

9-26-2024

British Columbia Teachers' Beliefs and Experiences on Implementing Social and Emotional Learning

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Walden University

College of Psychology and Community Services

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Walden University

2024

Abstract

British Columbia Teachers' Beliefs and Experiences on Implementing Social and

Emotional Learning

by

Lori Larkin

MACP, Yorkville University, 2007

MEd, Simon Fraser University, 2005

BA, University of Northern British Columbia, 2002

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

General Psychology

Walden University

May 2024

Abstract

Social and emotional learning (SEL) is a school-based educational intervention aimed at helping children and youth develop competencies to promote positive academic growth, behavior, and development. The success of the SEL intervention depends on several factors beyond the curriculum, including the role of teachers, the quality of the SEL implementation, and the classroom and school context. While research on the teachers' role in successful SEL implementation has been conducted, less is known about how SEL is implemented in an impoverished and diverse school context in British Columbia in Northern Canada. The purpose of this generic qualitative study was to explore Northern British Columbia elementary school teachers' experiences and beliefs about implementing SEL practices and programs in their school and classroom. The conceptual framework for this study was based on the collaboration for academic, social, and emotional learning conceptualization of SEL and on Schonert-Reichl's three-component SEL framework. Semistructured interviews with 12 elementary school teachers who had experience implementing SEL constituted the data for this study. Thematic analysis was used to analyze the content of the interviews. The results of this study underscored the significance of SEL in promoting student well-being and academic success, the role of ongoing professional development for educators, and the necessity for collaborative efforts to overcome implementation hurdles. The findings of this study have the potential to be used for positive social change in the creation and implementation of best practices for SEL and in providing a better understanding of how teachers juggle implementing SEL in the context of the reality of their diverse student population.

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Dedication

Two roads diverged in a wood, and I took the one less travelled by,

And that has made all the difference ~ Robert Frost

I want to dedicate this dissertation to my exceptional children, who have patiently observed and supported me throughout my pursuit of higher education. Your presence in my life has motivated me to strive for excellence, to become a more devoted and empathetic clinical counsellor, and a mother you can be proud of. You inspire and drive me to improve each day, so I work tirelessly in both my personal and professional life to equip you with the necessary tools to lead happy, fulfilling, and independent lives. Always remember that you are cherished unconditionally and eternally and deserving of love and meaningful connections; you deserve everything this world has to offer.

I like to extend my deepest gratitude to the wonderful teachers who generously volunteered to participate in this study. Your time and dedication in assisting me with my research study are greatly appreciated. I am also thankful to all the exceptional educators and administrators who have sparked my enthusiasm for social-emotional learning. Working with and learning from you in my career has been a pleasure. Your unwavering commitment to your work and the recognition you have provided for my contributions have been truly inspiring and have significantly impacted my journey.

The journey to deepen our understanding of "the teaching self" is long, usually lifelong! Like a journey, it has its difficult passages. "The more familiar we are with the inner terrain, the more sure-footed our teaching and living becomes." ~Parker

Palmer~

Acknowledgments

I want to express my deepest gratitude to my five children: Jayden, Keira, Araya, Emery, and Kinsley. Your unwavering support, whether helping with daily tasks or providing emotional strength during challenging times, has been crucial to my academic journey. Your unconditional love and constant encouragement have had a profound impact on my personal growth and have shaped me into the person I am today. I hope my dedication to education and lifelong learning has conveyed the importance of diligence, perseverance, and resilience as essential for success in all your pursuits. I am confident in the bright futures that await each of you. I am committed to offering you the same sincerity and encouragement you have graciously shown me, ensuring our familial bond remains strong and our mutual affection continues to thrive.

I want to express my sincere appreciation to my best friend, Amber Reed. Your unwavering friendship and support have been a source of strength and have contributed to my personal growth. Your resilience has been truly inspiring, and your guidance has been a beacon of light and strength. I am forever grateful for you and proud of your accomplishments. Your continuous presence in my life and the cherished memories we've created mean a lot to me. Your role as an Auntie to my children, from their births to your positive influence on their upbringing, has been invaluable in shaping them into confident individuals. You have been instrumental in helping them see me as their mother in a positive light and consistently demonstrating that they deserve a family that prioritizes them. You have been the anchor and cornerstone of the extended family we've built together, teaching our children that the best family is the one you choose. I am

honored to reciprocate this role for your wonderful children, Brandon, Brittney, Brair, and Brielle. Watching them grow and develop is a privilege I deeply treasure, always and forever.

I sincerely appreciate my closest friend and family, Santaya Garnot, for entrusting me with the role of Auntie to her remarkable children, my niece Araya and nephews Ryder and Kayson. Your trust and faith in me have been a constant source of strength and inspiration; I am forever proud of you. Equally, I sincerely thank my close friend Jen Millar for your friendship and encouragement. Your guidance and positivity have been vital, especially during my most challenging times. The role of friends in my journey cannot be overstated, and I am forever grateful for your unwavering support.

I thank my dissertation advisor, Dr. Susanna Verdinelli, and second reader, Dr. Denise Horton, for their continued support and guidance throughout this process and journey. Dr. Verdinelli, your role as my dissertation advisor was instrumental to my success; you helped me grow as a scholar and a lifelong learner, motivating me and lending me the stamina to complete my dissertation successfully. Your unwavering belief in my abilities and gentle nudges were invaluable when I needed them most. Without your support, I would not have been able to demonstrate to my children, nieces, and nephews that education is the only thing someone cannot take from you. I want to set an example of the importance of pursuing continued knowledge and self-growth to help others and give back to the world. I sincerely thank Dr. Amy Sikel, Program Director, for providing me with opportunities to prove my capabilities and Greg Murphy, my

Academic Advisor, for his professionalism, compassion, and consistent encouragement throughout this fantastic journey with Walden University. Your contributions have been beneficial; I deeply respect and admire your dedication to my success.

I would also like to extend my utmost appreciation to my third reader, my friend and colleague Karen Moller, who kindly guided and edited my work; I would only have a completed version with your support. Deepest gratitude to fellow DMHBT Clinician Lynne Anderson for being my rock at work; your innate kindness and compassion radiate your genuine soul; how you practice and show up in the lives of others; you set the bar high for us all to rise. I sincerely want to thank my colleagues, Shelia Hepburn, Inder Manhas, Natalie Manhas, and Majal Tyndal, who kindly checked in and reminded me to keep going; your emotional support and encouragement made a significant difference in ensuring I completed this long educational journey. Your professional guidance and support have been invaluable, and I am deeply grateful for your role in my academic journey.

Lastly, I express my deepest gratitude to Sarah Petrisor; your insights and guidance played a crucial role in refining my research study in the earlier stages of the dissertation. Many thanks to Cindy Heitman and Corrine Madill for your approval of my research study; all your contributions ensured my later success.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Social and emotional learning (SEL) is a school-based educational intervention that can improve immediate and long-term social-emotional competencies, leading to improved behavior, mental health, and academic achievement (CASEL, 2012). Evidence-based SEL interventions, programs, and strategies have been developed, implemented, and reviewed, resulting in direct and measurable gains, making it a fundamental part of education. SEL involves implementing practices and programs that help students and adults acquire and apply knowledge, skills, and attitudes that enhance CASEL's five interrelated core competencies: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making (Durlak, 2015; Greenberg et al., 2003; Taylor et al., 2017). Teachers play a significant role in educating an increasingly diverse student population in successful SEL implementation and outcomes (Bridgeland et al., 2013; Chetty et al., 2014; Jones & Bouffard, 2012; Nye et al., 2004). But continued research is needed to understand teachers' beliefs and experiences implementing SEL in school settings (Brackett et al., 2012; Collie et al., 2012). It is particularly relevant to understand teachers' experiences with SEL when working in rural and inner-city school contexts and with student populations at risk of limited resources. Teachers in these environments face higher levels of stress and burnout, experience difficulties connecting to their students, and lack the support and capacity to create positive learning environments (Braun et al., 2020; Oberle & Schonert-Reichl, 2016; Schonert-Reichl, 2017).

An example of this challenge is the current implementation of SEL in one

northern school district in British Columbia (BC). This school district honors and respects the ancestral land, cultures, and people of the L'heidli T'enneh Band, McLeod Lake Indian Band, and Simpcw First Nations through the work in their communities. The peoples' traditional territory serves approximately 13,000 students enrolled in 32 elementary schools, eight secondary schools, and a center for learning alternatives, including continuing, distance, international, and alternative education programs. It offers a diverse learning community supporting extensive French immersion student programs and self-identified Indigenous student population. The district provides a culturally sensitive curriculum and has the only Indigenous choice school in BC (School District No. 57 Prince George, 2021). This district is committed to working collaboratively to support, enhance, and increase all Indigenous students' academic, social, and emotional success (School District No. 57 Board of Education, 2021). As a result, SD57 recently changed all Aboriginal references to the culturally appropriate term Indigenous to represent and ensure all students achieve success in academic, physical, emotional, and spiritual areas.

This study aimed to explore Northern BC elementary teachers' beliefs and experiences implementing SEL practices and programs in their schools and classrooms. The results of this study offer this BC district a greater understanding of teachers' beliefs and experiences implementing SEL, how teachers perceive their influence on students' wellbeing when using SEL, and how they implement SEL with sensitivity toward their diverse student populations. This chapter includes the study's background, the problem and purpose statements, and the significance of this study. The theoretical framework

presented leads to a discussion of the methodology chosen to explore this study's key concepts. I also consider this project's specific scope, delimitations, and limitations.

Background

The existing research on school-based SEL programs has primarily focused on understanding and describing the positive outcomes of SEL for students. The results of three meta-analyses indicated that SEL programs demonstrated short- and long-term benefits for students, including (a) an improvement in academic performance, (b) better connection to the school, (c) positive social behavior, (d) positive attitudes about self and others, (e) decreases in conduct problems, and (f) decreased emotional distress (Durlak et al., 2011; Sklad et al., 2012; Taylor et al., 2017). For example, Durlak et al.'s (2011) meta-analysis of 213 school-based, universal social-emotional programs highlighted that when students received SEL implementation, their skills, attitudes, and behaviors improved with an 11% gain in academic achievement. When students have better academic skills, they are more at ease at school, feel accepted by their peers, experience less frustration at school, have more friends, and have more opportunities to develop and practice SEL skills (Welsh et al., 2001).

While most SEL research has focused on identifying the benefits of SEL for students, research on SEL must extend to teachers (Oberle et al., 2014). Teachers are educational leaders, and they are the primary implementers of students' academic and SEL programming. The teacher's role, skills, competence, and buy-in are instrumental in SEL programming's execution and student impact (Elbertson et al., 2010). Another study indicated that teachers' SEL and their well-being directly impact the relationship between

teachers and students, classroom management, and the implementation of SEL strategies and programs (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). In other words, teachers who recognize the need for students to develop SEL skills and competence are likely to be successful in implementing SEL (Elbertson et al., 2010; Kress & Elias, 2006; Schonert-Reichl, 2019). Due to the importance of teachers in the success of SEL programming, continued research on teachers' beliefs and experiences implementing SEL is warranted (Blewitt et al., 2021; Brackett et al., 2012; Oliveira et al., 2021; Schonert-Reichl, 2019; Steed et al., 2021). The success of the SEL intervention depends on several factors beyond the curriculum, including (a) teachers' confidence and enthusiasm during program delivery, (b) teachers' commitment, (c) teachers' program adherence, and (d) teachers' perception of school culture supporting SEL programs (Brackett et al., 2012; Collie et al., 2012; Steed et al., 2021; Zinsser et al., 2014). These factors work together to create a healthy classroom environment for students and teachers, impacting SEL outcomes (Oliveira et al., 2021; Steed et al., 2021).

Problem Statement

It is well-known that teachers play a central role in successfully implementing SEL; however, they receive little to no preservice training to know where to start and how to implement SEL programming and practices (Jones & Bouffard, 2012; Schonert-Reichl, 2019). Future research should examine how teachers' beliefs and SEL experiences directly impact how they implement SEL to their students (Collie et al., 2012). Understanding teachers' experiences with SEL implementation is relevant when working with diverse student populations, especially in impoverished school

environments. Teachers in these contexts tend to deal with high stress levels (Schonert-Reichl, 2017). While SEL finds support within the school system (Hymel et al., 2017), teachers working in distressed contexts have more pressure to meet role expectations and while ensuring adequate student-focused SEL program implementation.

