



## **Teachers' perceptions and practice of social and emotional education in Greece, Spain, Sweden and the United Kingdom**

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The central motive for conducting this research was to investigate how Greece, Spain, Sweden and the United Kingdom treat social and emotional education (SEE) within pedagogical practice. The study used a sequential quantitative-qualitative analysis with a comparative design, with 750 teachers in the initial quantitative phase participating in a questionnaire, and 22 teachers in the following qualitative phase participating in semi-structured interviews. Significant cross-cultural differences were found in SEE provision, as well as in teachers' beliefs about the purpose of SEE. Teacher education in SEE was found to be available to only a minority of teachers in all four countries. In terms of practice, SEE was more likely to be introduced in schools by teachers themselves (or a partnership between teachers and headteachers) rather than by educational policy. Furthermore, the findings show that SEE provision was more likely to be implicit (taken into consideration in existing classes but not taught as a separate subject), than explicit (having dedicated time and curriculum devoted to SEE).

**Keywords:** social and emotional education, teacher training, social and emotional learning, comparative education, cross-cultural research

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### **Introduction**

Given past findings that culture influences how adults socialise children's emotions (Friedlmeier, Corapci & Cole, 2011), it is surprising how little cross-cultural research has focused on how emotions are treated within pedagogical practices in different cultures. This gap in the literature is especially pertinent to researchers studying the educational process of social and emotional education (SEE). Existing cross-cultural literature on the topic includes evaluations of social and emotional learning (SEL) programmes in schools cross-culturally (Sklad, Diekstra, De Ritter, & Gravesteign, 2012; Wigelsworth et al., 2016), comparisons of global

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educational policy relating to social and emotional skills (Domitrovich, Durlak, & Gullotta, 2015; OECD, 2015; Emery, 2016), and summaries of relevant SEE policy and best practice in various countries (Fundacion Botin, 2008, 2011, 2013, 2015). These studies, however, tend to focus on testing students' social and emotional skills or the creation of frameworks to that effect, and given this aim, teachers tend to be treated as faceless variables that may or may not influence outcomes (e.g., testing whether a teacher can run an in-school social and emotional skills programme to similar positive outcomes as, say, a psychologist).

Denham, Bassett and Zinsler (2012) have previously highlighted the ongoing shortage of research regarding teachers' perceptions of SEE, especially regarding teachers' confidence in promoting emotional competence, the supervisory support available for this role and the influence of demographics on SEE provision. Although a number of studies exist that focus on teachers and their SEE practices such as Triliva & Poulou, 2006; Poulou, 2017 (Greece) and Djambazova-Popordanoska, 2016 (Australia), the question is whether the SEE process can be studied in the vacuum of a single culture given culture's significant influence on the socialisation of emotions. As the poet George Oppen warned, things explain each other, not themselves. If SEE continues to be studied without a comparative analysis - especially if researchers use the same schematics originating from the English-speaking world to test students' social and emotional skills around the world, or to train and evaluate teachers from other cultures - such research cannot help but perpetuate one crucial and problematic supposition: that social and emotional competencies are universal across cultures.

There are thus two important gaps in the literature that need attention: (1) research that treats teachers' perceptions and practice of SEE as crucial to how students acquire social and emotional knowledge and skills, and (2) the use of a comparative research methodology to investigate how teachers conceptualise and experience emotions differently from culture to culture and to test whether significant cross-cultural differences in the emotional makeup of the classroom exist. The present research thus attempts to fill these gaps by focusing on different cultures' assumptions about emotions, testing whether teachers' self-perceived roles in socialising emotion are influenced by culture, and statistically analysing how demographics influence teachers' perceptions regarding SEE (including age, sex, education level, teaching experience, SEE training and role in school).

## **Methods**

The study used a sequential quantitative-qualitative analysis with a comparative design, with 750 teachers in the initial quantitative phase participating in a questionnaire, and 22 teachers in the following qualitative phase participating in semi-structured interviews. The comparative design used a contrast of contexts method which works best when the cases that it juxtaposes are maximally different (Skocpol & Somers, 1980). For this reason, the four case studies in the current research were chosen from Hofstede's (1986) cultural groupings that were most likely to socialise emotion differently, as well as other variables to differentiate the cases, like whether the country had any SEE policy, or whether the education system was centralised or decentralised (to read more about the theoretical framework used to pick the case studies for the present

