experiences and need to have the tools to be able to thrive in society. Therefore, it is imperative that to give them the best teaching possible that other subjects and topics are incorporated together. In my case, they need to be incorporated with English. Helping them to learn more than just how to conjugate verbs and linguistic rules and conventions is key to helping them adjust to living on their own. We need to start incorporating skills with all the subjects when they are young, and everyone needs to

work together to help the students grow and learn. They might not need to remember what a simile is in 5 years' time, but they will definitely need to know how to express themselves, share their emotions, discuss topics and make conversation without being rude, empathise, realise their limitations and not feel terrible about them but realising that everyone has them, know how to deal with negative emotions, etc...

Another teacher clearly states the importance of SEL by mentioning;

If a student is not emotionally stable, it would be more difficult for the student to move on academically. More training with regards to the importance of SEL should be offered to educators. Apart from the importance of incorporating SEL in the curriculum, it is also important that educators implement such strategies through daily activities during their lessons. This includes getting to know students and their needs, taking an interest in each student, using positive discipline, and understanding that behind every behaviour there is always a reason, being non-judgmental, spreading positivity in the classroom, activities which include peer tutoring and interactions, peer preparation, situational role-plays promoting social skills etc.

4.8 Conclusion

This chapter aimed to reveal the Maltese teachers' views on SEL. Notwithstanding the limitations in generalisation due to sample size, this study obtained significant results. The study found that most teachers are familiar with SEL. The results indicate that teachers who received training on SEL tend to be more satisfied with their knowledge and skills on SEL. The study also concluded that teachers who received training on SEL, especially from the university, tend to be better prepared and more likely to incorporate it into their teaching. In particular, 55.3% of participants currently incorporate SEL into their teaching, but more

research needs to be done to better understand what is really happening in the classroom and whether SEL is being properly taught. In addition, the study highlighted challenges that teachers experience, which make it difficult for them to implement SEL in their classes. These include prioritising their subject over SEL, prioritising individual students' social and emotional needs, and a lack of training.

Chapter 5: Discussion

5.1 Introduction

This chapter will discuss the significant results of this study. The results are categorised into the research questions of this study, and they will be discussed accordingly. As there is limited local research on SEL, most of the literature is from international studies.

5.2 Research Question 2: Do teachers include SEL in their teaching subjects?

More than half (55.3%) of the participating teachers are currently implementing SEL skills into their teaching. The percentage of teachers who do not include SEL in their instruction is relatively high, even though a significant majority (94.7%) believe that SEL is essential to student well-being. This shows that although a high number of teachers think that SEL has a positive impact on student outcomes, the number of teachers who teach and engage with SEL in class is much lower. This implies that there are factors that are preventing teachers from implementing SEL in their classrooms. These challenges will be analysed in Research Question 4. Furthermore, even though the majority stated that they currently teach SEL, this does not mean that they effectively implement SEL in their teaching as suggested by evidence-based practices and research.

This study shows that teachers who are familiar with the term SEL tend to agree with the importance and positive impact SEL has on students and, therefore, they are more likely to incorporate SEL skills into their teaching. However, from participants who indicated that they strongly agree SEL is beneficial to student well-being, 48.1% do not currently teach SEL in the classroom. Interestingly, this is a high percentage, with nearly half of these teachers not implementing SEL, regardless of their positive beliefs on the impact of SEL on student well-being.

Also, the study shows another correlation between training and SEL implementation, where teachers with SEL training tend to include more SEL practices in their teaching, while teachers without training tend not to include SEL in their teaching. This confirms Jennings &

Greenberg's (2009) study, which suggests that teachers need to be competent to teach SEL. Training helps teachers address the various students' social and emotional needs and help them develop skills that will enhance their personal development. This confirms the importance of SEL training for effective SEL teaching.

Furthermore, the data suggested that most participants do not feel that they are best suited to teach SEL. They believe that professionals, especially, PSCD teachers (81.6%) and counsellors (61.8%), are more competent. In contrast to studies by Buchanan et al. (2009) and Brackett et al. (2012), teachers believe that the classroom teacher should teach SEL. Moreover, these findings might suggest that the teachers who do not consider themselves responsible are less likely to implement SEL in their teaching. Nevertheless, it confirms the study of Cefai (2015), which stated that in Maltese secondary schools, Social and Emotional Education is considered as an area of responsibility for PSCD as well as Social Studies, Home Economics, Religion and Ethics professionals.