School-based prevention and intervention practices have become essential for reducing the incidence of mental health, emotional, and behavioral problems that interfere with learning and social development (Murano et al., 2020; Reinke et al., 2011). SEL is influential in promoting positive mental health in schools, explicitly when looking at examples in BC (Hymel et al., 2017). In 2012, the Mental Health Commission of Canada recognized child and youth mental health as a priority and became an active partner with schools to promote positive SEL in schools to foster safe and caring school environments (Hymel et al., 2017). Children and adolescents must cope with the increasingly complex set of environmental and social issues, placing them at risk for developing emotional, behavioral, and health difficulties. As a result, teachers face the challenges of educating youth in the face of dwindling resources, increased class size, and decreasing support. Further, teaching is one of the most stressful careers; higher levels of stress affect teacher health and well-being, causing teacher burnout, lack of engagement, job dissatisfaction, poor performance, and high turnover rates (Schonert-Reichl, 2017). Stress also results in lower student achievement and higher school costs. A primary source of teacher frustration and stress is not feeling supported by their administration around challenges related to meeting their students' learning needs, such as preparation for high-stakes testing, teaching in an ever-changing curriculum, and

trying to keep and maintain a work/life balance (Schonert-Reichl, 2017). This includes how the education system has widely accepted SEL as a universal first line of defense in promoting positive mental health for their students (Hymel et al., 2017).

Teachers working in schools at risk who work in distressed situations have faced immense pressure to meet learning outcomes, affecting successful SEL programming and practices. School District 57 (SD57), located in BC, Canada is a challenging context for implementing SEL. This district offers a culturally sensitive curriculum and is home to the only Indigenous choice school in BC. Despite the district's diversity and wide-spanning students' needs, SEL and schoolwide implementation do not exist in all school settings within the district. While SEL is beneficial for all students (Wallace, 2016), there are additional challenges that BC teachers face. Teacher retention in Northern BC is low (The British Columbia Teachers' Federation, 2018), and a recent survey stated BC teachers reported violence in their workplace and heightened levels of stress or anxiety with nearly 80% reporting fatigue, loss of sleep, and headaches (Greenwalt, 2019).

BC school systems need the enhanced implementation of SEL programs in their schools that are embedded in BC curriculum as one of the core competencies in the personal and social competency strand (Hymel et al., 2017). This recently revised strand of the curriculum acknowledges that SEL skills contribute to school success and healthy child development. However, little is known about teachers' experiences implementing SEL within this context. In this study, I explored how teachers in SD57 perceived their role in implementing SEL in conjunction with how they juggled other various job demands to contribute to an understanding of teachers' needs, stressors, and perceptions

of SEL teaching efficacy (Collie et al., 2012; Schonert-Reichl, 2019). This study was projected to shed light on how Northern BC elementary school teachers implemented SEL programs in their schools and navigated teaching challenges within their school context.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore elementary teachers' beliefs and experiences implementing SEL practices and programs in their school and classroom. This study recruited teacher participants from one BC school district, located in the province's center and the second-largest school district in geographical size. It is the only school district serving this Northern community. Results of this study have the potential to provide ideas to teachers who are challenged in implementing SEL. It may also provide insightful feedback to the district and administrators regarding best practices and how they can better support school staff.

Research Question

What are British Columbia teachers' beliefs and experiences in the implementation of SEL?

Conceptual Framework

Two conceptual frameworks guided this study: CASEL's (2020c) five conceptualization of SEL and Schonert-Reichl's (2017) three-component framework for SEL. CASEL is the most respected, well-established database of high-quality, evidence-based SEL research and has served as an essential guide for preschool to high school SEL intervention and programming. According to CASEL, SEL describes the acquisition of

skills, including five interrelated cognitive, affective, and behavioral competencies referred to as CASELs' five: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making (CASEL, 2012). CASEL five is one of the widely referenced frameworks in SEL research, providing opportunities for young people to acquire the skills necessary to attain and maintain personal well-being and positive relationships across the lifespan (CASEL, 2012). CASELs' five core competencies and framework used for this study highlight the critical role the teacher plays in (a) building positive learning relationships, (b) improving academic performance, (c) providing effective classroom instruction, (d) promoting student engagement, and (e) reducing students' behavior and mental health challenges (CASEL, 2012; Durlak et al., 2011). A number of teachers' practices has been identified as essential in promoting students' SEL (CASEL, 2013a; Yoder, 2014), including using student-centered discipline, using a supportive language, promoting student responsibility and choice, fostering productive classroom discussion, addressing students with warmth and support, and promoting cooperative learning.

Schonert-Reichl (2017) considered CASEL's five competencies and proposed a three-component SEL framework. In this framework that includes the learning context, teachers' beliefs and attitudes toward SEL, and students' SEL growth, all interact to generate and strengthen core SEL learning. In this study, teachers' beliefs, attitudes, and experiences about the implementation of SEL in their student population were explored. CASEL's core understanding of SEL and Schonert-Reichl's three-component framework (the interaction of the context, teachers, and students) was used as the conceptual

framework to understand how teachers' practices fostered the development of SEL for the students, for the teachers, and for the learning environment.

Nature of the Study

I used a generic qualitative research methodology to explore the phenomenon of the experience of the SEL program on a sample of rural and inner-city elementary school teachers. The generic research design was distinct from the more traditionally used qualitative designs such as narrative research, phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography, and case study (Caelli, et al., 2008; Kahlke, 2014). The generic approach is flexible, responsive, and enables the researcher to explore original perspectives while approaching research problems (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). A substantial strength of the generic approach is to explore new research questions, create new methodologies, and advance theory (Kahlke, 2014). Furthermore, adopting a generic approach enables the researcher to focus more attentively on describing participants' experience of the implementation process. This ensures transparent personal interpretations and enhances the credibility of findings (Sandelowski, 2000). The generic approach is adaptable and aligned with the goals of this study focused on describing participants' experience and process in implementing and facilitating children's SEL in classroom settings. Open-ended questions asking teachers to reflect on their personal beliefs, perspectives, and attitudes of SEL were used to explore teachers' experiences implementing SEL.

BC elementary teachers who had 5 or more years of teaching experience and had worked at their current school for more than 2 years during schoolwide SEL implementation were interviewed using a semistructured interview format. A broad goal

was to interview them on their experiences implementing the program. More specifically, the interview questions explored topics around the training received to implement the program, participant beliefs about the usefulness of the program, how they applied SEL in the specific context where they work, the organizational support received to implement the program, the challenges experienced, how SEL fit or adapted to their diverse student population and needs, and how they perceived the implementation of the SEL program in the context of their multiple job expectations.

Definitions

Social and emotional learning (SEL): It is a process for helping children and adults develop the required life skills to “apply knowledge, attitudes effectively, and skills necessary to 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, 2020c, p.1). SEL is essential to human development and an integral part of education linked to school-based interventions. SEL implementation helps children and youth develop core competencies that promote self-regulation, identify emotions, demonstrate care and concern for others, and maintain positive relationships.

SEL Core Competencies: CASEL (2021) identified five broad, interrelated SEL core competencies: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. Children who master SEL competencies and skills get along better with others, have outstanding academic success, and become more mentally, physically, and healthier adults with successful careers (Jones & Bouffard, 2012).

Assumptions

This study took place in a Northern BC school district in one rural and one inner-city school. Before I began, I assumed that teacher participants would be forthcoming in discussing their experiences implementing SEL and that they would be honest in answering the interview questions associated with this qualitative study. I understood that teacher participants were under pressure and had many responsibilities and commitments to guide students in their learning. I assumed that respondents did not consciously fabricate responses or provide intentional inaccuracies of their experiences. Finally, I considered that participants may have experienced a certain degree of uncertainty in discussing their work experiences. I therefore maintained a professional stance and reassured teacher participants that I respected and did not judge their opinions and decisions.

Scope and Delimitations

This research study focused on elementary teachers' perceptions and beliefs of introducing and implementing SEL in their classrooms. Although other factors, such as consideration of teaching styles, classroom management, and emotional regulation skills that support or impede stress and well-being experienced are equally crucial in understanding best practices, they were not the main focus or scope of this study. In addition, this study only included elementary school teacher participants who had taken part in schoolwide SEL for 2 or more years from one of the two schools selected explicitly for this current research.

Limitations

This study relied on recruiting participants and collecting data from two of SD57's 32 elementary schools. I understood that selecting only one rural and one inner-city school in advance would not offer a complete picture of the district. Therefore, there was no guarantee the results would be transferable to another school district or that they could be transferred to high school contexts. I only interviewed and collected data from elementary teachers who had 5 or more years of teaching experience and had worked at their current school for more than 2 years during schoolwide SEL implementation. School administrators, parents, and students were not a part of the study; therefore, this study did not include the perspectives of all district or community stakeholders.

Another limitation is related to my own perspective about the benefits of SEL and my knowledge of the school district where I collected the data. The evolution of my professional role as a District Mental Health Behavior Team (DMHBT) Specialist raised my awareness of the vast and long-term benefits of SEL. I have become increasingly aware of the need for SEL practices and programming, which could be considered a personal bias. During the research process, I monitored and checked my assumptions and biases to avoid interpreting participants' voices from my perspective. Finally, I interviewed elementary teachers and collected data from participants I have not worked with, taught, or supervised.

Significance

This study contributes to the literature on teachers' beliefs and experiences of implementing SEL. Since the focus of the study was contextualized within a diverse

student population, it particularly contributes an understanding of how teachers manage implementing SEL within these types of contexts. This study provided SD57 with a greater understanding of teachers' beliefs and experiences implementing SEL, how teachers perceive their own influence on students' well-being, and how they juggle implementing SEL in the context of this school district learning environment. Administrators in this northern school district have gained specific knowledge and awareness of their own educators' experiences that they can apply to future SEL implementations. This knowledge is invaluable to the promotion of SEL, to understanding how to support teachers' social-emotional competency, and to creating positive classroom environments (Schonert-Reichl, 2017).

Summary

This chapter provided a general description of the phenomenon that was the focus of this study while also noting the theoretical, conceptual, and empirical supports for the research questions and the purpose of this project. Key words were defined in preparation for further discussion of these concepts in Chapter 2. The scope and limitations of this study were also identified, leading to a discussion about this project's potential to bring about positive social change in the intersection of SEL and the educational context. Chapter 2 delves deeper into the foundational understanding of teachers' implementation of SEL within the existing literature.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Research on the positive outcomes of school-based SEL is extensive. The results of three meta-analyses indicated that SEL programs demonstrated short- and long-term benefits for diverse students, including (a) an improvement in academic performance, (b) better connection at school, (c) positive social behavior, (d) positive attitudes about self and others, (e) decreased conduct problems, and (f) decreased emotional distress (Durlak et al., 2011; Sklad et al., 2012; Taylor et al., 2017). The success of SEL school-based interventions depends on several factors that go beyond the curriculum, including the role of teachers, the quality of the SEL implementation, and the classroom and school learning context (Jones & Bouffard, 2012).

Understanding teachers' beliefs and experiences with SEL is relevant to working in rural and inner-learning contexts with at-risk student populations. Teachers in these contexts have limited resources and deal with higher stress levels (Schonert-Reichl, 2017). BC school support the implementation of SEL programs in their schools (Hymel et al., 2017) and acknowledge that SEL skills contribute to school success and healthy child development; thus, teachers working in distressed and resource-limited contexts have more pressure to meet role expectations and ensure adequate implementation of student-focused SEL programs. While SEL seems helpful for Indigenous students and their retention (Wallace, 2016), rural BC teachers face additional challenges, resulting in a high teacher turnover (The British Columbia Teachers' Federation, 2018). However, little is known about teachers' experiences implementing SEL within this context. Exploring how teachers in school district 57 perceived their role in implementing SEL

and how they juggled their job demands had the potential to contribute to an understanding of teachers' needs, stressors, and perceptions of SEL teaching efficacy (Collie et al., 2012). The purpose of this study was to explore Northern BC elementary teachers' experiences and beliefs implementing the SEL programs in their schools and classroom. This study took place in SD 57, located in the city of Prince George in the province of BC, Canada.

This chapter outlines the search strategy used to examine the existing evidence-based SEL literature. After explaining the process used to complete a comprehensive literature review, I further explain how two conceptual frameworks were applied to various concepts in this research study. In addition to examining extensive evidence-based SEL research, the study discusses the following topics: (a) the need for SEL in education, (b) how SEL impacts student academic achievement, behavior, and mental health, (c) the need for SEL to promote stronger teacher-student relationships, (d) teachers' perceptions of SEL, (e) the impact of SEL on the schools' climate, (f) the increase of teachers' stress, and (g) the impact teaching SEL can have on improving their wellbeing.

Literature Search Strategy

I used many different databases to complete the search on key literature on the topic under study. I reviewed PsycARTICLES, PsycEXTRA, PsycINFO, Academic Search Complete, Research Net, ERIC, Science Full Text Select, and Google Scholar to find peer-reviewed journal articles on SEL in education and teachers' perceptions and beliefs about SEL. Key terms that were used in various combinations throughout these

searches were *SEL core competencies, the need for SEL, the benefits of SEL on student achievement, behavior, and mental health, teachers' perceptions and beliefs of SEL, SEL benefits on the teacher-student relationship, school climate, and teacher stress*. I focused on “Canadian and province-wide SEL influences” particular to “British Columbia.” I became familiar with CASEL, an evidence-based online SEL database and research organization. As a researcher and advocate for social change, it was vital to focus on the long-term benefits of social and emotional learning and the importance of determining what teachers need to introduce and implement SEL successfully to improve school culture.