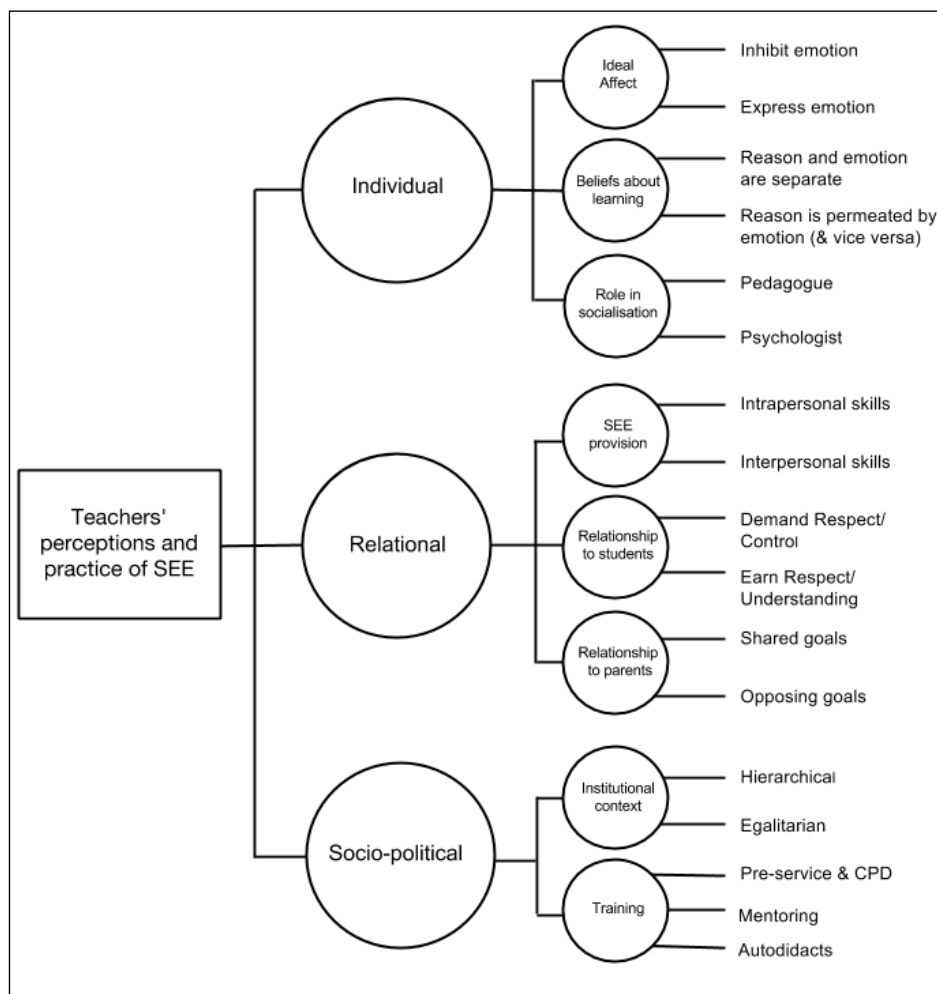
comparative research see Scott Loinaz, 2018). The case studies chosen for the present study were: Greece, Spain, Sweden and the United Kingdom.

For the quantitative data collection, surveys were used to collect original data using UCL's Opinio web-based survey software. In order to have a large number of teachers participate and to be able to have a random sample, virtually every school in each of the four countries was sent an invitation email to participate (using the SwiftMailer software and UCL's SMTP email server to send a copy of the questionnaire invitation to every school email address available). The questionnaire included ten Likert scale questions, and frequency distributions by item were examined for both significance value ( $p$ ) and magnitude of Cohen's effect size ( $d$ ) using the R software (for a copy of the full statistical findings please contact the author). The significance value ( $p$ ), calculated using a t-test, tested the difference between the observed means of each of the pairwise comparisons (for example, the mean difference between Spanish teachers agreeing that they were comfortable expressing their emotions in class compared to Greek, Swedish and UK teachers), with the value giving the probability of obtaining the observed difference between the samples if the null hypothesis were true (that the difference was zero). But as the statistician-researcher Gene V. Glass said, the significance value ( $p$ ) is the least interesting thing about results since it can only highlight that there was a difference in opinion between countries, but not by how much (the measure of magnitude; Sullivan & Feinn, 2012). To solve this problem, Cohen's effect size ( $d$ ) was used in the present research which is a figure determined by calculating the mean difference between two samples, and then dividing the result by the pooled standard deviation. According to Sullivan and Feinn, effect size ( $d$ ) should be reported as: 0.2 small, 0.5 moderate, 0.8 large and 1.3 very large.

The qualitative data collection included semi-structured interviews with 22 teachers (a sub-sample of the original quantitative sample) to discuss the three following topics: (1) Role of SEE provision; (2) SEE training; and (3) SEE and students. Questionnaire responses to open-ended questions and interview responses were analysed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase model of thematic analysis, as well as quantified to ascertain their frequency. Information on the purposes of the research was provided to all participants in the initial email sent to teachers, plus an invitation to be notified of the findings. All participants had the right to withdraw from the research at any time.

## **Results**

The results section presents teachers' beliefs and practice of SEE in terms of their individual, relational and socio-political knowledge (Zembylas, 2007). The themes that make up these three categories were found in both the QUAN and QUAL findings using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase model of thematic analysis (see Figure One for more detail) and included: ideal affect, beliefs about learning, and the teacher's self-perceived role in socialising emotion (individual knowledge); their relationship to students, relationship to parents, and whether their SEE provision focused on interpersonal or intrapersonal skills (relational knowledge); and how the school context and influence of policymakers were experienced by teachers, as well as their access to training (socio-political knowledge).