5.3 Research Question 3: Do teachers believe they are equipped or trained to teach SEL?

The results suggest that the majority of teachers who participated in this study received training on SEL. The findings contradict Waajida et al.'s (2013) claims that stated teachers generally receive minimal training on the importance of teaching social and emotional skills in the classroom. The data contributes to a clearer understanding of the situation in the three participating Maltese government schools. The fact that more than half of the teachers were in some way trained on social-emotional teaching is an incredibly positive outcome. Even though, most teachers have received training in SEL, this percentage can be even higher, especially now when SEL is receiving more attention because of its importance and benefits. A significant number of (nearly 40%) of teachers from participating schools have still not received training on SEL. However, because the sample size is small, the generalisability of these findings is limited. Even though teachers reported receiving training on SEL, this study cannot determine whether this training has indeed targeted teachers' ability to implement and teach SEL effectively in their classrooms.

Furthermore, 23.5% of teachers felt that the training had no impact, 38.3% felt that it was useful, while another 38.3% chose the middle response as they were unsure and could not pass judgement on their given training. In most cases, the participants may have had different SEL training, and as stated earlier, it cannot be assumed that every training was effective and specifically aimed at teaching teachers how to implement SEL in the classroom. Moreover, the majority (77.8%) of those who were unsure of their level of preparedness after SEL training and opted for a neutral response, currently include SEL in their teaching. The findings show an improvement of the three participating schools to Askill-Williams and Cefai's (2014) study involving Australian and local teachers, who reported that teachers felt inadequately trained to teach social and emotional skills and that they needed to improve their knowledge of SEL. Payton et al. (2000) suggested teachers need to be adequately trained, supported and provided with feedback in order to have successful SEL programmes. Buchanan et al. (2009) further developed on Payton's proposal, noting that when all three components are met, "teachers are more likely to implement the program with greater ease, efficiency, and integrity and to avail themselves of opportunities for improvement when indicated" (p. 190).

In addition, this study shows that teachers who felt prepared to teach SEL by training tended to incorporate SEL into their teaching. This provides new insight into the correlation between preparedness and training. This study reports that teachers who received training on SEL tended to be better prepared to implement SEL in the classroom. This finding confirms that training can make teachers feel better prepared and more confident to teach social and emotional skills. These findings confirm existing evidence from Buchanan et al. (2009) that teachers need "to feel confident in their abilities to implement a program and have the skills and resources to deliver the program as designed" (p.190). Even Schonert-Reichl et al. (2015) and Alvarez's (2007) studies state that the more the teacher knows about child development and is competent, the better they can effectively integrate SEL skills into their teaching.

Furthermore, the findings draw on the existing literature of Ee & Cheng (2013), which suggests that training influences teachers' confidence in incorporating SEL into their practice, especially if it is high-quality training. Jennings & Greenberg (2009) also commented on how high-quality training on SEL equips teachers with the appropriate knowledge and skills to address and transmit students with social and emotional needs and help them develop these

types of skills, leading to better student outcomes (Durlak et al., 2011). In addition, McClelland et al.'s (2017) first strategy for effective intervention SEL also included training for teachers at SEL.

The results show that most of the participating teachers received their training from the University of Malta. Moreover, the data suggest that the SEL training provided by the University makes teachers feel better prepared to teach SEL and most teachers are satisfied with the knowledge provided by the University. These findings support existing evidence of Schonert-Reichl et al.'s (2015) recommendation about the importance of pre-service training in preparing teachers to address social and emotional needs. Furthermore, SEL is not acknowledged in any of the study-units included in the Masters in Teaching and Learning course, which is a relatively new programme recently developed around the awareness of the importance of SEL in curriculum. In addition, 30.3% of the participants got their training from school. This highlights the importance of in-service training. As CASEL (2020) states, the school environment is an important setting for SEL, and providing training to in-service teachers is very beneficial both for teachers and students.