Conceptual Framework

Two conceptual frameworks guided this study: CASEL’s (2020c) five conceptualization of SEL and Schonert-Reichl’s (2017) three-component framework for SEL. CASEL’s five framework for SEL is a broad empirically-based SEL framework that helps others understand SEL implementation, including researchers who use it in their work (CASEL, 2020c). In Schonert-Reichl’s (2017) three-component framework for SEL, researchers must consider three distinct and interrelated components: (a) the learning environment, (b) students’ SEL, and (c) teachers’ SEL. Frameworks that do not share these distinct and interrelated dimensions cannot provide a strong foundation for future SEL research (Schonert-Reichl, 2017). Together, these systemic frameworks established a strong foundation for this study, further building on and bringing greater awareness of how teachers’ perceptions and beliefs require direct attention to ensure comprehensive SEL implementation. Increased SEL research needs to consider the

teacher as the engine that drives SEL practices and programs. Newly developed SEL frameworks must encompass preventive measures and consider how the interrelated dimensions (the student, teacher, and learning environment) influence the greater community, ensuring rich SEL research.

CASEL's Five Framework for SEL

CASEL (2020c) describes SEL as a framework for providing opportunities for young people to acquire the skills necessary to attain and maintain personal well-being and positive relationships (Elbertson et al., 2010). CASEL defined SEL as the process of students and adults acquiring the skills to recognize and manage emotions, develop caring and concern for others, make responsible decisions, establish positive relationships, and handle challenging situations effectively (CASEL, 2003). SEL has become a fundamental part of education, with increased research demonstrating its need to be incorporated into daily practices in schools and classrooms. SEL programming aims at improving students' five core social and emotional competencies: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, responsible decision-making, and relationship skills, referred to as CASELs' five framework for SEL (see Figure 1)):

- *Self-awareness*: Recognizing and comprehending one's emotions and how they translate into behaviors; this includes acknowledging stressors or triggers that cause negative emotions, being aware of one's strengths and limitations, and having a grounded sense of confidence and purpose, according to CASEL.
- *Self-management*: The ability to regulate one's feelings and behaviors; can

include controlling anger, handling stress, accessing self-motivation, or persisting through setbacks.

- *Social awareness*: Looking outward, empathizing with others, and possessing a willingness to understand and respect the unique experiences, norms, and behaviors of others.
- *Relationship skills*: The ability to establish and maintain healthy and supportive relationships effectively through various settings and with diverse individuals and groups. CASEL (2020c) stated that this can occur by developing effective communication, active listening, cooperation, and conflict resolution.
- *Responsible decision-making*: The ability to make an informed decision with careful consideration of how they will impact personal or social situations that create positive, healthier well-being. (CASEL, 2020c)

Figure 1

CASEL's Five Core Competencies



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Research showed that these intrapersonal and interpersonal SEL competencies can be taught and measured. Students with these skills do better in school and life (CASEL, 2013a). SEL competencies are necessary for building positive and supportive relationships that help individuals interact while managing their emotions (CASEL, 2021). CASEL strives to advance SEL science, evidence-based practice, and policy to establish a goal for every school worldwide to provide SEL programming to preschoolers through high school students (CASEL, 2012, 2015).

Prior Application of CASEL's Five Framework for SEL

SEL research is vast across many disciplines, encompassing researchers' voices, frameworks, and languages. For researchers sorting through each SEL framework to find one that works for their context and population, this process can be challenging (Blyth & Borowski, 2018). However, the foundation of any SEL research must start with CASEL's extensive online database, an understanding of five core social-emotional competencies, and a review of previous evidence-based SEL research findings. Although many worthwhile SEL frameworks and programs are currently available, when considering one for use, CASEL (2013b) clarified that all SEL programs must (a) be well-designed classroom-based programs that promote students' SEL competence, provide practice opportunities and offer multi-yearly programming; (b) deliver high-quality training and other implementation supports, including initial training and ongoing support to ensure SEL introduction and implementation success; and (c) be evidence-based with a least one carefully conducted evaluation that documents the positive impacts on students behavior

and/or academic performance.

Evidence-based research demonstrates that SEL programs are among the most successful interventions to promote positive development (CASEL, 2003). Durlak et al. (2011) meta-analyzed 213 school-based SEL programs, finding that students demonstrated significantly improved social and emotional skills, attitudes, behavior, and a relevant gain in academic achievement. Increasingly, educators, researchers, and policymakers worldwide are recognizing the importance of addressing students' social-emotional development to optimize educational outcomes in the classroom and beyond, including health, education, and employment (Durlak et al., 2011). Despite research outlining the many positive benefits of SEL on students, such as increased academic achievement, social-emotional competencies, and SEL skill set, SEL still does not exist in all schools and classrooms. A growing body of research offers a deeper understanding of the teacher's role in nurturing SEL skills. These skills are critical for improving academic performance, reducing mental health risks, and creating stronger teacher-student relationships, thus promoting classroom management and preventing teacher burnout (CASEL, 2012; Durlak et al., 2011; Greenberg et al., 2017).

Relevance of CASEL's Five Framework for SEL to Current Research

This study examined elementary school teachers' perceptions and beliefs of SEL. The study aimed to better understand teachers' experiences with SEL, exploring teachers' implementation of SEL. CASEL's five framework for SEL was relevant as it provided a lens for understanding the importance of the definition of SEL, social-emotional competencies, and evidence-based SEL research that provide a valuable foundation for

SEL research. This research considered the teacher's critical role in helping students develop social and emotional competencies. The success of evidence-based SEL programs and schoolwide programming depends on high-quality implementation and knowledge of teachers' perceptions and beliefs of SEL helps to determine what teachers need to be successful.

Schonert-Reichl (2017) Three-Component Framework for SEL

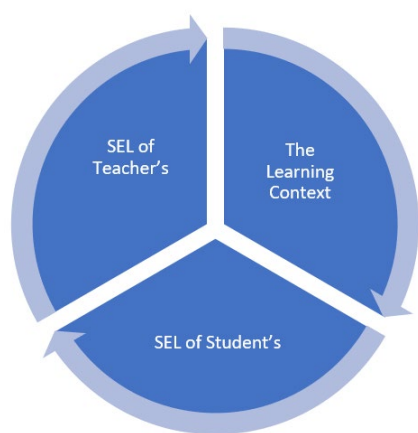
Teachers are the “engine” that drives SEL implementation and are at the heart of student learning, nurturing academics and social skills; they drive SEL programs and practices in schools and classrooms (Schonert-Reichl, 2017; Whitehead et al., 2023). Teachers must foster teacher-student relationships that support deep learning, develop positive student SEL competence, and focus on classroom management. To create positive classroom environments conducive to student learning, teachers must first examine their own social-emotional competence and well-being. The social-emotional demands of teaching can place immense stress on teachers, impacting students' academic achievement, behavior, and mental health. Schonert-Reichl (2017) recognized that while SEL needs to exist in the classroom, it cannot occur without acknowledging the teachers' critical role, social-emotional well-being, and teacher influence on students. Before researchers focus on long-term SEL benefits for students, researchers must first consider the what teachers need to ensure they can be the healthy engine that rolls out SEL programs and practices to students across time.

Schonert-Reichl (2017) urged that future SEL research use the three-component framework that considers (a) the learning environment, (b) students' SEL, and (c)

teachers' SEL (see Figure 2). While many SEL frameworks share these three distinct, interrelated dimensions, Schonert-Reichl urged all future research and discussions to examine each dimension's influence on the quality and process of SEL research.

Figure 2

Three-Component Framework for SEL



Note. Adapted from Schonert-Reichl's (2017) three-component framework of SEL.

The Learning Context

The learning environment is critical to effective student learning and SEL skill development and interventions. For this current study, the learning context was the school and classroom environment. The learning environment plays a large part in retaining information. Although the teacher, curriculum, and peers significantly impact student learning, the environment in which they do so is critical to how teachers facilitate this process. Schonert-Reichl (2017) stated for a teacher to effectively implement SEL skill development and interventions in their school and classroom, the learning environment must be (a) safe, (b) caring, (c) supportive, (d) participatory, and (e) well-managed.

Students who have safe, caring, supportive, well-managed classroom environments have success developing and practicing skills. Students who feel comfortable with their teachers and peers and learn in a healthy learning environment are more willing to persist with resilience when learning becomes challenging (Schonert-Reichl, 2017).

Students' SEL

Schonert-Reichl (2017) recognized the importance of acknowledging social and emotional learning (SEL) as the process by which people (a) acquire and effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes, and skills to manage emotions, (b) set and achieve positive goals, (c) feel and show empathy for others, (d) establish and maintain positive relationships, and (e) make responsible decisions. SEL is grounded in research findings that demonstrate students can be taught social and emotional skills through explicit instruction, promoting developmental assessment, reducing problem behaviors, and improving students' academic achievement, citizenship, and mental health-related behaviors (Schonert-Reichl et al., 2017). Schonert-Reichl (2017) recognized it is critical that when researchers are conducting and evaluating SEL research they must apply CASEL's five interrelated SEL competencies: (a) self-awareness, (b) self-management, (c) social awareness, (d) relationship skills, and (e) responsible decision-making. The SEL competencies establish the foundation of all SEL research (CASEL, 2020c).

Teachers' SEL

Teachers' SEL competence and wellbeing play a critical role in influencing how SEL is introduced and implemented in schools and classrooms. Teachers are at the center of SEL success (Schonert-Reichl, 2017). Teachers who experience higher emotional

competence and wellbeing experience less stress and be more confident in creating (a) positive learning environments, (b) building stronger teacher-student relationships, (c) managing the classroom, (d) managing students' behavior, and, as a result, they are (e) better able to implement social-emotional programs effectively to help mediate classroom and student outcomes. When teachers cannot manage the social and emotional demands of teaching, students' performance becomes negatively impacted, which is why Schonert-Reichl (2017) urges researchers to examine ways to improve teachers' social-emotional competence before considering other areas of SEL research.

Prior Application of Schonert-Reichl (2017) Three-Component Framework for SEL

SEL has become a welcome addition to education. CASEL's extensive, evidence-based research has demonstrated SEL is an essential part of good teaching. Schonert-Reichl et al. (2017) acknowledged researchers and advocates believe in SEL and understand the critical role teachers play in successful implementation. Although, they remained unsure how to support teachers who say they do not have time for SEL and see it as one more add-on to an already stressful and demanding profession. Despite SEL popularity, teachers do not feel prepared to teach SEL. As a result, CASEL funded a research study in partnership with Schonert-Reich et al. (2017) that conducted the first-ever scan of teacher preparation programs for evidence of SEL teaching and instruction to pre-service teachers. The study was conducted in two phases. The first stage examined teacher certification policies and requirements of fifty U.S. states. The goal was to determine what is missing from pre-service teacher preparation programs to better prepare teachers to teach SEL. A coding guide was created for CASEL's (2020c) five

SEL competencies and examined using three components: (a) Teachers' SEL (e.g., pre-service teachers learn to foster their SEL competencies, such as self-awareness and social awareness, (b) Students' SEL (e.g., pre-service teachers learn to foster their students' SEL skills, and (c) the Learning Context (e.g., a focus on the classroom, school, and community environments that promote students' SEL skills). For this research, the three-component framework assessed how teachers learn to create an optimal learning environment to teach and foster SEL skills that prepare them to collaborate with others beyond the classroom setting to enhance students' SEL skills. The second stage of the study looked at the degree SEL was incorporated into 1,400 U.S colleges of education. They interviewed deans of colleges who supported SEL to determine if their websites offered a clear description of their programs.

The research conducted by Schonert-Reichl et al. (2017) is critical for determining what is missing in pre-service education. Schonert-Reichl et al. (2017) determined that the least addressed teachers' SEL competencies were self-management and self-awareness, which are vital to how teachers regulate their emotions, thoughts, behaviors, and effectively manage stressors that influence the infusion of SEL into classrooms and schools.

Schonert-Reichl et al. (2017) offered four future recommendations: (a) governments must create policies that ensure all educators receive pre-service SEL education training that shows teachers how to introduce and implement SEL in their daily classroom practices; (b) specific research must take place that shows the correlation between teachers who have had pre-service SEL education, which raises SEL

competencies and wellbeing, improves happiness, decreases levels of stress levels, and decreases the use of healthcare; (c) research must encompass input from an array of SEL experts, including researchers, deans, governors, state boards of education, educators, educational leaders, and policymakers, to determine how to improve pre-service teacher education; and (d) research on existing pre-service SEL education programs is needed to determine if they are effective in measuring whether they offer the best training approaches for teachers.