**Figure One: Summary of teachers' beliefs and practice of SEE**

### *Ideal affect*

A good place to start the results is with the teachers' beliefs about the role of *their own* emotion in the classroom. Only 63% of UK teachers in the sample agreed that teachers should be comfortable expressing their emotions in class - a statistically significant difference compared to 83% of Spanish teachers who agreed ( $p < 0.001$ ,  $d = 0.76$  which suggested a large practical significance), and 73% of Swedish teachers ( $p < 0.01$ ,  $d = 0.35$  which suggested a small to moderate practical significance). When asked why this might be the case, a UK secondary school teacher interviewed felt that overly expressing their own emotion would jeopardise the learning environment; "There has to be an appropriate level of emotional intelligence displayed by the teacher, too much emotion, or negative emotions can prove destructive to the learning environment."

On the other hand, for most of the Spanish teachers interviewed, freely expressing their own emotions was the keystone of social and emotional education. As a Spanish primary school teacher put it:

According to my training and experience, the first phase of emotional education is to recognise one's emotions, that is, to name what I feel. If I want to get my students to learn to recognise and express their own emotions openly, transparently, I think it is beneficial for them to feel that teachers are

also human and as such we feel emotions just like them... that they know that I feel joy when they've done a good job... I feel frustration, sadness, when there are violent conflicts in the school yard... I think that to express my own emotions helps them to identify their own.

A notable cross-cultural difference in 'emotional rules' concerned the expression of negative emotion in the classroom. Only the Spanish teachers were more likely to agree that anger, sadness and other negatively-evaluating emotions are emotionally intelligent reactions to a certain state of affairs and belong in the classroom: the largest difference being with the Swedish teachers in the sample ( $p < 0.001$ ,  $d = 0.47$  which suggested a moderate practical significance). Whereas 73% of Swedish teachers agreed that they should be comfortable expressing emotion in the classroom, only 51% believed that this should include negative emotion. As one Swedish teacher said when explaining the purpose of SEE, one "can feel anything, but not do and express everything."

There were, however, examples of ideal affect being shared cross-culturally. For example, primary school teachers were much more likely to agree that they felt comfortable expressing their emotions in class compared to secondary school teachers in both the UK ( $p < 0.001$ ,  $d = .47$  suggested a moderate practical significance), and Spain ( $p < 0.05$ ,  $d = .29$  suggested a small practical significance). Greek and UK teachers also seemed to have a very similar emotional makeup in their classrooms overall, with effect sizes having hardly any practical significance between the relevant items ( $d = .1$  and  $d = .14$ ): that is, UK and Greek teachers were not as emotionally expressive (compared to Swedish and Spanish teachers), and less likely to tolerate negative emotional expression in the classroom (compared to Spanish teachers). The only difference between the UK and Greece was that in the latter there was a significant difference found in the emotional expression between genders: Greek male teachers were found to feel more comfortable expressing their own emotions in the classroom than Greek female teachers ( $p < 0.05$ ,  $d = .44$  suggested a small to moderate practical significance). An explanation for this came from the interviews: according to the Greek female teachers, male privilege allows men to feel more comfortable to express their emotions in the classroom, as male teachers tend to be more respected than female teachers by students' parents and have more freedom to express themselves as they deem fit.

### *Beliefs about learning and emotion*

The research also wished to determine whether or not teachers think social and emotional aptitudes are something that can be taught - explicitly through teaching, or implicitly by modelling - and if so, to determine their confidence in developing their students' social and emotional skills. A majority of teachers from all countries agreed that social and emotional aptitudes can be taught (98% in Spain, 91% in Greece, 88% in Sweden and 84% in the United Kingdom), but it was only Spain that had a highly statistically significant difference to the other countries. It is important to highlight the difference in average means between theory and practice in this respect: whereas 72% of UK teachers participating in the study strongly agreed that emotion is fundamental to learning, only 40% strongly agreed that emotional skills are actually

teachable. In other words, though a majority of UK teachers believed emotion is important to learning, they were much less confident that they themselves could develop their students' social and emotional skills. However, there were demographic differences in the answers: the more experienced and older the teachers were in the samples from Sweden and the UK, the more likely they were to agree that social and emotional skills can be taught. No other demographic variable influenced the confidence of teachers in developing their students' social and emotional skills, not even SEE training (a matter which will be discussed in more detail in the training section below).

There were, however, teachers who explicitly said that they do not believe social and emotional skills can be taught (and thus that they cannot be responsible for the socialisation of students). Arguments included the claim that emotional regulation is not a transferable skill, or that teachers are not qualified to do so. As an English secondary-school teacher said in their interview: "I'm not an expert in mental health issues and so discussing ways to cope with something such as anxiety, for example, wasn't something I was trained in." This creates an important distinction: yes, most teachers believe social and emotional skills can be taught, but they were divided as to who was qualified to do so.

#### *Teachers' identity as emotion socialisers*

The majority of teachers in the sample believed themselves to be responsible for socialising students' emotions: 94% of teachers in Spain agreed, as did 92% in the UK, 92% in Greece, and 82% in Sweden. As with teachers' beliefs regarding their own emotional expression (meta-emotion), demographic variables also influenced teachers' beliefs about their self-perceived role as emotion socialisers. Groups in the study who were significantly more likely to believe themselves responsible for socialising emotion included: female teachers in Sweden and Spain, primary school teachers in the UK and Spain, teachers with over 10 years' experience in Sweden and the UK, teachers aged 51-60 in the UK, headteachers in Sweden, and teachers who had received SEE training in the UK and Sweden.