When teachers were asked about their satisfaction with their knowledge of SEL, the majority indicated that they were satisfied and very satisfied. Notably, this study reported that a quarter of the participating teachers were unsatisfied and very unsatisfied with their knowledge of SEL. These findings build on existing evidence of Buchanan et al.'s (2009) study, which indicated that although the majority of teachers are somewhat satisfied with their knowledge of SEL, there is a significant number of teachers who feel unsatisfied. Furthermore, the study provides new insight into the relationship between training and satisfaction. Teachers who have received training on SEL tend to be more satisfied with their knowledge and skills on SEL. This further underpins the importance of training as CASEL's Theory of Action (CASEL, n.d.) indicates that one of the four elements that guide quality SEL implementation and sustainability involves strengthening adult social and emotional competencies and capacities.

5.4 Research Question 4: What kind of challenges do they encounter?

63.2% of the participating teachers agreed that the subject being taught takes priority, leaving limited time for SEL. It is therefore a challenge that most teachers experience. According to most respondents, the pressure to achieve the academic goals of the subject does not leave enough time to focus on SEL. This supports findings in the studies by Brackett et al. (2012) and Buchanan et al. (2009), which found that teachers do not have enough time to teach SEL. Similar to this study's insights, the teachers in Bhalla's (2019) study also stated that some curricula are very focused on the academic aspect, which makes them feel unmotivated to integrate SEL into their subject. As seen in the literature, SEL should be interwoven with the school curriculum (CASEL, 2013) and not considered as an add-on (Greenberg et al., 2003) or a stand-alone lesson on topics related to socio-emotional skills (Zins & Elias, 2007). However, this could be the reflection of the NCF, which still prioritises the academic curriculum (Ministry for Education and Employment, 2012).

The questionnaire also found that 57.9% of the teachers surveyed said that students have different types of social and emotional needs, and therefore, they are uncertain which needs must be first prioritised. Since every individual is different, it is challenging and time-consuming to address the needs of all students. This challenge is related to a previous finding where participating teachers believe that professionals are more competent to teach SEL. As studies show, teachers are already overwhelmed with their workload (Butt & Lance, 2005) and dealing with different types of students' social and emotional needs can put additional pressure on teachers. Although psychosocial staff are specifically trained to deal with socio-emotional skills, studies show that SEL programmes are more effective when delivered by teachers or student support staff as their direct involvement improves student outcomes (Payton et al., 2008; Durlak et al., 2011; Varela et al., 2013). For this reason, more should be invested in teachers' SEL training and in developing their own well-being and social and emotional competencies.

These two major challenges are then followed by the lack of training or knowledge of SEL, which also indicated a high percentage of 42.1%. This challenge is among the most common in the literature. Jones & Bouffard (2012) study also discussed that limited training of staff is one of the limitations of SEL teaching. In Bhalla's study (2019), teachers showed concern about their lack of training in SEL, resulting in them not feeling confident enough to implement it in the classroom. Even Askell-Williams & Cefai (2014) and Schonert-Reich et al. (2015) studies confirmed that there are a significant number of teachers who feel inadequately trained to teach their students social and emotional skills.

In addition, a considerable number of teachers recommended the need for training. This confirms the literature, which stated that little focus is given to SEL training in pre-service or in-service training (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009; Waajid et al., 2013, Schonert-Reichl et al., 2017). Indeed, Schonert-Reichl et al. (2017) suggested that pre-service teacher training should not only provide future teachers with knowledge and skills about SEL but also "tools and strategies to build their own social and emotional competence" (p.150).

5.5 Research Question 5: Do they think that SEL should be a key goal of the Maltese educational system?

The teachers who participated in this study believe that SEL should be a key goal in Maltese education. This result aligns well with previous research in which SEL was shown to have a positive impact on students (Durlak et al., 2011; Sklad et al, 2012). The findings indicate that majority of teachers were familiar with SEL and acknowledged the positive impact that SEL has on each individual. Moreover, this study highlighted how much teachers care and show interest on SEL. Many of them recommended that they need training and Continuous Professional Development (CPD) to feel competent and prepared to adequately incorporate social and emotional skills into the classroom. Research suggested that SEL skills should be prioritised in education (Hamilton et al., 2019). A research report identified that self-control, communication skills, social skills, positive self-concept and higher order thinking skills improve success in the workforce (Lippman et al., 2015). These five critical skills are amongst the skills taught in SEL programmes.

5.6 Research Question 1: What are the views of Maltese secondary school teachers about SEL?

The vast majority (65.8%) of the participating teachers in this study are moderately familiar and very familiar with SEL. In addition, the study shows that 95% of teachers who are remarkably familiar with SEL indicated that they strongly agree that SEL is important for the students' well-being. Hence, teachers who are familiar with the term SEL tend to agree on the importance and the positive outcomes on the students.