Relevance of Schonert-Reichl (2017) Three-Component Framework

This study explored Northern British Columbia teachers' beliefs, attitudes, and experiences implementing SEL in the school and classroom setting. It provided an in-depth understanding of how elementary teachers perceived SEL and their approach to teaching SEL. This framework was relevant for this current research study. It provided a foundation for understanding CASEL's definitions of SEL competencies and included three distinct and interrelated components: (a) teachers' SEL, (b) students' SEL, and (c) the learning context. It is portrayed in a circular figure to illustrate their interconnectedness: each dimension influences and is influenced by the others, which is critical for all future SEL discussions and research.

Literature Review Related to Key Concepts

Various topics of interest built upon the evidence based SEL research at the center of this current study. This section addresses why it was crucial to examine teachers' beliefs, and experiences of SEL and their influence on how to introduce and implement SEL. While much of the research surrounding SEL has focused on student learning

outcomes and benefits, as discussed below, emerging research must focus on how teachers perceive and approach SEL to determine how to successfully implement SEL. The topics described below examine the positive benefits of SEL and the effect SEL has on student and teacher-school factors.

The Need for SEL

To optimize students' educational outcomes, educators and researchers increasingly recognized the relevance of addressing students' social and emotional development (Collie et al., 2012; Durlak et al., 2011). This has made a case for introducing SEL skills and competencies to students at the elementary-school level. Since SEL's conception, CASEL has defined SEL, advanced a conceptual framework of SEL, referred to as CASEL five, provided evidence-based, high-quality SEL research, and offered a guide to school-based SEL programming (CASEL, 2003, 2012; Elbertson et al., 2010). SEL supports students' positive social, emotional, and academic development. SEL focuses on core social and emotional competencies, outlined by Collie et al. (2012) to include:

- (a) recognizing one's emotions (self-awareness), (b) regulating one's emotions, thoughts, and behaviors (self-management), (c) taking the perspectives of others (social awareness), (d) developing and maintaining high-quality relationships (relationship skills), and (e) making constructive decisions regarding behaviors and social interactions (responsible decision-making) (p.149).

These competencies provide a solid foundation for SEL success, and implemented into already standing subjects curriculum, involved as a part of a specific SEL classroom

program, or implemented as a schoolwide whole-student SEL approach (Collie et al., 2012; Durlak et al., 2011).

The CASELs' Five Framework has directly influenced school-based interventions, SEL practices, and programming incorporated into the academic curriculum (CASEL, 2012). Given how vital SEL is for early interventions, all elementary school students should receive school-based SEL programming. Research has supported the value of SEL associated with positive student outcomes, prosocial behavior, and academic achievement (Durlak et al., 2011; Sklad et al., 2012). Research has demonstrated that SEL is relevant for teachers' experiences at work. Specifically, teachers' beliefs about SEL influence how they implement SEL (Collie et al., 2012; Zinsser et al., 2014). Jennings and Greenberg (2009) linked teachers' SEL to student outcomes. Despite continued evidence-based SEL research in education, the majority of germane research has examined students' benefits instead of the critical role teachers play in successful SEL implementation.

Teachers' introduction of SEL programs has been slow, as education has primarily focused on educational attainment, measured by test scores. At the same time, SEL skills and competence have been more challenging to measure, despite extensive research and claims of SEL benefits. Schools and districts have been reluctant to embrace school-based SEL programming. Universal SEL programs can reduce problems, promote competence, and improve school success, such as school attitudes, school behavior, and school performance (Durlak et al., 2011). However, it has not guaranteed the commitment needed to ensure high-quality SEL programming. As a result, Belfield et al.

(2015) conducted an extensive review of six effective SEL programs' economic value to determine its profitability as an investment. They found that SEL programs provided a return on investment, some exceeding the program's initial costs (Belfield et al., 2015). In the educational context, the benefit-cost analysis compares the monetary cost of an investment with the monetary value of its outcomes. For example, reducing the high school dropouts has a benefit to the students in terms of higher income, better health, and lower likelihood of engaging with the criminal justice system. All of these can be measured in terms of a monetary return on investment. These and other factors were considered in the cost-benefit analysis of SEL programs (Belfield et al., 2015). For example, Lee et al. (2012) assessed costs and benefits of the Seattle Social Development Project, a well known SEL intervention. The assessment results indicated that the participant costs are \$3,030 and the benefits are \$5,800; the net benefits are strongly positive at \$2,770. The cost-benefit analysis of including SEL programs can help districts and school leaders make a compelling case for including SEL in strategic plans and budgets.

Longitudinal research conducted by Hawkins et al. (2005) demonstrated that well-designed and executed school-based elementary programs can see positive student benefits 12 to 15 years later, witnessed in higher educational attainment, better employment, increased mental health (a reduction of anxiety, depression, and the early onset of mental health disorders), and prevention and reduction in suicide rates (Hymel et al., 2017).

SEL Effects on Students

SEL has become part of a comprehensive vision of education. A central priority for schools is to prevent school failure and decrease student dropout rates (Oberle et al., 2014). Schools are social places, and the process of learning is social; how we feel about ourselves, our relationships, and our environments directly connect to teaching and learning (Schonert-Reichl & Hymel, 2007). Teachers can better promote students' SEL competency skills and wellbeing alongside their academic achievement, shaping their developmental trajectories and positive school, work, and life outcomes (Durlak, 2015; Hamre & Pianta, 2010; Sauve & Schonert-Reichl, 2019). Schools offer an ideal environment to teach SEL competencies and skill-based programs that positively impact young students' social, emotional, academic, and behavioral development (Durlak et al., 2011). School-based SEL programs improve students' academic performance, attendance, behavior, culture, and climate (Belfield et al., 2015).

Teachers must respond and provide interventions for students with social, emotional, behavioral, and mental health problems. SEL plays a critical role in promoting positive mental health and preventing emotional and behavioral disorders amongst children and youth. While most SEL programs focus on developing student's competency and skills, they are also effective in creating positive teacher-student relationships in safe, caring, school environments and climates. Durlak et al. (2011) and Sklad et al. (2012) found significant students' gains in (a) SEL skills, (b) attitudes, (c) positive social behavior, (d) conduct problems, (e) emotional distress, and (f) academic performance. These gains led to an increase in personal, social, emotional, and mental wellbeing. The

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2013) agreed that teaching SEL is a critical response to rising mental health issues and behavioral and substance use, which jeopardize young people's positive development and life success (Oberle et al., 2016).

Teachers' Perceptions of SEL

Research highlighted that teachers' knowledge and perceptions of SEL influence how they integrate SEL into their teaching practices, further shaping their experiences associated with student outcomes (Brackett et al., 2012; Collie et al., 2012). Brackett et al. (2012) developed a tool to measure teachers' beliefs about SEL to determine teachers' readiness when implementing. A survey using three reliable scales asked teacher participants (a) their comfort with teaching SEL, (b) their commitment to learning SEL, and (c) the extent to which the school culture supports SEL. The study's goal was to examine teachers when implementing SEL by using the three scales to determine how much time and support teachers need when implementing SEL programming. Brackett et al. (2012) highlighted the influence teachers' perceptions had on classroom learning environments, and how classroom climate improved students' beliefs about their capabilities, increasing academic success. Brackett et al. (2012) shared that when teachers believed in their students, students worked harder, increasing students' self-regard and strengthening teacher-student relationships.

Collie et al. (2012) extended Brackett et al.'s (2012) research and used the scale to examine teacher's beliefs and thoughts of SEL when promoting social and emotional competence to students, with their level of job comfort. Brackett et al. (2012) described three teachers' beliefs: comfort with SEL; commitment to improving SEL skills; and

perceptions of principal and schoolwide support for SEL. Collie et al. (2012) identified three teachers' profiles: the SEL-thriver; the SEL-striver; the SEL-advocate. Results of the study demonstrated a strong correlation between teachers who held positive SEL perspectives and those who expressed higher job satisfaction as crucial determinants in the willingness to commit, support, and make quality efforts to ensure successful SEL project outcomes (Collie et al., 2012). Teachers' SEL beliefs may differ depending on the support, training, and experience with SEL. Teachers who believe in the importance of SEL, and who are well-supported by a school team are more confident in implementing SEL (Collie et al., 2012). The more knowledge gained of teachers' perceptions of SEL, the more is known about individual teachers' and organization's beliefs about SEL, offering a starting point on how many teachers are ready to implement SEL to make it a schoolwide success. Research has affirmed that teachers' perceptions and SEL beliefs matter, naturally influencing the introduction and implementation of higher-quality SEL programming success (Brackett et al., 2012; Buchanan et al., 2009; Dyson et al., 2019; Ee & Cheng, 2013).

Teachers' Stress

Teacher stress has become a topic of growing concern. Johnson et al. (2005) reported teaching as being ranked as one of the highest in stress-related outcomes from a database of 26 occupations. Teachers' emotional involvement with their students is considered the primary explanation for such findings (Spilt et al., 2011). More teachers leave the profession in the first five years; 25% to 50 % reported high stress levels as the primary reason (Algozzine et al., 2010; Haydon et al., 2018). Haydon et al. (2018)

defined stress as a "disagreeable emotional experience accompanied with feelings of anxiety, anger, frustration, and tension and connected with specific environmental causes" (Haydon et al., 2018, p. 99; Kyriacou, 2001). Haydon et al. (2018) demonstrated that teachers' stress builds over time, significantly impacting their sense of efficacy, job satisfaction, burnout, attribution, student engagement, and physical health (Haydon et al., 2018; Shernoff et al., 2011). Teachers are not only responsible for promoting their students' SEL wellbeing, but they must also focus on their wellbeing.

The role of the teacher is no longer as simple as teaching students' academics. The increasing job demands and responsibilities teachers face continue to rise, with some describing an expectation to become a surrogate parent to all students. Teachers have increasingly recognized the importance of addressing students' social-emotional development in efforts to optimize educational outcomes. Research has shown the value of SEL, demonstrating positive results for students. Still, little research has looked closely at teachers' beliefs about SEL associated with implementation (Collie et al., 2012). Teachers cannot effectively implement SEL in school and classroom settings without their commitment. Increasing evidence of stress can occur in the classroom and school environments. Alarming reports from teachers and principals have highlighted growing concern over rising stress levels that have caused negative perceptions of education and the teaching environment. Adverse classroom environments are the significant cause of problems in the social, emotional, and behavioral areas, such as bullying, conflict with peers, internal and external behavior, and mental health problems.

Research on teacher wellbeing has focused on teacher stress and burnout. Studies

have demonstrated mounting evidence on the sources of teacher stress, outlining the following sources (a) school organization and lack of administrative structure and support, (b) adverse school working conditions and lack of supervisor and team support, (c) job demands, such as excessive paperwork, heavy workloads, and not enough time to complete, (d) social pressures, such as classroom management issues, (e) lack of work resources, (f) lack of autonomy, and (g) lack of decision making power (Greenberg et al., 2016; Haydon et al., 2018; Spilt et al., 2011). These sources of teachers' stress remain outside the teachers' ability to change or control. Many teachers enter the teaching profession with passionate determination to make a difference in their students' lives and their learning success. As a result, teaching is a stressful profession with increasing roles and unwanted responsibilities mounting and stress impacting both teacher and students; it is little wonder these factors have become damaging to the teacher-student relationship (Ee & Cheng, 2013; Hamre & Pianta, 2010; Poulou, 2017; Schonert-Reichl, 2017; Weissberg & Elias, 1993).

Increasing stress and pressure placed on teachers' expanding roles and responsibilities have created a crisis for B.C. teachers. While it is hard to say precisely how much stress educators face, most research has demonstrated the sources of stress have reached epic proportions. Researchers have considered SEL with respect to specific to teachers' stress, teaching efficacy, and job satisfaction (Collie et al., 2012; Shann, 1998; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2007; Wilson, 2002). The University of British Columbia (UBC) has been instrumental in furthering SEL research. Researchers are eager to discover ways teachers can implement SEL within the Ministry of Education's new B.C.

curriculum. UBC researchers Collie et al. (2012) expanded knowledge about teachers' perceptions of SEL climate in their schools, which influenced three variables: teachers' sense of stress, teaching efficacy, and job satisfaction. Two stress types identified by teachers examined workload and student behavior as the interrelationships among the three variables later explored.

Summary and Conclusion

In this literature review, I provided an overview of the current pertinent research on SEL in schools. Literature indicated a limited amount of research that discusses teachers' perceptions of SEL implementation, particularly in the context of BC schools. As a result, the focal point of my study was to explore Northern British Columbia elementary teachers' experiences and beliefs about implementing SEL in their school and classroom context. In the next chapter, I describe the rationale and design choice for this qualitative study, explain the study's sampling strategy and the targeted population, and outline and explore methods of recruiting participants. I also examine trustworthiness with consideration of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability with reference to the research question. In the end, ethical considerations are presented alongside evidence of the steps that were taken to uphold optimal ethical integrity at each point in the study.