Unlike beliefs about inhibiting or expressing emotion in the classroom, there was no significant difference between UK and Spanish teachers in their perceived responsibility to socialise students. However, differences between these two samples were found qualitatively: Whilst most UK teachers saw socialisation as a chance to fill in gaps not met at home, "Seeing them every day in a relatively stable environment we can perhaps spot any signs of concern", this was not mentioned by any of the Spanish teachers, who instead were more likely to mention the need for the school to model society, e.g., "The school is structured as a small country with its communities, regulations, hierarchies ... This introduces you to society."

#### *SEE provision*

According to the teachers in the sample, the most common way SEE was taught in the four countries was that social and emotional aspects of learning were considered for all subjects, rather than being a separate subject or taught as part of another module. The second most common way SEE was taught was as part of another subject such as religious education, health or citizenship studies. The UK was the most likely to

teach SEE as its own subject - both primary teachers (29%) and secondary teachers (20%) - said that they had time dedicated to teaching SEE exclusively throughout the school year (see Table I).

When SEE was taught exclusively as its own subject, it was found to positively correlate with teacher satisfaction with SEE provision in general ( $p < 0.01$ ,  $d = .61$  suggested a moderate practical significance), improved teacher-student relationships in Spain ( $p < 0.01$ ,  $d = .66$  suggested a moderate practical significance), and teachers feeling more comfortable in expressing their emotions in the classroom in the UK ( $p < 0.05$ ,  $d = .37$  suggested a small to moderate practical significance).

**Table I: How is social and emotional education (SEE) taught in your school and/or classroom? (N: 706)**

<b>Preschool and Primary</b>	<b>Greece</b>	<b>Spain</b>	<b>Sweden</b>	<b>UK</b>
Own subject	8%	11%	7%	29%
Part of other subject	24%	18%	19%	32%
Considered but not taught	53%	66%	67%	38%
Not considered	16%	5%	7%	1%
Total	38	148	27	140
<b>Secondary and Upper</b>	<b>Greece</b>	<b>Spain</b>	<b>Sweden</b>	<b>UK</b>
Own subject	1%	13%	11%	20%
Part of other subject	19%	31%	23%	36%
Considered but not taught	51%	41%	56%	34%
Not considered	29%	14%	11%	10%
Total	101	90	75	87

Throughout the four case studies, teachers interviewed were divided on whether there should be changes to the time devoted to SEE: whereas teachers from the UK and Sweden were mostly satisfied with their school's SEE provision, teachers from Spain and Greece were not. Secondary school teachers were the most likely to agree that their school needed to devote more time to social and emotional education: both in the UK ( $p < 0.001$ ,  $d = .48$  suggested a moderate practical significance), and Spain ( $p < 0.01$ ,  $d = .35$  suggested a small to moderate practical significance). Despite this, many teachers had recommendations as to how SEE provision could be improved in their school and certain rifts between different SEE provisions were found:

1. Teachers who wanted SEE to be considered as part of every subject and not treated as a separate topic (mostly due to lack of time/support/resources), compared to those who wished for a specific time and space to be carved out to teach SEE exclusively throughout the school year.
2. Teachers who saw the value of SEE for its own sake, compared to those who saw it more instrumentally as a means to bolster academic achievement.

3. Teachers who wanted SEE to be simplified with a standard curriculum detailing what social and emotional skills needed to be worked on at each developmental level, compared to those who saw a great danger in creating a normative, one-size-fits all SEE curriculum.
4. Teachers who saw the solution to improving SEE provision as dependent on more training and professional development in the area, compared to those who would prefer more day-to-day support from experienced teachers or mentorship programmes.

Cross-cultural differences were found regarding which particular social and emotional skills were more likely to be targeted. There were also many culturally-specific terms used. A common term used by a number of Spanish teachers, for example, was ‘convivencia’ - a word that the positive psychologist Tim Lomas included in his lexicography of ‘untranslatable’ words related to wellbeing as ‘co-habitation, but also implying shared feelings, meanings and purpose’ (Lomas, 2016). Another translation for this term is co-existence, for example: “making co-existence with others easier and more enjoyable”. A specific term in Greece was *ενταχθούν* which can be translated as to join or integrate, as in: “the main purpose of SEE is to develop social skills in order to integrate smoothly into various social groups.” The Swedish responses placed particular importance on collaboration and group dynamics in order “to achieve success together.” And finally the UK teachers were more likely to emphasise the need for resilience and grit: whilst 20% of UK teachers mentioned this skill, only 4% of teachers in Sweden, 6% in Spain and 7% in Greece did so. An aggregate summary of the teachers’ responses as to what social and emotional skills should be imparted as part of SEE can be seen in Table II.