In addition, teachers feel that certain subjects provide more opportunities than others to implement SEL. This is confirmed by a recent study in Vietnam Secondary Schools where although teachers were trained annually on how to integrate SEL in each school subject, it was found that many teachers were unsuccessful in integrating SEL into their subject because of the lack of practicality of some subjects (Huynh et al., 2021). Also, the Vietnamese teachers considered the teaching of SEL as one of the roles of a life skills teacher (Huynh et al., 2021). This ties in with this study where the participating teachers consider SEL as a concept being taught separately from their teaching subject. The findings show that they do not see themselves as the person responsible for teaching SEL skills as they do not feel that they are most suited to teach such skills. They believe that other professionals, especially PSCD teachers and counsellors, have a better skill set to teach SEL. This could be because they do not feel competent enough to teach SEL as the study expresses teachers' desire for SEL training in pre-service and in-service. This is contrary to the findings of Buchanan et al. (2009), where half of the participating teachers reported that the class teacher should be responsible to implement SEL.

Moreover, the curriculum and time have been found to prevent them from implementing SEL in their teaching. Buchanan, et. al (2009) also found that more than half of the teachers indicated that the most significant barrier to SEL implementation is a lack of time. As the curriculum is highly focused on the academic aspect, teachers feel obliged to complete the academic curriculum, leaving little time for teaching social and emotional skills. Therefore, the curriculum has a strong influence on the implementation of SEL in their lessons.

Although SEL has gained a lot of interest in recent years, they view SEL as a concept that needs more awareness. The implication of this finding suggests that although most teachers are familiar with SEL, they feel that there is not enough local awareness. One could speculate that this might be due to schools failing to give enough recognition to SEL, which seems to be contributing to the strong recommendations for SEL training.

5.7 Conclusion

In conclusion, the purpose of this study was achieved by providing new insights into how teachers in Malta perceive SEL. Overall, this study found that the vast majority of participating teachers are familiar with SEL, and most of them claimed that they currently integrate SEL in their classrooms. However, they do not see themselves as responsible for teaching SEL skills. The participants in this study do not believe that they are most suited to teach such skills and they believe that other professionals, particularly PSCD teachers and counsellors, have better skills. Although they believe that professionals in the field are responsible, there is still a majority of teachers who teach SEL, regardless of whether they think it is not a part of their job. Moreover, most participating teachers are trained to teach SEL, they feel prepared, and they are satisfied with their knowledge on SEL. However, they believe they need additional training to help them feel more competent and knowledgeable in this area, and believe there should be more awareness on SEL. This study found that teachers' biggest challenges in implementing SEL are limited time, addressing various social and emotional needs, and lack of training or knowledge.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

6.1. Introduction

This chapter outlines the main conclusions of this study, its limitations, recommendations for future studies and recommendations for education policymakers and teaching practitioners.

6.2. Overview of the study

The concept of SEL has gained importance in recent years. Nowadays, due to active awareness of students' social and emotional health, educational institutions and schools are more inclined towards Social & Emotional Learning. However, although there is a lot of encouragement to use SEL in the classrooms, many subject teachers, who are the main leaders of this kind of education, do not incorporate it in the classroom. Integrating SEL into academic subjects is difficult, especially when it has not yet been incorporated into the curriculum or been trained properly. Literature has found that SEL enables children to acquire social and emotional skills that help them to be more successful later in life (CASEL, 2013). Many studies report how effective SEL programmes lead to positive outcomes in terms of student's well-being, including increased academic achievement, reduced behavioural and emotional problems (CASEL, n.d., Durlak et al., 2011). Nevertheless, the Maltese curriculum does not recognise SEL as one of the main goals in education, nor does it include a SEL programme for Maltese schools to follow. As there are no formal policies indicating the implementation of SEL in the classroom and there is limited information available on SEL and Maltese education, this research aimed to highlight the current local scenario by exploring teachers' perceptions about SEL.