Chapter 3: Research Method

This generic qualitative study aimed to explore the beliefs and experiences of Northern BC teachers who engaged with the schoolwide implementation of an SEL program in either a rural or inner-city school for 2 or more years. SEL best practices hinge on school districts applying SEL programming districtwide to guarantee success, as this ensures all students receive a common language and a consistent approach. A universal SEL approach can benefit diverse students, especially those who struggle with academic, behavioral, or mental health challenges or those who move schools.

In this chapter, I describe my research design—a generic qualitative research approach—and highlight its strengths and limitations. Next, I layout my process for participant selection and data collection. I consider my motivations and bias in my role as a researcher. Finally, the method of analysis (thematic analysis) and the issues of trustworthiness are introduced.

Research Design and Rationale

SEL program delivery and outcomes are positively influenced when teachers have a strong belief in the effectiveness of SEL and a high regard for their own agency in its implementation (Brackett et al., 2012; Yoder, 2014). The primary focus of this research was not to evaluate SEL programs but to uncover teacher beliefs and experiences after engaging with the implementation of SEL for a minimum of 2 years. The primary question used to guide my research of elementary teachers' SEL practices was “What are BC teachers' beliefs and experiences in the implementation of SEL?” To answer this research question, I employed a semistructured interview protocol that included a

prewritten set of exploratory questions. While conducting the interviews I gave space to participants to provide insights beyond the stated questions and beyond my own assumptions as a researcher. Using this qualitative research lens provided the opportunity to hear the varying perspectives, strategies and experiences of participants when implementing a learning approach like SEL.

After capturing and transcribing participant interviews using an online audio-video recording platform, I used thematic analysis to interpret the data. Throughout the analysis, I maintained a focus on the research question for the purpose of contributing understanding to current best practices. This study constitutes a practical addition to the field of SEL implementation in schools by understanding the beliefs and experiences of teacher participants in an in-depth manner.

Qualitative Research Approach

Qualitative researchers explore individuals' experiences and the meanings they attach to the events and social constructs surrounding them (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). Research using qualitative approaches often uses data from real-life situations and circumstances, including individuals' interactions, experiences, beliefs, and perspectives. Furthermore, qualitative research stresses the importance of investigating a specific context which informs the participant's experiences (Maxwell, 2012). The criteria for selecting both participants and their schools were therefore carefully planned. I selected participants who had previously experienced SEL implementation for a period of 2 years or more and who were employed in the same northern school district in either a rural or urban placement. These criteria were an important part of the qualitative approach and

provided for a deeper understanding of teachers' beliefs and experiences in implementing SEL.

Generic Qualitative Research Methodology

The generic research design is distinct from traditional qualitative systems, including narrative-based research, phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography, and case study research (Caelli et al., 2003; Kahlke, 2014). The generic approach is flexible, responsive, and enables the researcher to explore original perspectives while considering research difficulties (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). Adopting a generic approach enables the research to focus on describing participants' experiences by investigating participants' reports of their subjective opinions, attitudes, beliefs, or reflections of their experiences. Simultaneously, it ensures transparent personal interpretations and enhances the credibility of findings (Sandelowski, 2000). Generic research design aligned well with this study's goals: to capture the descriptions and insights into participants' experiences and processes in implementing and facilitating students' SEL in classroom settings.

The generic research design supported the research methodology. I used a semistructured interview guide to pose open-ended questions that explored teachers' understanding and application of SEL in the classroom. Following this, I employed thematic analysis, a framework and series of steps developed by Braun and Clarke (2006). Thematic analysis fit well with the generic approach because it (a) provides a highly flexible approach; (b) can be modified according to the needs of the study; (c) offers a rich, detailed, and complex account of data; and (d) is used to describe patterns across qualitative data.

Role of the Researcher

There were many different tasks associated with my role in the current study. I approached school administrators and teachers from each school who had taught SEL. I identified participants for the study and dedicated time to building rapport with participants prior to and throughout the data collection and analysis process. As suggested by Rager (2005), I ensured that participants felt they were the experts of their own experiences and felt supported to share their SEL practices and knowledge.

I conducted interviews with each participant via Zoom's online platform. Zoom is a collaborative, cloud-based videoconferencing service that offers the ability to record and store sessions without recourse to third-party software (Archibald et al., 2019). Qualitative interviews require protection of highly sensitive data. I chose to use Zoom's online platform as its security features are robust and include user-specific authentication, real-time encryption of a meeting, and the ability to backup recordings to online remote server networks (the cloud) or local drives, which can then be shared securely for the purpose of collaboration (Archibald et al., 2019). Zoom's also offers a live transcribe option and several additional advantages that enhance its research utility including simplicity and convenience. Zoom's user-friendly design also fosters rapport-building with participants (Archibald et al., 2019).

After the data were collected and recorded, I reviewed each transcription while listening to the recordings to ensure verbatim accuracy prior to the start of the data analysis. I analyzed the transcriptions identifying emerging themes and using other strategies that are outlined in the next section. As the researcher in this study, my goal

was to identify meaning that emerged from participants experiences and to generate an understanding of both the particular as well as the shared experiences of teachers who facilitated SEL in their classroom.

Methodology

Participant Recruitment and Selection

The population of interest for this study consisted of 12 elementary school teachers who taught SEL in School District 57 (SD57). This district serves the City of Prince George and close surrounding communities in Northern BC. I used purposeful and criterion sampling strategies to collect relevant data from participants. Purposive sampling allows the researcher to recruit a specific group of individuals considered suitable for the objective of the study (Merriam, 2002). For this study, I purposely selected participants employed by SD57 assigned to one specific rural and one urban elementary school. These schools were selected because they had well-established SEL practices and because they represent two unique school settings that are common to SD57. Criterion sampling was used to select participants that met predetermined criteria: (a) be a full-time teacher, (b) have earned a bachelor's degree or higher, (c) be employed by SD57 in BC, (d) have taught in their current school for 2 years or more, (e) be teaching elementary students (K to 7), and (f) have experienced teaching SEL as part of a schoolwide SEL introduction and implementation. This sampling strategy is optimal for selecting participants who have experienced the same event, situation, or phenomenon (Merriam, 2002). Thus, there were two defined layers to participant recruitment: First, participants were invited from one of two pre-selected schools (purposive) and second,

from this pool, individuals had to possess the requisite experience of implementing SEL for a minimum of 2 years (criterion).

The recruitment process yielded 12 teachers to participate in interviews. Qualitative research can yield rich data when there are enough participants to reach saturation, the point at which no new patterns or results emerge from a homogenous sample (Guest et al., 2006). A sample size of 12 participants is appropriate when using a semi-structured interview guide (Guest et al., 2006).

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

During this research, I had to amend my procedures for recruitment, participation, and data collection to coincide with provincial and school district restrictions due to COVID-19. Building rapport was an important step in supporting participants to confidently share their experiences. COVID-19 necessitated that most of my interactions with participants take place via email, by phone, or over Zoom. Although this changed the way I communicated with participants I nonetheless made every effort possible to ensure that participants felt comfortable and honoured. Below are my adapted procedures for recruitment, participation and data collection.

Recruitment of participants included the following steps. I asked permission from the SD57 Deputy Superintendent to contact two Administrators from the elementary schools I selected. The Deputy Superintendent and identified school administrators received a letter explaining the study details, the target population, the purpose of the study, the participants' criteria for inclusion, and how the respondents would be involved in the research. I contacted each school administrator via their school e-mail for a face-to-

face meeting to discuss the recruitment letter, allowing me to explain the research study and answer any questions prior to contacting their staff. Once the deputy superintendent and identified school administrators accepted to help me in recruiting participants, I asked them to distribute the flyers via staff group e-mailing. The flyer contained a brief description of the study and my contact information. Interested individuals were able to reach out to me by e-mail or phone.

Eligible participants who expressed interest and met selection criteria were sent an invitation to participate in the research via e-mail. The invite included the following information: (a) purpose of the study, (b) possible contribution of the study to their school and SD57; (c) reason for the invitation; (d) participant eligibility criteria. Once participants responded to the invitation, I sent an e-mail to confirm their acceptance. If participants were still willing to participate, I sent them an e-mail with a consent form (Appendix A). Interested participants responded to me by e-mail with a statement indicating they consented to the study. They could respond to the e-mail with a statement of “I consent,” in lieu of providing a signature. By consenting to the study, the participant agreed to be interviewed and to have their responses anonymously published in my dissertation.

Eligible participants were invited to select from several offered dates and times to have the interview. The interviews took place through the online Zoom platform; at this time, participants will be asked to find a private space to feel comfortable engaging in the semistructured interview. The interviews were guided by a semi-structured questionnaire that included open-ended questions and a place to collect demographic information

(Appendix B).

Instrumentation

Demographic Questions

Prior to the interview, demographic questions were asked to get a clear picture of participants and their work context. This step also contributed to rapport-building and communication during the interview. Twelve participants were interviewed for approximately 45 minutes to an hour to ensure that all necessary information was obtained. The demographic questions are listed in Appendix A.

Semistructured Interview Guide

After the demographic information was collected, I engaged participants in conversation using a semi-structured interview guide (Appendix A). The interview guide allowed me to connect with them in real time dialogue (Percy et al., 2015). This format of interviewing is expected to provide space for original topics to emerge. While I prepared a set of questions for participants, this form of interviewing allows the flexibility of creating follow-up questions during the conversation. I developed the semi-structured interview questions based on the literature review and previous related studies on SEL and the role of teachers in SEL (CASEL, 2012, 2015; Schonert-Reichl, 2017).

Data Analysis

I analyzed the qualitative data from individual teacher-participant interviews using a thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Braun and Clarke (2006) recommended six stages for researchers to consider when using thematic analysis:

1. Familiarize yourself with the data. In this first phase of analysis, I reviewed the

transcriptions of the recorded interviews and took note of common themes across the data.

2. **Generating codes.** Coding is an analytical process that captures the meaning behind what is said to gain a conceptualized understanding of the common themes. In the second phase of analysis, I manually coded the data to look for emerging patterns and then created a coding key or framework. I checked that the emergent patterns had relevancy to the research question.
3. **Search for themes.** In the third phase, I reviewed the codes looking for similarities and differences that could combine to form potential themes.
4. **Review themes.** In the fourth phase of analysis, I determined the criteria for codes to fit within or without of themes. I checked if the themes were relevant to the research question.
5. **Define and name themes.** In the fifth phase of analysis, I defined the themes and described their relevancy to the research question. I creatively constructed headings that outlined my study, allowing the data to tell the story.
6. **Write the report.** In the final phase of analysis, I wrote up my findings, including representative examples of participants' responses that answered the research question.

I applied these steps to conduct a thorough thematic analysis. I started by familiarizing myself with the data. I first listened to each recorded teacher participant interview to ensure I could rely on the online Zoom platform's built-in transcription. Once I confirmed the transcriptions were correct, I actively read each transcript to ensure

I was familiar with each participant's understanding of the subject of SEL and the overall context of their discussion throughout the interview. In the second step, I looked to generate codes in the data. I analyzed the recorded interviews and transcriptions, taking notes to look for emergent patterns that stood out and were commonly identified by all research participants. I also compared the emerging themes with CASEL's online research database (2020b) and applied Schonert-Reichl's (2017) theoretical lens of teacher-driven SEL. I then searched how to create an initial coding with similar grouping statements into common themes. After that, I reviewed the identified themes presented in teacher participants' interviews to ensure they aligned with my research question. Once I identified common themes, I defined them using a thematic map; this helped me to explore links between the themes. Lastly, I wrote up my findings and rendered into a coherent report. Most of the findings were expected but some did not fit or support the research question. When discrepancies emerged, I documented the negative data to provide other facets or perspectives. I conducted a negative analysis and critically reviewed conflicting information to add credibility to the study.

In analyzing the data, I considered the concept of saturation. I knew I reached saturation when enough information and data were obtained to replicate the study, avenues for new data were explored, and additional coding and analysis were exhausted (Fusch & Ness, 2015). I expected to reach analytical saturation with the number of proposed interviews. If I had not reached saturation, I would have interviewed more participants. Lastly, I analyzed discrepant information using negative analysis.

Issues of Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness is a measure of the quality of the research that includes four considerations: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. These four aspects of trustworthiness are considered the qualitative inquirer's equivalents to those used in quantitative research, namely internal validity, external validity, reliability, and objectivity (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Trustworthiness is an overarching summative description of the value of the research once credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability have been evaluated.

Credibility

Credibility is the most critical factor that ensures success, and as the researcher, I considered it from the beginning of this current research study (Shenton, 2004).