#### *Relationship to students*

When asked whether SEE had improved their own relationship with students, 72% of teachers in the UK, 72% in Spain, 67% in Sweden, and 62% of teachers in Greece agreed that it had. In terms of demographic variables, the teachers who were significantly more likely to agree were: preschool and primary school teachers in Spain and the UK; teachers more than headteachers in Spain; more experienced teachers in Sweden and the UK; older teachers in Greece; and teachers who had received SEE training in the UK.

When discussing how to improve teacher-student relationships, teachers frequently mentioned developing students’ social and emotional aptitudes. In Spain, however, teachers were more likely to talk about the role of their own emotions to improve relationships with students, especially as a means of undermining more traditional ‘authoritarian’ roles in the classroom once expected of teachers. For example, a Spanish mathematics teacher said in their interview:

My science is exact, but I am not... I got so tired of the role of the perfect teacher, because it didn't even work. I was suffering because of this. Because you have 20 people in front of you, and you can't control everything ... This used to happen a bit to me many years ago. Going against them, ‘I will control them. They are not going to overpower me’... And once this fear had gone, because I believe it is fear, it is fear what we [teachers] have, you can go into the classroom more relaxed.



**Table II: A summary of teachers' responses as to the purpose of SEE cross-culturally: Teaching social and emotional skills**

Intrapersonal skills			Interpersonal skills	
Improve students' relationship to emotion	Know thyself	Manage Adversity	Better understand others	Form positive relationships
Coping with negative emotion	Self-acceptance	Resilience	Diversity and respect	Social skills
Experience more positive states of mind	Self-worth	Stress management	Understand others' emotions	Improve co-existence
Normalise and understand the spectrum of feelings	Self-autonomy	Problem solving	Awareness of others' needs	Assertiveness
Appropriate expression of feeling	Self-respect		Empathy	Solidarity
Emotional maturity	Self-awareness			Conflict resolution
Benefitting from emotion	Sense of belonging			

### *Relationship to parents*

To understand the cross-cultural differences in the boundaries between home and school, a Likert scale was included in the questionnaire: 'My students have consistent behaviour goals between home and school'. The sample group from Spain was highly significantly more likely to agree than the other three countries in their responses ( $p < 0.001$ ). However, considering that only 23% of Greek teachers, 24% of Swedish teachers, 35% of UK teachers, and 43% of Spanish teachers agreed that their students had similar behavioural goals between home and school, this troubling finding shows that most teachers believed there was a disconnect between parents and educators regarding student's behaviour.

Teacher groups more likely to report more consistency between school and home were: Spanish primary school teachers, older Greek male teachers, and UK teachers who had received SEE training. Spanish primary school teachers were more likely to discuss the need for co-responsibility and shared values, but were also very aware of creating a positive mesosystem between home and school for students, for example, "A kid should not consider the different moments of [their] upbringing as compartmentalised and unrelated to each other." As for SEE training in the UK, one English teacher interviewed had recently

become a teacher trainer and discussed at length the process of improving the teacher-parent relationship with their trainees:

Every time I do my training there's a discussion about not being judgmental about parents... Is there something that is cross-generational? Does it mean that they're bad parents if they've behaved badly? What are your barriers to them?

### *Institutional context*

In all four countries, respondents from schools where SEE provision had been introduced by policymakers were the most dissatisfied with the attention given to SEE in general. However, policy had introduced SEE provision in the minority of cases: 31% of UK teachers said SEE provision had been introduced in their school due to policy, compared to only 23% in Sweden, 16% in Spain, and 9% in Greece. An English teacher described the SEE provision introduced by policy as superficial, "I felt like it [SEE] was incorporated in a 'tick box' sort of way rather than being meaningful."

The results of the present research also highlighted how much more influential senior management and headteachers in the UK were compared to teachers, adding another level of hierarchy for teachers in schools. Headteachers were found to be involved in introducing SEE in 70% of responses in the UK sample, compared to only 46% in Sweden, 37% in Spain and 23% in Greece. The heavily decentralised education systems of Sweden and the United Kingdom were also the two case studies which were more likely to have different opinions between headteachers and teachers regarding SEE. For example, in Sweden headteachers were more likely to agree that: emotion is fundamental to learning, the key to learning depends on the relationship between the teacher and the student, teachers are responsible for socialising students, and that negative emotion can be expressed in the classroom. Headteachers in the UK, on the other hand, were more likely than teachers to agree that the school pays enough attention to SEE.

A negative correlation was found regarding teacher satisfaction with SEE provision if senior leadership had introduced SEE without teacher involvement, and a partnership between teachers and senior leadership in introducing SEE was found to have the highest likelihood that teachers were satisfied with the provision. 69% of Spanish teachers said they introduced SEE provision into their school, compared to 59% in Sweden, 57% in UK and 53% in Greece. When teachers introduced SEE into their schools they were more likely to consider social and emotional aspects of learning for every subject that was taught, rather than teach, measure and assess social and emotional competencies explicitly; this method of introduction and approach to SEE correlated positively to teacher satisfaction with SEE provision in all four countries.