The purpose of this study was to determine teachers' perspectives regarding SEL. The study attempted to achieve this goal by answering the five research questions. These include (i) What are the views of Maltese secondary school teachers about SEL?, (ii) Do teachers include SEL in their teaching subjects?, (iii) Do teachers believe they are equipped or trained to teach SEL?, (iv) What kind of challenges do they encounter?, and (v) Do they think that SEL should

be a key goal of the Maltese educational system? This study adopted a quantitative approach, using online questionnaires, as a large sample was required to understand the current Maltese situation on SEL from the teachers' perspective. Conducting survey research helps to gain a better understanding of the current situation in a certain area and to make decisions for the future (Isaac & Michael 1985 in Buchanan et al., 2009). A total number of 76 teachers participated by taking an online questionnaire. Participants had to be teachers (non-PSCD), in the following three participating schools: STC Mriehel Secondary School, SCC Pembroke Secondary School, and GC Rabat Middle School.

6.3. Main Conclusions

This quantitative analysis of SEL in relation to teachers' views reveals that teachers generally believe in the benefits of SEL for students. Although the majority of respondents claim that they currently incorporate SEL into the classroom, the purpose of this study was not to examine how SEL is currently implemented, but rather to examine the teachers' opinion regarding such practices, its importance, their preparation, satisfaction and practicality. Moreover, they do not believe that they are best suited to teach such skills and they believe that PSCD teachers and counsellors have better skills to teach SEL.

In addition, most of the participating teachers have received training, and it was found that teachers who have received training on SEL are more prepared and willing to incorporate SEL into the classroom. Regardless of whether teachers have received training and how satisfied they are with their knowledge on SEL, there is a significant desire for additional training on SEL so that they feel competent enough to incorporate SEL into their subject. This finding is encouraging considering how effective SEL programmes are in schools. In addition, this study also establishes that teachers believe that certain subjects are more practical than others for the implementation on SEL. In addition, because teachers lack SEL training, resources, knowledge, concrete SEL programmes, they are not implementing SEL effectively. Specifically, their biggest obstacle is the lack of time available for SEL in light of their main priority being the academic subject being taught. This confirms that the curriculum and the demands of the school to meet academic learning goals restrict teachers and create limitations for the development and implementation of social emotional teaching in classrooms.

6.4. Limitations of this Study

This study encountered several limitations. The researcher had no control on schools chosen, and the location of schools was not dispersed across the island. This means that certain beliefs and ethos tend to vary according to the school location or area on the island. The limitation of generalisation was also affected by the small number of participants. Due to the Covid-19 situation, three schools were assigned to this study, far fewer than originally targeted. This already resulted in having a smaller sample size. Moreover, this study had a lower response rate than expected. In spite of the challenging times to conduct research studies with schools, the researcher created a prize draw and contacted schools regularly in an attempt to improve response rates, but the results did not meet the study's expectations.

In addition, this study identifies teachers' views of their current SEL practices. Although this gives extremely useful insights into their beliefs and opinions on the subject, it does not give insight into their actual practice of these SEL skills. Since the responses to the questionnaire represent teachers' views of SEL, it does not determine whether teachers' implementation of SEL is correct or whether their teaching method is beneficial to students. Therefore, one cannot assume that teachers who claimed that they currently involve SEL in their teaching are adequately implementing SEL as discussed in the literature. Another limitation concerns validity and reliability: due to limited number of participants and time limitations, this study could not conduct a test-retest reliability nor a pilot study. Undoubtedly, these measures could have improved the quality and impact of this research study.

6.5. Recommendations for Future Research

The field of SEL has grown rapidly in recent years; however, local studies on SEL are limited. Future research could incorporate a larger sample to represent all teachers in Malta. As teachers play an essential role in SEL teaching, understanding their perspective on SEL will help to improve teaching and implement changes wherever necessary for the benefit of students.

In addition, this study concluded that the majority of the participating teachers integrate SEL in their lessons. Another suggestion for future research could be observations of how the teaching of SEL is delivered. As the literature suggests, the teaching of SEL should be intertwined with the subject being taught. Observation and investigation of the practices teachers use in teaching SEL will then define the quality of SEL teaching. In addition, focus groups could be conducted with students to understand their experiences of being taught SEL more formally in the classroom and how they feel such teaching has impacted their overall wellbeing, friendships, academic performance and experiences at school.

Another recommendation relates to teachers' social and emotional competence. In the literature accompanying this study, a section is devoted to teachers and their own social-emotional wellbeing. Research suggests that teachers with high social and emotional competence tend to implement SEL more effectively, promote positive outcomes in their students, and experience greater well-being and motivation (Collie, 2017). Addressing teachers' social and emotional competence through mindfulness training helps teachers improve relationships with students and implement better SEL in students (Roeser et al., 2013; Jennings et al., 2013). Further research suggestions could be to select a group of teachers who are provided with mindfulness training and examine the gains and the benefits that impact their teaching.