Credibility refers to the findings' congruency with the reality of the participants (Shenton, 2004). When conducting qualitative research, the researcher must present a clear picture of the participant's context and the quality and duration of their exposure to the experience. Shenton (2004) refers to this as being able to put the "phenomenon under scrutiny" (p.63).

In my research study, I ensured credibility through extensive interviews, prolonged engagement, and negative case analysis. Prolonged engagement required researchers to spend enough time in the field to gain an understanding of the phenomenon under study and its context. I conducted several teacher-participant interviews to ensure I achieved saturation. Negative case analysis involved refining data trends to gauge how they disconfirm or do not answer the research question (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I revised

all instances in which findings did not fit to understand more extensively why they did not. I included the disconfirming evidence in my write up of the findings.

Transferability

Transferability refers to the extent to which the findings can be replicated or applied in similar situations or settings. Transferability is strengthened by providing detailed descriptions of the participants and research environment so that the reader can visualize the setting and be able to compare the findings to their own research or that of others (Korstjens & Moser, 2018).

As the researcher, I improved the transferability of my study by collecting extensive background to establish the research context (Shenton, 2004). I provided a detailed description of participant demographics, the location of the schools in rural or urban settings, and the geographical region of the district within the province. All participants worked in Northern BC elementary schools and had two or more years of experience teaching SEL in a classroom setting. Finding a similar sample population in another environment to recreate this study is realistic. The present study could be considered a pilot project that could be introduced and implemented throughout other Northern BC schools and districts.

Dependability

Dependability seeks to address the study's reliability; hence, it refers to the stability and consistency of research procedures. I was able to provide consistency in my procedures for participant recruitment, data collection and analysis. When conducting the semi-structured interviews, I used the same online platform, and I posed the same

questions to each participant. All participants were intentionally given time to expound on their experiences and they did not have to limit their responses to the question in the interview guide. I attained dependability by demonstrating that the research process is logical, traceable, and well-documented (Nowell et al., 2017; Tobin & Begley, 2004).

I further strengthened this study's dependability by describing my research criteria in detail, documenting my data collection and analysis, and outlining the framework I used to provide the qualitative foundation. I also acknowledged that qualitative research is a social construct that is continually changing. Therefore, I captured changes as they appeared and adapted my research design as these changes occurred. This in-depth attention allows the reader to evaluate my research practices to ensure dependability.

Confirmability

Confirmability is a measure of how well the findings accurately depict the authentic experiences of participants as opposed to the subjective predilections and interpretations of the researcher (Shenton, 2004). To help ensure that the findings resulted from the informant's experiences and ideas, the researcher must acknowledge any biases that might affect the conclusions reported. To ensure confirmability, I kept a private reflexive journal and used memos to report the decisions, changes, and directions made throughout the research process. I captured my thoughts, reactions, and biases in the reflexive journal. In turn, I debriefed these issues with my chair. This debriefing helped me clarify my own biases and preferences and helped diminish the potential influence of these biases on the findings. I documented any changes needed to occur within the

method, data collection, and analysis. I checked and re-checked my audit trail throughout the process. I was responsible for describing changes in the setting and how they affected the study's approach. Finally, throughout the analysis, I continually returned to the raw data to check my understanding and minimize the influence of my biases on the reported findings.

Ethical Procedures

I employed ethical principles in my research methods and procedures to uphold my professional obligations to do no harm. Participants in this study were tasked with describing their professional experiences; thus, they were not at risk of physical or emotional harm. Participating in the interview with me was not expected to bring forth any distress. Yet, participants were informed about the nature of the study before data collection. As the researcher, I took notice of any participants' non-verbal and verbal expressions and emotional responses indicative of potential stress during the interview. I was mindful of participants' needs and time and did not continue to probe in these situations.

An important ethical procedure in any research is informed consent. The consent form document used for this study carefully outlined the research process. Participants were made aware of the ways in which their experiences and the subsequent outcome of the investigation would be utilized. Each participant had the opportunity to review the consent form at their pace, and ask questions. Interviews were only scheduled following a participant's written consent. At the end of the study, a 1-2 page summary of results was shared with participants summarizing their data and my analysis. This summary was sent

to participants via e-mail.

Participants of this study were recruited from a relatively small educational community. Maintaining complete anonymity for the participants was impossible; nevertheless, all possible measures were taken to maintain participants' confidentiality. The interviews and other information collected for this study were only shared with the dissertation committee and identifiers were removed from the data to protect confidentiality. Field notes, audiotapes, and transcripts were kept locked in a cabinet in my home office. E-mail communication, computer transcripts and other relevant information was filed in my computer that is password-protected. To ensure participants' de-identification, each transcription was assigned a number or code, and any identifying demographic information was removed or generalized. Interview transcripts and other study's raw data will be destroyed after five years of completion of the study.

Finally, I reported about my own awareness and expectations in this study. I acknowledged that I have been hopeful about the use of SEL in the schools since initially reviewing the literature, which led me to be interested in the long-term benefits and positive implementation districtwide. SEL is a topic I am familiar with and have a great passion for. My interest and familiarity emerged during the time I spent conducting school and classroom observations. These experiences allowed knowledge and awareness of elementary schools' unique challenges, specifically those located in the Prince George School District SD57. To address potential personal biases, I kept a journal of my reactions and expectations. I debriefed with my dissertation committee and supervisor at all steps of the data analysis.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I discussed the qualitative research design I selected for this study. Within the qualitative tradition, I described and introduced the generic approach. I provided reasons for choosing this research approach, outlining the generic designs' key features that fit the investigations' objectives. I outlined the description of the criteria selected for this study's research participants and identified my role as the researcher. I introduced ethical considerations and described the steps I took to ensure the data's trustworthiness and subsequent findings. I presented my role as a researcher and demonstrated the potential researcher bias to protect the integrity of this research study. Finally, I described the methodological framework for this project. The following chapter focuses on the study's findings and results.

Chapter 4: Results

This study was conducted to explore the beliefs and experiences of elementary teachers in Northern BC, Canada, regarding the implementation of SEL programs in their schools and classrooms. Twelve teachers were interviewed to answer the research question: What are BC teachers' beliefs and experiences in the implementation of SEL? Through this study, I gained a deeper understanding of teachers' beliefs regarding the introduction of schoolwide SEL and the breadth of resources required to sustainably implement it. This knowledge has the potential to inform district planning. The current results support a need for school-based SEL programs that promote and ensure the academic proficiency and life success of all students. Teachers are the driving force behind SEL programs and practices in school and classroom settings, thereby contributing to social change. In this chapter, I present the setting and demographic information portraying the participants of this study. The data collection and analysis that helped me generate the themes in the study's findings are also introduced. Finally, a description of the trustworthiness of this study and its results is presented.

Study Setting

Study participants were teachers from a Northern BC school district serving a diverse student population from kindergarten to Grade 7. I recruited participants by seeking permission from the SD57 superintendent to contact two school administrators from a rural and inner-city school in the district. I explained to them the purpose of the study and provided relevant details about research participation and procedures. The superintendent and school administrators assisted me with participant recruitment by

distributing invitation flyers via staff group email. Potential participants responded to my invitation, and we corresponded via email. After verifying participants' eligibility, I sent a consent form via email. If they agreed to participate, they sent me an email stating their consent to the study. Once the participant consented to the study and agreed to participate, I scheduled an online interview at a convenient date and time.

I conducted all participant interviews using Zoom's online platform, which recorded and transcribed all communication and interactions. The virtual platform allowed participants to choose a location and space where they were comfortable to be interviewed. Conducting interviews over Zoom enabled me to ask follow-up questions and seek clarifications as needed. All teacher-participant interviews lasted approximately 30 to 45 minutes over the Spring/Summer 2021-2022 school year. Once I completed each interview, I provided each participant with a \$25.00 gift card from a local coffee shop as a token of appreciation for their participation in my research study.

Demographics

The 12 teacher participants were all employed in a Northern BC school district. All participants self-identified as Caucasian; nine were female, and the remainder were male (see Table 1). Participants varied in terms of their relationship status during data collection. Participants also reported whether they had children living with them. To protect participants' identity and privacy, they were assigned a two-digit research participant (RP) code from RP01 to RP12. The teaching experience of participants ranged from 3 to 33 years. All interviewed participants held a post-secondary educational degree, with five having a bachelor's degree and seven having a master's degree.

Table 1*Participants' Demographics*

Participant #	Age range	Rural or Inner-City School	Marital Status	Children Living At-Home	Level of Education	Years of Teaching Experience	Years At Current School	Current Teaching Grade
RP01	30-35	Rural	Engaged	No	Master	7	4	K-7
RP02	45-50	Rural	Single	No	Master	22	15	5-6
RP03	51-55	Inner-City	Widowed	2	Master	33	33	K-7
RP04	45-50	Rural	Married	2	Master	10	8	2-3
RP05	25-29	Inner-City	Single	No	Bachelor	4	4	7
RP06	56-64	Rural	Married	No	Bachelor	25	9	3-4
RP07	25-27	Rural	Single	No	Bachelor	3	3	5
RP08	36-40	Inner-City	Common-Law	No	2 x Bachelor	12	6	K-1
RP09	30-35	Rural	Single	No	Master	11	6	7
RP10	41-45	Rural	Married	3	Master	16	16	7
RP11	45-50	Inner-City	Married	4	Master	13	3	K-1
RP12	30-25	Inner-City	Common-Law	No	Bachelor	10	9	K-3

All 12 participants reported limited initial awareness of SEL practices and programs due to receiving no formal SEL courses or direct knowledge of SEL curriculum in their preservice teacher education program. They did not learn the importance of SEL competencies and skills or how to implement them with diverse students during their teacher-preparation program. Participants reported attending professional development sessions offered by their district; however, none could identify a specific, meaningful SEL training on implementing SEL practices or programs in their school or classroom setting.

Data Collection

To collect data for this research study, I conducted interviews with teacher participants from one pre-selected rural and one inner-city elementary school that had

implemented SEL schoolwide for over 2 years. The interviews were semistructured and open-ended, allowing participants to thoroughly explore their knowledge of SEL practices and programs as well as their experiences with schoolwide implementation. I conducted the interviews on Zoom, a virtual online communication platform, which facilitated the recording and transcription of our discussions (Zoom Support, 2023). For these interviews, participants selected a private and comfortable environment, and I ensured a location that guaranteed their privacy. I obtained verbal consent at the beginning of the online interviews, confirming that they had read and reviewed their rights and understood the confidentiality details of informed consent. Participants returned the consent form before the interview along with the date they would log into the provided Zoom link.

Participants' confidentiality was maintained using a secure computer, and interviews lasted 30 to 45 minutes, although participants could have had more time if needed. The participant interviews focused on teachers' beliefs and experiences of SEL implementation schoolwide. Topics discussed included (a) beliefs and experiences of SEL, participants' perspective on SEL implementation schoolwide for all elementary students; (b) first awareness of SEL, whether participants stumbled upon SEL practices, received pre-service teacher education, or participated in SEL training offered by their district to shape their outlook; (c) personal and professional experience with SEL strategies used in the classroom, identifying the characteristics of effective SEL programs and practices; and (d) implementation of SEL programs and practices and the outcomes demonstrated among different student populations in the school and classroom

environment. Participants were encouraged to share their thoughts, elaborate, and expand on the researchers' questions. The same interview protocol was used for all interviews (see Appendix A).

Data Analysis

Data analysis for my study involved analyzing the recorded virtual online Zoom interviews and the transcripts produced by the 12 research participants. The semistructured interviews consisted of five central questions and four to five subquestions designed to thoroughly explore each topic. Furthermore, I utilized thematic analysis to identify and analyze patterns of meaning in my dataset (Braun & Clarke, 2006). I chose thematic analysis to uncover participants' personal views, opinions, knowledge, experience, and values collected from their interview transcripts and recorded responses. As the researcher, I aimed to highlight central themes that described the phenomenon under investigation and to provide evidence that helped address the research question. Identifying themes in the data analysis served as the starting point for any reported findings from this qualitative research study.