The lack of time for SEE due to policy and/or school management's emphasis on academic attainment was another institutional issue that surfaced in the study. Many teachers talked about how senior staff focus so much on academic achievement that they begin to treat all other educational goals such as developing social and emotional competencies as a zero-sum game at worst, or a minor detail at best. This tension was very clear in the responses of an English teacher interviewed:

N.Q.T. [Newly Qualified Teachers] come into education wanting to make a difference... You don't come into education to make a mint, you're coming because you are driven to make a difference, and then they come in and they realize, 'They're not going to let me do it. I have to do this prescriptive thing', and even the schools that are very holistic and really switched on to it [SEE], because all those other pressures, they can't even do it as much as they want to.

This feeling was corroborated by many other teachers in all four countries, and in many cases SEE was seen as a possible means to deliver a more holistic education.

As to the purpose of SEE for students, Greece and Sweden had similar responses regarding the need to create citizens (with 24% and 23% of teachers respectively mentioning this as the purpose of SEE), compared to only 11% of UK teachers and 19% of Spanish teachers. Greek and Spanish teachers commonly added an extra stipulation to this theme: teaching students to be 'active' citizens (ενεργός πολίτης), or as a Spanish teacher described it, "The training of persons in a comprehensive manner, critical citizens, responsible, participatory, ultimately, [people] with values; where emotion is the engine of growth and learning." None of the Swedish and UK teachers, however, used the word active in their description of citizens - instead they described the purpose of SEE as helping to create responsible, empathetic, good and happy citizens.

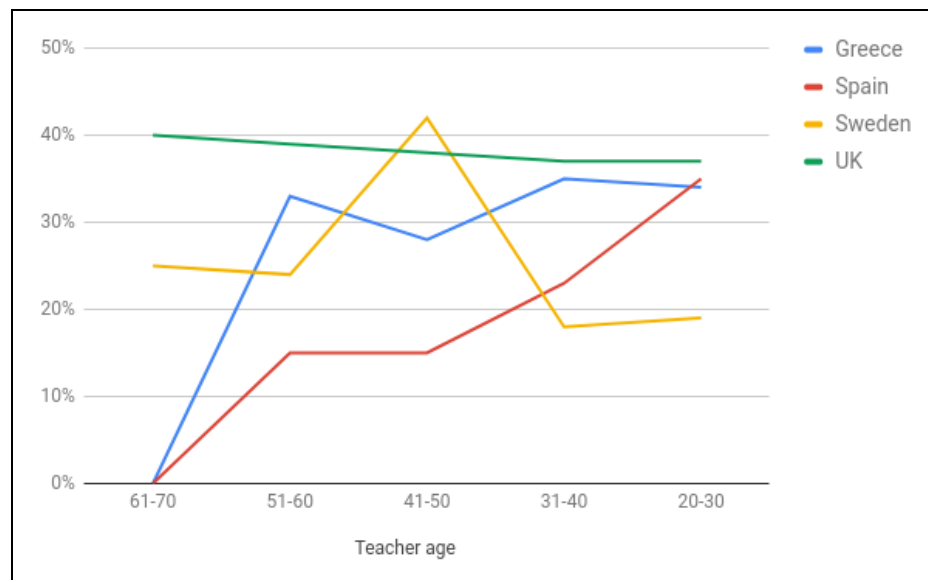
UK teachers were the most likely to mention preparation for work as the purpose of SEE at 32%, compared to Greece at 7%, Sweden at 16% and Spain at 21%. It was also more common in the UK to find teachers speaking of the need to equip students for future relationships: "Preparation of children for social and emotional interaction as adults," compared to the other countries where teachers more commonly spoke about the application of social and emotional skills in the here and now, for example, to "improve relationships of students with their peers." Such a contrast between present and future also influenced the way physical space was discussed - whereas UK teachers discussed how SEE "Prepares them [students] for life outside," and to "face the challenges of the real world", responses from the other countries had no division between the rest of society and the classroom, such as a Spanish teacher that described school as "a micro-society, where many of the relationships that occur at the macro level (in society) occur."

### *Training*

A minority of teachers in the research studied social and emotional education as part of their teacher training or continuing professional development. Those who had studied SEE included 40% of UK teachers, 38% of Swedish teachers, 34% of Greek teachers and 23% of Spanish teachers. These numbers, however, hide a shift in the amount of teachers who have trained in SEE over the last five decades in specific countries, as can be seen in Figure 2.

Spain saw the most significant change in teacher training: only 15% of respondents aged 41-60 years old had SEE as part of their initial teacher training, and this doubled to 35% for teachers aged 20-30 years old. The Swedish sample on the other hand saw a drop in the number of teachers receiving SEE training by

over half: from 42% of 41-50 year olds to 19% of 20-30 year olds. These training figures obscure the fact that a large number of teachers who had not received SEE training were autodidacts: 50% of Spanish teachers, 39% of UK teachers, 36% of Swedish teachers and 36% of Greek teachers.