In addition, considering the impact that COVID-19 appears to be having on students and teachers (Ozamiz-Etxebarria et al., 2021; Duraku & Hoxha, 2021), SEL programmes could be implemented in order to minimise the social and emotional impact of the pandemic. A research study could be conducted to investigate the impact SEL programmes have on students' well-being, especially those students who are doing online learning, and are not able to be in a school environment.

6.6. Additional Recommendations for Education Policymakers and Teaching Practitioners

In conclusion, the researcher hopes that this study will inspire others to investigate the practices conducted in schools in relation to students' social-emotional development and well-being. In this dissertation, the importance and benefits of SEL for student well-being are

supported by various literature. In addition, CASEL's well-known framework (2020) believes that SEL is most beneficial when integrated into the curriculum, whole school culture, school practices and policies, and collaboration with the community and families. Therefore, the researcher hopes that this study will help educators, policymakers, and stakeholders to reflect on the importance of SEL and on possible improvements that could be carried out within the Maltese educational system in order to meet the needs of our students in a more holistic manner. Training teachers to be competent to teach SEL is essential, and this study clearly shows the need and desire for more training and Continuous Professional Development. Furthermore, implementing a high-quality SEL programme that is formally intertwined with the curriculum is what is best for our students. SEL will then no longer be an elective and practised only when time permits. All students will be provided with an equal opportunity to gain social and emotional skills that will eventually help them grow into healthier, well-functioning adults in tomorrow's society.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Questionnaire

Teachers' perspective on Social and Emotional Learning in Maltese secondary schools.

What is Social and Emotional Learning (SEL)?

Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) is the process through which children and adults understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions. (CASEL, 2013)

* Required

1. Gender*

- Male
- Female
- Prefer not to say
- Other : _____

2. How long have you been teaching? *

- Less than a year
- 1 - 2 years
- 3 - 5 years
- 6 - 10 years
- 11 - 15 years
- 16 - 20 years
- 21 - 25 years
- More than 26 years

3. What subject/s do you teach? *

4. In which school do you teach? *

5. What course/s did you complete in order to become a qualified teacher?*

- B.Ed (Hons)
- PGCE
- Masters
- Other

6. How familiar are you with the term Social and Emotional Learning? *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not familiar at all	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Very Familiar

7. Do you think Social and Emotional Learning is important for the students' well-being? *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly disagree	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Strongly agree

8. Have you received training on how to teach Social and Emotional Learning? *

- Yes
- No

9. If yes, how was the training provided to you? (You can tick more than once) *

- Not applicable
- By university
- By the school
- Attended a course
- Other : _____

10. Which topics were addressed in the training?* (You may tick more than one)

- None, as no training was given
- Self- Awareness : (emotions, thoughts, values, behaviour, strengths)
- Social-Awareness : (empathize with others, understand social and ethical norms for behaviour)
- Self Management : (emotions, thoughts, behaviours)
- Relationship skills : (healthy relationships, communication, cooperate with others, social pressure, seek and offer help)
- Responsible decision-making : (constructive choices, realistic evaluation of consequences)
- None of the above
- Other : _____

11. Do you feel that your training prepared you in involving Social and Emotional Learning with the academic subject that you teach? *

- | | | | | | | |
|-------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|----------------|
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | |
| Strongly disagree | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Strongly agree |

12. Are you satisfied with your current knowledge and skills on Social and Emotional Learning? *

- | | | | | | | |
|------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|----------------|
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | |
| Very unsatisfied | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Very satisfied |

13. Who do you think is responsible for teaching students skills on SEL? * (You may tick more than one)

- Subject Teacher
- PSCD teacher
- School Counsellor
- Other : _____

14. How practical is it to implement Social and Emotional Learning in your lesson? *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not practical at all	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Very practical

15. Are you currently involved in teaching Social and Emotional Learning skills in your classroom? *

- Yes
- No

16. What are the greatest challenges you face with respect to students' Social and Emotional Learning? * (You may tick more than one)

- The main priority is the subject taught, leaving limited time for Social and Emotional Learning
- Students are not interested in learning about Social and Emotional Learning
- Students have so many different types of social and emotional needs
- Lack of training or knowledge about Social and Emotional Learning
- The school lacks adequate resources or support for Social and Emotional Learning
- Parents do not feel comfortable with the teaching of Social and Emotional Learning
- Other : _____

17. What do you recommend regarding the teaching of Social and Emotional Learning?

Appendix B: Permission Letter for Heads of School

22nd January 2021

Dear Head of School,

I am Antonella Bondin, a student reading for a Master in Teaching and Learning at the University of Malta. As part of this course, I will be carrying out research in order to write a dissertation. My dissertation supervisor is Dr Madeline Duca.