Braun and Clarke (2006) outlined a six-step process for using thematic analysis: familiarization, coding, generating themes, reviewing themes, defining and maintaining themes, and writing up analysis of the data. The first step, familiarization, allowed me as the researcher to get to know the data collected before analyzing individual participant transcripts. I first watched all Zoom interviews, took notes, listened to audio recordings, and later read through transcripts until I became familiar with the data. The second step, coding, requires the researcher to code the data. I coded my data by highlighting sections

of individual transcripts in red font, including phrases and sentences from participant interviews, and created codes to describe their content. The third step, generating themes, allows the researcher to review the codes created and identify patterns among them to help break down earlier identified themes into more refined ones. The fourth step, reviewing themes, ensured that themes were valuable and accurate data representations. The fifth step, defining and naming, allowed me to refine the meaning of themes using succinct language, which became my theme headings. The sixth step, writing up, allowed me to clarify how the themes related to the original research question. This process also affirmed that a qualitative research design and thematic analysis were valuable approaches for this study. The results section describes the themes and subthemes appearing in the data and includes direct quotes from participants' interviews as evidence.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

The trustworthiness of this study was advanced through attention to ethical research procedures, a well-researched and thoughtful interview protocol, securely collected data, and a rigorous and methodical analysis to yield meaningful and valuable results. To ensure strong trustworthiness, I based my research design and procedures on Lincoln and Guba's (1985) and Shenton's (2004) guidelines and recommendations for quality research. Ethical practice, including the university's IRB review protocols, was a cornerstone of this research. Ethical practice contributes to trustworthiness because it ensures that participants are not coerced and that they only give their consent after being informed of research procedures and any potential risks. This research was described to

participants as low risk since their interviews would be held in confidence and their identities protected by a pseudonym ensuring their professional reputation would not be injured. A considered and ethical approach was also an important variable in developing a trusting rapport with each of my participants. I was upfront with participants that we worked for the same school district as our employer. When I introduced myself, I explained my title, role, and responsibilities to ensure all participants were comfortable proceeding. I increased participant confidence by providing a detailed explanation of the study during recruitment. I reviewed how the data would be captured, stored, and utilized prior to participants providing written consent.

Another component of trustworthiness was a well-designed interview protocol that focused on topics in SEL research that would capture participants' knowledge of SEL, core competencies, classroom practices and strategies adopted and implemented to develop diverse students' SEL skills. Examples of the in-depth questions included

- What are your beliefs, perspectives, and attitudes of SEL?
- When did you first become aware of SEL, and has that shaped your outlook?
- What are the characteristics of effective SEL programs?
- What implementation strategies support SEL programming?
- Based on your experience, how important is it for SEL to have teacher-buy-in or administrative-driven?
- What outcomes have you witnessed that SEL programs demonstrated among diverse student populations and settings?

As I conducted the interview, I checked in with each participant throughout, letting them

know how many research questions were left and rereading any unheard questions.

Rigorous analysis is another aspect of trustworthiness. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), a researcher ensures the trustworthiness of a qualitative study by organizing and presenting details that support themes worthy of attention when compared to the current body of research. To do so requires a rigorous approach: conducting an analysis of the data in a precise, consistent, and methodical way that exhausts the data. Following this, the setting of the research and the demographics of the participants present a rich and trustworthy representation of the results that can then be compared to current research studies to consider its reliability, transferability, dependability, and conformability (Creswell, 2012). I approached the data analysis in a systematic way, looking for patterns and defining themes. I repeatedly returned to the central research question to verify that the data were relevant. I kept a reflective journal throughout the research process to support my examination of personal biases and mitigate making assumptions that would misrepresent the data. My guiding principles were to allow the content and patterns in the data to define and organize themes, to evaluate how they related to the central research question, return to the current research to support my interpretations, and finally review current research that supported or contradicted the findings.

Credibility

In designing each step of this study, I considered ways to allow teacher participants' experiences to direct the study findings in a way that protected credibility and therefore transferability (Shenton, 2004). First, all participants had adequate time to

respond to interview questions and were encouraged to elaborate on their beliefs and perspectives of SEL. Second, I spent ample time reviewing and engaging in the data collected to ensure I understood the phenomenon's context and how I achieved data saturation in the study. I watched and rewatched participants' recorded Zoom interviews and compared them to their printed transcripts, making necessary edits and changes to ensure credibility. Finally, I used a consistent method of color-coding and organizing text to aid in accurate thematic analysis. I ensured this study's credibility by carefully adhering to methodological procedures that offered the best fit between participants' views and the researcher's representation of their responses (Nowell et al., 2017).

Transferability

I enhanced transferability in this study by providing readers with clear evidence of the research study's findings that could apply to other contexts, situations, times, and populations. I offered readers detailed descriptions of terms to ensure the transferability of Lincoln and Guba's (1985) second criteria. Transferability is tricky, given that qualitative research does not and cannot thrive for replicability (Stahl & King, 2020). Therefore, I thoroughly discussed the patterns in my research and offered clear descriptions of each school setting as well as the demographics of participants so the results from this research could be relevant to future studies. It is productive to seek understanding from another's systematic qualitative inquiry (Stahl & King, 2020). I created new knowledge in this discovery-oriented qualitative research.

Dependability

A third perspective for trustworthiness offered by Lincoln and Guba (1985) is

dependability, or the “trust” in trustworthiness (Stahl & King, 2020). The issue of dependability included the aspect of consistency (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). As the researcher assesses research participants’ accounts, dependability asks what shared or common constructs exist. The researcher then checks whether their analytical process aligns with the acceptable standards for a particular chosen design. As I mentioned in Chapter 3, I kept a private reflective journal to document my feelings and experience interviewing teacher participants and to track interpretations of the data I was considering, allowing me to stay contemplative as a researcher throughout the research process.

Confirmability

Confirmability is the final factor under the evidence of trustworthiness offered by Lincoln and Guba (1985). Confirmability asks the researcher and audience to consider to what degree we can confirm the findings of a study by ensuring a degree of replicability in qualitative terms for future studies. It allows the researcher to get as close to objective reality as a qualitative study can (Stahl & King, 2020). This research study aimed to understand teachers’ beliefs and experiences of SEL implementation in the classroom and school setting, which called for various strategies that optimized the study’s confirmability. I remained reflective throughout the research process of this study, mindful of any potential bias that would challenge the neutrality of my role as the researcher (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Creswell, 2012).

Results

This study’s themes and corresponding subthemes embody the essence of the

elementary teacher participants, their shared lived experiences, and confirm or argue findings from earlier SEL research studies. The shared experiences of the 12 teacher participants from the Northern BC school district's rural and inner-city elementary schools became critical to understanding the importance of teachers in SEL implementation. Furthermore, I identified future directions for research and practice by comparing the results of this study to the foundational understanding of SEL and the requirements teachers identified to ensure confidence in their delivery and implementation success. Three significant themes were identified and generated from the data analysis, including several subthemes that I elaborated on and further discussed. These three themes included: (a) teachers' beliefs and experiences of SEL; (b) teachers' professional awareness and training of SEL; (c) teachers' barriers and challenges in facilitating SEL implementation (Table 2).

Table 2

Themes and Subthemes

Themes	Subthemes
Teachers' Beliefs and Experiences of SEL	The Need for Elementary Schoolwide SEL Implementation
	Benefits of Consistent SEL Practices and Programs
	Benefits of Teaching SEL that Prepares Students for Success.
Teachers' Professional Awareness and Training of SEL	Awareness and Modeling of SEL from Seasoned Teachers
	Lack of Training from Preservice Teacher Education Programs
Teachers' Barriers and Challenges Facilitating SEL Implementation	Time Involved in Selecting and Preparing SEL Lessons
	Teachers and Administration Should Collaborate in SEL Implementation
	Connecting and Engaging Parents as Co-SEL Educators
	Need for Formal SEL Outcome Assessment

Theme 1: Teachers' Beliefs and Experiences of SEL

The first theme that emerged from the interview dataset highlighted how the participants recognized the need for consistent and effective SEL programs to support student development. Participants identified SEL as a universal tool to meet diverse students' needs. All 12 teacher participants strongly emphasized that SEL was a valuable tool to reduce students' problem behaviours and better mental health, improve elementary school academic success and build positive relationships and learning environments. There are three significant beliefs documented in the subthemes.

The first consistent belief participants shared related to the urge for schoolwide SEL implementation. Schoolwide SEL implementation is likely to foster continuity in its outcomes. Students who receive only one or two years of SEL in their classrooms during elementary school would not grasp or benefit from the core aspects of the program. The second belief related to the need of having consistent and effective SEL programs implemented in schools. The third belief related to how teachers view the benefits of implementing SEL. Particularly, they stated that setting a positive emotional environment became the ground for academic learning and well-being. Three subthemes related to this theme surfaced that outlined the vast benefits of SEL implementation: (a) the need for elementary schoolwide SEL implementation, (b) benefits of consistent SEL practices and programs, and (c) benefits of teaching SEL that prepares students for success.

The Need for Elementary Schoolwide SEL Implementation

The first subtheme highlights participants' belief in the benefits of early elementary schoolwide SEL implementation with students in the elementary years and

continuing through subsequent grades. Indeed, participants emphasized the importance of public education establishing systemic SEL approaches in schools from kindergarten to grade 12. Participants recognized having undergone a shift in their role as teachers, realizing they cannot only teach academics; they must also provide students with SEL competencies and skills that will give them the foundation for learning and developing future life skills. All interviewed teachers considered themselves SEL supporters, as they had observed its vast benefits to diverse students. Participants agreed that the early introduction of SEL competencies provided gains in behavioral, emotional, and self-regulation skills in later grades.

RP01. SEL must be schoolwide... school-based, and consistently taught every school year because they may not receive it the following year. While there is flexibility on how teachers can introduce and implement SEL, students must receive SEL teaching every year and for the entire school year... I know schoolwide SEL has worked when I see certain students who used to struggle now going through things, stopping, reflecting, and using their tools and strategies.

RP09. If SEL is not schoolwide, it can also be a slow process helping each student to identify their feelings and emotions. Unless, at the moment, learning happens, then how can a teacher guess what a student feels? If their guess is wrong, it can hinder the teacher-student relationship building.

RP10. That is a big question. SEL, I think it needs to be part of the whole, like the whole student, schoolwide at school, in the home and community. It must be part of everything essential for students, as it is just as vital for us as adults and

educators. Teachers can see and implement SEL differently, depending on their experiences, learning environments, and contexts. But I think, especially with how we learn in this day and age, our expectations in society, and with our jobs and stuff. I believe SEL is integral to education and way more important than it used to be. You know, when we were kids or when I was a kid.

Key to the success of a schoolwide program was the use of common language, that participants noted as advantageous to improving student understanding and increasing student engagement. RP11 said,

SEL programs and practices must be absolutely responsive to students' needs, and the only way we as a school and teachers can achieve this is to have and use a common language. So, everybody uses similar vocabulary, and there's buy-in from everybody schoolwide.... It doesn't work as well if only some or a few teachers do it in their silos, domain or walls of just their classrooms. It is much more effective if a school team does SEL schoolwide and is implemented and practiced by everyone.

The first subtheme unanimously highlighted by teacher participants is that for SEL implementation to be successful in elementary schools, it must be schoolwide. A schoolwide approach infuses SEL into everyday aspects of elementary students' learning across all classrooms during all parts of the day. When SEL is implemented schoolwide, students are happier and more engaged. A key component of schoolwide delivery is the use of a common language when communicating with students.

Benefits of Consistent SEL Practices and Programs

The second subtheme, and perhaps the most significant shared conclusion from participants, was the recognition that teachers must have continuous access to SEL practices and programs that can be consistently delivered throughout grade levels. Participants recognized the necessity of open access for all teachers to SEL programs designed for schoolwide implementation. Participants shared that before schoolwide SEL, there were more discipline referrals to the office due to their students' poor decision-making, lack of self-regulation skills, low self-awareness, and other factors that impede learning. Participants agreed that the absence of consistent schoolwide SEL practices, programs, and language could hinder a school's clear vision shared by all school staff, resulting in confusion, which impedes success. Participant data demonstrates a need for open access to dedicated SEL programs to coordinate their efforts and implement new practices effectively.

RP03. We used to have a youth care worker at our school who systematically taught social-emotional learning to our primary children, which was extremely effective. I do not believe they collected any data or measured SEL outcomes, and I don't have data, but anecdotally I could see the difference right then. Then that youth care worker went to a different school, and the new people we got in their place had other priorities. So, systematic SEL teaching was so valuable, and we missed it when it was gone. We're finding this year that we're putting out a lot of fires because we don't have this 1:1 SEL support, and we see that the kids no longer have this; they do not know how to self-regulate. I am paraphrasing a

quote Linda O'Neill a trauma expert at UNBC, shared with me. "Teach a kid to regulate; you may save their life." SEL is that important.

RP04. I have used many SEL programs. When the Zones of Regulation came out, we (the school team) got on board, and we all started teaching that. Before that, it was the Second Step Program, and now it's come full circle, and we are back to Second Step. In our school's response to teaching students about social situations, SEL programs like Kelso's Choice and WITTS have incorporated yoga, breathing, and mindfulness in their classrooms. Last year, back, we focused on teaching students how to increase self-confidence and esteem. Teaching SEL practices and programs seems to become more important each year as teaching students SEL strategies and how to use them to ensure success is critical.

RP05. I have used a variety of SEL practices and programs that have been positive. I have attended many positive workshops offered by the district on Pro-Days. I did a trauma-informed seminar and crisis intervention training on a professional development day, which was also really good. Still, outside of that, I've just been on my journey, throwing spaghetti at the wall and seeing what works.