**Figure 2: Percentage of teachers whose initial teacher training or continuing professional development included social and emotional education depending on teacher age (N: 749)**

For those who did receive SEE training, what kind of topics and theories regarding social and emotional education influenced their practice the most? The answer - in the majority of cases - was none, or more precisely, that the teachers did not remember: 60% of Greek teachers, 59% of Spanish, 55% of Swedish and 39% of UK teachers answered that they did not remember any specific topic or theory from their SEE training or continuing professional development that inspired them. For those who did remember, some of the most influential topics cross-culturally regarding SEE training were: Bowlby's attachment theory which was mentioned by 35% of UK teachers, 8% of Spanish, 4% of Greek, and 4% of Swedish; Developmental psychology (and more specifically, the theories of Piaget and Vygotsky), mentioned by 19% of Greek teachers, 17% of Swedish, 11% of UK and 5% of Spanish teachers; and emotional intelligence theory, mentioned by 11% of Spanish teachers, 2% of Greek, 1% of Swedish, and 1% of UK teachers.

When analysing the differences in the Likert scales between teachers who had received SEE training and those who had not, it was the UK that showed the most statistically significant differences, including (in order of significance) that teachers who had received training were: more likely to agree that social and emotional education had improved their relationship with their students ( $p < 0.001$ ,  $p = .57$  which suggested a moderate practical significance); more likely to agree that emotion is fundamental to learning ( $p < 0.05$ ,  $p = .35$  which suggested a small to moderate practical significance); more likely to agree that teachers are responsible for socialising students ( $p < 0.05$ ,  $p = .29$  which suggested a small practical significance); and

more likely to agree that their students had consistent behavioural goals between home and school ( $p < 0.05$ ,  $p = .27$  which suggested a small practical significance). One Likert scale that was not influenced by training was whether or not teachers felt confident in teaching social and emotional skills. However, in both Sweden and the UK the findings show that teachers who had over 10 years' experience were significantly more confident in their ability to develop their students' social and emotional competencies compared to teachers with less experience - that is to say, it was not training nor university qualifications that gave teachers confidence to teach SEE, but rather the amount of experience they had as teachers.

## **Discussion**

*Culture influences emotion, and thus cannot help but influence SEE provision.*

Taras, Kirkman and Steel (2010) found that the predictive power of culture was higher than that of other demographic variables regarding emotion (or the 'ideal affect' of any given culture), and the present research corroborates this finding in that each culture was found to have different conceptualisations of emotion. Spanish teachers were more likely to describe their classrooms as being very permissive of expressing emotion: both the students' and the teachers' emotions. Concomitantly, Spanish teachers felt that there was less of a division between home and school and a lot of teachers believed it was their responsibility to not compartmentalise the school and the home emotionally - a finding that adds weight to ecological theory which purports that children will encounter difficulties when there are disconnects between parents and educators (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

The 'emotional rules' for teachers in Sweden, the UK and female teachers in Greece meant they were more likely to hide their emotions in the classroom than express them. This is an important finding because, (1) adults socialise children's emotion by modelling behaviour (and thus students are more likely to suppress their own emotions in class), and, (2) the literature has found that there are negative consequences to regularly suppressing emotion, particularly to the teacher's mental health and the resulting desensitisation to other people's emotions (Cameron & Payne, 2011; Taxer & Frenzel, 2015; Lee et al., 2016). Emotional rules to inhibit emotion were felt by some teachers in the present study to be an imposition as a result of the 'artificial' nature of the classroom, or as a necessity to 'act professionally' thus leading to a dichotomised identity between the model teacher and themselves as human beings. This was especially so with secondary school teachers. Though this partly corroborates findings from Hargreaves' (2000) research which described secondary school teachers as more likely to treat emotions like intrusions in their class, the present research also contradicted Hargreaves' findings in that some secondary school teachers believed it was organisational policies and rules - the institutional context - that imposed these 'emotional rules', not the teachers themselves. The majority of secondary school teachers from all four countries wanted more importance to be given to SEE, and were just as likely to agree with primary school teachers that the key to learning was the teacher-student relationship.

In what instances did teachers' beliefs about emotion actually change? The answer was SEE provision itself. When UK teachers' SEE provision was taught exclusively and explicitly as its own subject,

that is to say, when SEE provision allowed teachers and students alike to actively and consciously analyse their relationship to emotion, only then could beliefs about emotion change. This finding gives further weight to Feldman Barrett's (2017) theory of constructed emotion: that is, emotions are a product of human agreement, and thus they do not 'happen to you', you create them yourself.

*More teaching experience led to higher confidence in promoting students' social and emotional skills, whereas SEE training did not.*

A conundrum has existed in the literature regarding teachers' continuing lack of confidence in developing the social and emotional aptitudes of their students, even after undergoing SEE training (Kimber, Skoog and Sandell, 2013; Reeves and Le Mare, 2017). This was also found to be the case in the present study where training in SEE did not impact teachers' confidence in teaching social and emotional skills. It was the demographic data that did show a difference: in Sweden and the UK, teachers who had over 11 years' experience were significantly more confident in their ability to develop their students' social and emotional competencies compared to teachers with less experience.