The title of my dissertation is *Teachers' perspective on Social and Emotional Learning in the Maltese secondary schools*. This research study aims to gain a better understanding of Secondary School teachers' perspectives on Social and Emotional Learning. Furthermore, I will be determining their training, if they already teach Social and Emotional Learning, the challenges they face and if they consider Social and Emotional Learning as one of the main goals of Maltese education.

For my data collection, I shall be using an online questionnaire. The questionnaire will ask teachers to present their perceptions regarding various aspects of Social and Educational Learning, including whether they think it is an important part of education, their training and confidence, if they consider themselves as responsible for students' SEL, and the challenges they experience.

The questionnaire is anonymous and it should take approximately 6 minutes to complete. The questionnaire will be open for 2 months; from 26th February till 26th April. Additionally, the participants of this study are subject teachers, excluding teachers teaching PSCD, coming from 4 Middle and Secondary schools within the Maltese state colleges. Due to Covid19 only a limited number of schools can be involved in this research. Hence, your voluntary participation is of utmost importance.

Participation in the study is voluntary and participants will suffer no negative consequence should they choose not to submit the questionnaire. The questions were carefully worded so as not to cause offence. However, if participants feel offended they can withdraw at any point from the questionnaire by simply closing their browser window. At that point, their responses will not be recorded.

Additionally, the participation is anonymous. Therefore, teachers will not be required to enter their names. Furthermore, as the questionnaire is online, the instrument used will not collect IP addresses, therefore the questionnaire remains anonymous. Moreover, participants will be informed about their rights, under the Data Protection Act Chapter 586 and the General Data

Protection Regulation (GDPR) (EU2016/679), to access, rectify or erase the data concerning them.

In this study, participants will not benefit directly, but they will be contributing to research which aims to highlight the importance of Social and Emotional Learning, in order to improve the schools' environment. Furthermore, I hope the data from the questionnaire will aid educators, policymakers and stakeholders reflect and possibly make amendments which consider the importance of Social and Emotional Learning. Also, there are no known or anticipated risks associated with participation in this study. If a question makes the participants uncomfortable, they can withdraw at any time.

The research findings will be analyzed and presented in the dissertation. Participants can contact me to request the findings. Moreover, the findings cannot be used other than specified without further consent.

I would be grateful if you would give me permission to conduct my research study at your school. Should you give me permission, interested teachers will be asked via an information letter to complete a questionnaire. The research project will abide by the General Data Protection Regulations at all times. Furthermore, the study has been approved by the Directorate for Research, Lifelong Learning and Employability (DRLLE) within the Ministry of Education and Employment.

If you confirm your participation in this study, I kindly ask that you act as an intermediary and forward an email containing an informative letter and a link to the online questionnaire to all your teachers.

Should you require further information, please do not hesitate to contact me via email at antonellaXXXXX @um.edu.mt or on my personal number +356 79XXXXXX. Also, you can contact my supervisor, Dr Madeline Duca, via email at madelineXXXXX@hotmail.com or on her office number +356 99XXXXXX.

Thank you for your kind consideration.

Sincerely,
Antonella Bondin
22nd January 2021

Researcher's signature

Appendix C: Email sent to teachers

Dear Teacher,

I would like you to participate in a 6-minute questionnaire on teachers' perspectives on Social and Emotional Learning. In order to participate in the study, you must be a qualified subject teacher, excluding PSCD teachers. Participation is voluntary and anonymous. If you are interested in participating in this study, kindly access the following link: <https://forms.gle/HpDxnK9tWHuxj6qj8>. In appreciation of the time you will give to this study, you have a chance of winning a €50 Trilogy's gift card. Your voluntary participation is of utmost importance.

Attached you will find an information letter with details regarding my study and the questionnaire.