This finding was able to give weight to Scott's (1998) definition of experience as 'metis', rules of thumb which are acquired solely through practice and a developed 'knack' for classroom strategy. The need, therefore, for teachers to access the metis of more experienced teachers cannot be overstated - not by trial-by-fire inspections, nor by more seminars offering piecemeal psychology theories and assessments (which are more than likely to be forgotten according to the present findings), but by ongoing mentorship from more experienced teachers with a treasure trove of experience; teachers who can pass on their hard-won knowledge about all kinds of specific problems that teachers constantly encounter throughout their professional lives. For example, one Greek teacher in the interviews recounted that in their first year of teaching, it was the advice of an experienced teacher (in charge of supporting all public schools in the region) that greatly helped them with one particular student's unruly behaviour:

She said to me, 'Look, what you're going to do is every day just allow two minutes of your time only for him, like when you walk in the school just talk to him and ask him how you're doing and stuff,' and this was one of the best [pieces of] advice ever given to me. It was so simple and I would have struggled the whole year without it.

Although the need is much greater than the time and resources made available so far, education practices in Greece are a positive example of how new teachers can access the 'metis' of more experienced teachers.

*Teachers who were not in favour of SEE provision were more likely to believe that reason and emotion were mutually exclusive.*

Because some teachers believed emotion to be mutually exclusive from reason, they believed that the time given to SEE in the classroom was a zero-sum game to learning. For this reason, the evidence of how

emotion positively impacts the learning process cannot be emphasised enough in order to challenge the treatment of emotion as ‘noise’, pandering to students’ whims, or an annoyance in the classroom which risks making the classroom ineffective. As Immordino-Yang & Damasio (2007) state, ‘The neurobiological evidence suggests that the aspects of cognition that we recruit most heavily in schools, namely learning, attention, memory, decision making, and social functioning, are both profoundly affected by and subsumed within the processes of emotion’ (3).

The gender of teachers was also found to influence whether they were in favour of SEE provision, particularly in Spain where female teachers were more likely to believe that emotion is fundamental to learning, that children can be taught SEE skills, that they should be responsible for socialising students, and that their students were offered enough opportunities to verbalise their emotions, and in Sweden where female teachers were more likely to feel responsible for socialising students’ emotions compared to male teachers.

*Headteachers and teachers held significantly different opinions regarding SEE in the UK and Sweden.*

All is good and well when headteachers and teachers are on the same page, but when they are not, as Jones (2016) warns in her study about headteachers’ influence on SEE provision, headteachers have ‘influence on everyone involved in the system, but do not seem to be easily influenced by others’ (ix). The findings from the present study indicate that the less involved teachers were in the introduction and implementation of SEE provision the more dissatisfied they were with the provision itself. Furthermore, younger teachers on lower salaries in the study were more likely to be dissatisfied with the current SEE provision in their schools (compared to headteachers who were more likely to be satisfied), especially newly-qualified secondary school teachers who felt powerless to do anything about SEE in their schools.

*Different cultures emphasise different social and emotional skills, and so SEE cannot help but be specific to each culture.*

The regularity at which SEE skills were taught from culture to culture was found to be significantly different in the present study, with the largest differences being between Sweden and the UK (which is arguably due to the fact that Sweden has in-school counsellors to develop learners’ social and emotional aptitudes). Since each country was found to be significantly different, this means that the recommendations made by the OECD (2015) and the United Nation’s World Happiness Report (2015) to create a universal social and emotional skills framework could impose a particular model of emotional competency in cultures where it does not belong, particularly models from the English-speaking world such as those marketed by the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL). As linguist Anna Wierzbicka warned, English has long been a conceptual prison for the study of emotion, ‘English terms of emotion constitute a folk taxonomy, not an objective, culture-free analytic framework’ (Feldman Barrett, 2017, p.148).

Future cross-cultural research using comparative methods is necessary to support the development of bespoke, grassroots frameworks of social and emotional skills, each created by local educators, in their own language, with their own set of emotional concepts. This would be a much needed alternative to a one-size-fits-all schematic for all cultures, and the PISA-like emotional intelligence assessments that would inevitably use it to rank teachers, schools, and countries for political purposes. Such SEE universal frameworks would do more harm than good because, by design, they cannot take into account the local and divergent knowledge that make up social and emotional education in each context.

## Conclusion

Does culture influence SEE? The answer is a resounding yes. The differences between cultures in the study were found to be individual (the teachers' meta-emotions and how culture influences the inhibition and expression of emotion in the classroom); relational (their relationships to students, to other teachers and to students' parents); and finally, linked to the wider socio-political context (what SEE is *meant for*, e.g., employment, citizenship or wellbeing). The main purpose of SEE was described by most teachers as the development of students' social and emotional competencies, both intrapersonal skills and interpersonal skills - and culture influenced what skills were more likely to be prioritised and taught. It is no surprise then that SEE was more likely to be introduced by teachers than by policymakers: whereas teachers were more likely to introduce SEE provision that was relational (where teachers explicitly focus on the quality of their interactions with students to promote social and emotional competencies), policymakers and some school management were more likely to introduce SEE provision that was explicit (competence-based approaches that were taught from a manual or framework). Although teachers' self-perceived role in socialising emotion differed from culture to culture, teachers in all four sample countries were more likely to be satisfied with SEE provision when they themselves (or other teachers) introduced it into their schools.

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