Kind regards,
Antonella Bondin

Appendix D: Information Letter for Teachers

18th March 2021

Dear Teacher,

I am Antonella Bondin, a Spanish student-teacher reading for a Master in Teaching and Learning at the University of Malta. As part of this course, I will be conducting a research study entitled *Teachers' perspective on Social and Emotional Learning in the Maltese Secondary schools* under the supervision of Dr Madeline Duca.

In the course of my research, I will be determining the views of Maltese Secondary school teachers on Social and Emotional Learning; whether teachers consider Social and Emotional Learning as one of the main goals of Maltese education. This research involves the participation of subject teachers, excluding PSCD teachers, coming from 3 Middle and Secondary schools within the Maltese state colleges.

I would like to invite you to participate in my research study. This would involve the completion of an online questionnaire, which will take not more than 6 minutes to complete. In order to participate in the study, you must be a qualified subject teacher, excluding PSCD. The questionnaire will be open from 18th March till 4th June. By completing the questionnaire, you will be consenting to take part in this study. Due to Covid19 only a limited number of schools can be involved in this research. Hence, your voluntary participation is of utmost importance.

The questionnaire will ask you to present your perceptions regarding various aspects of Social and Educational Learning, including whether you think it is an important part of education, your training and confidence, if you consider yourself responsible for students' Social and Educational Learning, and the challenges you experience when doing so.

Participation in the study is voluntary and you will suffer no negative consequence should you choose not to submit the questionnaire. The questions were carefully worded so as not to cause offence. However, if you feel offended, you can withdraw at any point from the questionnaire. At that point, your responses will not be recorded.

Additionally, the participation is anonymous. Therefore, you will not be required to enter your name. Furthermore, as the questionnaire is online, the instrument used will not collect IP addresses, therefore your responses will remain anonymous.

Participation in this study may not provide any personal benefit to you. However, you will be contributing to research which aims to highlight the importance of Social and Emotional Learning, in order to improve the schools' environment. Furthermore, I hope the data from the questionnaire will aid educators, policymakers and stakeholders reflect and possibly make amendments which consider the importance of Social and Emotional Learning.

There are no known or anticipated risks associated with participation in this study. If a question makes you uncomfortable, you can withdraw at any time. Moreover, your rights as a participant are protected under the Data Protection Act Chapter 586 and the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) (EU2016/679), to access, rectify or erase the data concerning you.

The research findings will be analyzed and presented in the dissertation. Also, you can contact me to request the findings. Moreover, the findings cannot be used other than specified without further consent.

If you are interested in participating in this study, kindly access through the following link : **<https://forms.gle/HpDxnK9tWHuxj6qj8>**

The deadline for participation is the 4th June, 2021

In appreciation of the time you have given to this study, you have a chance in winning a €50 Trilogy's gift card. If you wish to participate, once you submit your questionnaire, send an email with your name and email address, to the following email address: antonellaXXXXXX@gmail.com. These details will only be used for the purpose of this voucher competition and therefore, the questionnaire will remain anonymous. On 10th June, an online random picker will choose a winner and I will inform the winner and all who participated via email. Your odds of winning one of the prizes is based on the number of individuals who participate in the study.

Should you require further information, please do not hesitate to contact me via email at antonellaXXXX@um.edu.mt or on my personal number +356 79XXXXXX. Also, you can contact my supervisor Dr Madeline Duca via email at madelineXXXXX@hotmail.com or on her office number +356 99XXXXXX.

Declaration of Consent

By completing the questionnaire, you are consenting to the following declarations:

‡ I have been invited to participate in a research titled *Teachers' perspective on Social and Emotional Learning in the Maltese Secondary schools*

‡ I have confirmed that I have read and understood the above information, and that I agree to participate in this study.

‡ I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the research, and any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction.

‡ I understand that I am free to contact the researcher or the researcher's supervisor to seek further clarification and information.

‡ I understand that my participation in this study is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw from the study at any time, without giving a reason and without consequence of any kind.

‡ I understand that all data are anonymous and that there will not be any connection between the personal information provided and the data.

‡ I understand that there are no known risks or hazards associated with participating in this study.

‡ I understand that my identity will remain anonymous in any form of dissemination, written or otherwise.

Thank you for your kind consideration.

Sincerely,

Antonella Bondin
18th March 2021

Researchers' signature