Benefits of Teaching SEL that Prepares Students for Success

All participants agreed that integrating SEL in their classroom and school creates positive learning environments and relationships directly linked to improved social-emotional outcomes. Teachers working with vulnerable schools at risk may be the only stable and caring adults in the students' lives and, thus, in a position to offer a positive

relationship and safe learning environment. Students respond to being cared about, recognized, and appreciated, especially by their classroom teacher. Teacher participants shared how they focused on strength-based learning to create a sense of belonging, improve student engagement and knowledge, and develop environments where students feel safe and secure. Participants acknowledged and affirmed schools as the primary setting in which children first learn to negotiate complex social relationships with their peers and have the opportunity to build essential SEL skills. Academic learning accelerates when students have supportive relationships and opportunities to develop and practice social, emotional, and cognitive skills across positive learning environments.

RP01. SEL is not only crucial in the education system. SEL is important for all students in school and across their lifespan. It's critical to personal and professional relationships and vital in our jobs. SEL is essential to connect with people and students and helps us to feel good about ourselves. I don't think you can separate SEL and mental health. Although, I think many factors in our district demographics influence the focus, such as Indigenous Education and knowledge of intergenerational experiences and trauma. SEL must be first and foremost and not lost as a result, as our relationships depend on it.

RP02. I initially thought SEL was like a program or things you do in the classroom. What I know now, it has progressed. I didn't realize SEL was a way of teaching, an identity. It took me several years to realize SEL must be in your practice, from the physical space in your room to deepening relationships with your students. SEL 100 % changed the way I teach.

RP03. I think SEL is essential in any education; I don't believe children learn dynamics if they're not socially and emotionally in a good place. There is a wide variance in how teachers implement SEL, depending on the support received and the staff. I think SEL is absolutely essential for student success.

RP04. I have excellent student attendance; that's another reason I know SEL interventions work. I rarely have kids absent for any length of time, and when they return to school, they tell me how sick they were. I work to build an environment that makes it feel like a place where they can trust, take risks, and grow. A place they enjoy being at is all part of SEL; that's what it is all about. We would never have seen this come up as a problem if we didn't have kids reluctant to go to school. The biggest thing is that so many kids are unwilling to attend school. Well, what are we going to do about that? Well, we will implement SEL because these kids have anxiety or whatever they might have that prevents them from wanting to go to school. Okay, well, let's implement SEL. So what are we going to do? They come up with all these different things that we're going to do, and then really what we have to do is make our classrooms friendly, inviting, safe place to be. Then the kids will want school. I focused on relationship building right, and when kids feel connected to the teacher in the classroom setting right, they thrive.

SEL core competencies have a significant and positive influence on students' academic achievements. Participants in this study agreed that addressing students' SEL needs must take precedence before expecting them to absorb and retain educational

information. Providing SEL knowledge and instruction is essential in accomplishing this goal.

RP05. SEL is the foundation of everything I need to work on right, so I can't do my academics with students if social-emotional learning is not in place. It is kind of where everything else spawns out of, even if it's not a sit-down SEL lesson. It is an integral part of what we do every day and how the interactions between my students and me go as we work on building positive relationships, which is always my first consideration. I ask my students and myself daily if we are making ourselves better people socially, emotionally, and academically. I recognize the importance for us both to have SEL as our foundation, as it is essential for us both to have SEL as it is for me to teach it.

RP12. I firmly believe that SEL is the foundation of all learning. Um, and that's something I think I felt from the very beginning. But definitely, it's become more and more evident over the years working in an inner-city school. And now, just knowing that certain basic needs must be met before academics can take place or they understand or retain what I teach. So, for example, we start every day with a soft start here with SEL in mind, having our kiddos regulated and getting them ready for the day.

Participants interviewed strongly supported SEL and believed SEL skills are essential for the success of diverse students. They reported that SEL instructional strategies and curricula correlated with positive academic outcomes, improved mental health, and reduced problem behavior among students. The BC Ministry of Education

supports SEL as an evidence-based practice. Participants expressed that when students have opportunities for SEL, they experience increased academic success, exhibit fewer behavior problems, and demonstrate higher levels of positive social behavior.

Theme 2: Teachers' Professional Awareness and Training of SEL

The second theme was professional awareness, including an ability to identify SEL programs and understand the purpose of program components to deliver and teach them effectively. Accessing further training supported teachers' professional development. When there are various levels of professional awareness, understanding, and training of SEL, it is challenging to keep implementation consistent and to determine which SEL practices and programs teachers are finding effective for use with students. Participants shared when they first became aware of SEL and how this knowledge shaped their outlook. Specifically, I asked teachers to reflect on their initial hearing of the word of SEL, how they increased their self-awareness and understanding of SEL, and what training they received to expand their knowledge and confidence in implementing SEL schoolwide.

Participants of this study demonstrated that teachers' first awareness of SEL was random. Twelve teacher participants reported stumbling across SEL accidentally without knowing they were initially practicing SEL, hindering their initial beliefs and experience with SEL. All participants reported receiving no specific introduction to SEL, including no pre-service teacher education, specific SEL courses, or training focused on the instruction teachers require about using SEL practices in their classroom. Teacher participants said they often first practiced SEL without knowing it was SEL. Only after

they became knowledgeable of specific SEL practices and programs in their teaching career, were they able to reflect and become aware that they have been practicing SEL principles earlier and for some time. More than receiving specific training that could have taught participants about SEL, they reflected on the importance of having a positive role model who introduced them to SEL. This theme encompasses two major subthemes: (a) awareness and modeling of SEL from seasoned teachers, and (b) lack of training from preservice teacher education programs.

Awareness and Modeling of SEL from Seasoned Teachers

Participants identified modeling SEL behaviors by seasoned teachers as having the most significant impact on them as new teachers, highlighting the vast benefits of SEL and its power to change how they teach and relate to students. The findings indicated that many teacher participants reported that their initial exposure to SEL occurred through interactions with colleagues who were supporters of SEL, significantly influencing their beliefs and practices.

RP08. I first became aware of SEL as a tool or a specific group of tools in my teaching program in 2011 at Western University. It was very theoretical at that point ... learning about mindfulness, techniques and calm-down strategies, and different brain areas that would control various functions. I gained a deeper understanding of SEL implementation when I did an additional kindergarten certificate during my training there. The instructor was a veteran teacher with many years of experience as a seasoned principal in her district and brought SEL into her courses and my teacher education program. There was no specific SEL

course; she just woven it into the classes she taught in my education program.

RP02. I received no formal SEL educational training other than a few workshops offered by the district on PD. I had an excellent role model and mentor who took me under her wing. In my first year of teaching, I worked across the hall from an experienced SEL-driven teacher who was supportive and encouraging. In my first classroom experience, I was the only new teacher in the school then, and having a mentor who fostered SEL made a difference in my teaching practice. There were also more mature, experienced, great teachers who were very supportive and encouraged me as a new teacher. When I realized SEL was not just a program but a way of teaching, it aligned with my identity. Today's new teachers, or less experienced teachers, need SEL mentors. It took me a good few years to implement SEL and identify it as my teaching style. Before that, I struggled with implementing SEL, and I think many new teachers are struggling to do the same today.

Lack of Training from Preservice Teacher Education Programs

This subtheme highlights that while participants strongly desired to learn more about SEL and its implementation, they expressed the need for more preparation and training from their preservice education programs. Preservice education programs typically instruct soon-to-be new teachers on preparing lesson plans, practical strategies for classroom management, and teaching techniques to achieve academic outcomes. However, current teacher education programs generally lack training in SEL or specific SEL courses to equip new teachers with guidance on implementation. Additionally,

student teachers do not receive support to explore their own SEL. The findings of this current research study confirmed this belief, as all teacher participants interviewed had yet to receive critical SEL preparation and training necessary for achieving enriched SEL program implementation.

RP03. I didn't receive any formal training on SEL and don't know if it is still missing in teacher education programs... I didn't deeply understand SEL and its importance until I did my master's in counseling. It took that shift in thinking to gain a deeper understanding of SEL ... and to see the connections between the importance of students being able to regulate and learning to form relationships. You know, it clicked, and then it has just been a gradual learning process since.

Teachers strongly desire continued professional development and training in SEL. Teacher participants reported having limited professional development and ongoing support from their district and school in this area. SEL has significantly evolved in education, and today's teachers recognize the importance of providing SEL to diverse student populations to help them adapt to challenging learning environments and a changing world. Despite SEL's popularity and teachers' initial awareness of it, many participants report feeling unsure and unprepared to implement SEL effectively.

RP02. The first time I heard about SEL was maybe five years ago at a workshop offered by the district. It appealed to me because you do not have to be an authority figure. SEL focuses on teachers having respect for students. In the beginning, not many teachers knew about SEL. It took some time to incorporate it into teaching practices because it was so new, and nobody knew about it. I didn't

have much information. The first thing I did was go online; the only thing I saw at the time was the CASEL online database. There is a lot more now, but I think it was the only CASEL website where I could find anything about it when I first started searching for information about SEL.

All teacher participants in this study reported never receiving SEL-specific educational training during their pre-service teacher preparation programs. While it would be logical for teacher education programs to take the initiative to impart SEL knowledge and skills to new teachers for successful implementation, this has not been the case. Through years of teaching, teachers have found that they must possess extensive knowledge of SEL to perform with expertise, as well as vast skills and confidence. When teachers first become aware of SEL, they quickly realize that they have been indirectly teaching SEL without realizing it, making a teacher's SEL expertise and confidence a work in progress.

RP12: I'm sure that SEL was a subject that was touched on when I was in university. I don't think it was as much of a buzzword when I was in school. It's become more prominent. I feel there are a lot of incredible SEL programs out there. I've done my best to keep on top of resources coming out, making myself aware of what's available. That way, I can, you know, try everything and see what works for our little learners, and if it doesn't work, you try something else; if it does, that's fantastic. So, I'm really open to anything available to us as teachers.

SEL training is vital, especially given that pre-service teacher education programs often offer little to no SEL-specific education. As schools and districts continue to

develop preventative programming related to SEL, teachers will likely receive some form of SEL training. All participants in the study identified receiving what they believed was SEL training offered by their district on professional development days. While professional development can help teachers cultivate their social and emotional well-being, the learning, application, and implementation processes require continued awareness, a commitment to seeking knowledge, and lifelong learning.

RP09. I have no formal SEL education or attended specific training on SEL programs offered on professional development (PD) days. I am unsure if there are any; I could be wrong because I glance at certain things so that I could have missed them. I don't think our district has had any PD specific to SEL. I think the language for it has just come out within the last couple of years in BC, let alone in our district. I believe we are catching up; I can speak to this, too, as the new BC Curriculum has implemented the SEL core concepts for all education. It is now easier to implement SEL because it is laid out and more accessible. I went through Teacher College in 2011, and it was not even a concept. Then, I talked to some of the newer teachers during COVID, 2019-2020 years, and they shared there is now an SEL course built into their university training, which is fabulous.

Theme 3: Teachers' Barriers and Challenges in Facilitating SEL Implementation

The third theme shared by participants in this study surrounded teachers' barriers and challenges in facilitating SEL implementation. All teacher participants identified several factors that make prioritizing and implementing SEL challenging. They also acknowledged factors that contribute to SEL's successful implementation. The challenges

and barriers were organized in four major subthemes: (a) time involved in selecting and preparing SEL lessons, (b) teachers and administration should collaborate in SEL implementation, (c) connecting and engaging parents as co-SEL educators, and (d) need for formal SEL outcome assessment. The first subtheme referred to challenges teachers face in selecting and implementing SEL lessons. One of the main barriers is the abundance of SEL materials and the lack of guidance on which ones would work best for a certain group or cohort. The second barrier involves the time involved in preparing lessons.

The second subtheme referred to the need for teachers and administration to collaborate in promoting, supporting, and implementing SEL. If either group does not engage with or believe in SEL, its implementation is prone to failure or abandonment. Participants stated that while school administrators are essential for SEL implementation, teachers must drive the SEL implementation process, being coined as primary SEL implementers. All participants believed that successful SEL implementation primarily depends on their role as teachers. Naturally, the goal for teachers is to provide SEL tools and strategies to students to help them develop the skills to engage with others and form interpersonal relationships, thus becoming productive members of their school, community, and society later in life. Nevertheless, administrative backing is essential to facilitate educators' access to training and assistance in integrating SEL practices, as well as to foster participation in the broader adoption of SEL initiatives within the school environment. In essence, the first challenge is intertwined with the second one, as teachers require administrative support from the district to access organized SEL

information and to have time to prepare SEL lessons. The third subtheme referred to the challenges of engaging parents and families as co-SEL educators. Participants believed that continuing SEL at home would strengthen its effects. Finally, participants acknowledged the need to implement SEL outcome assessment to demonstrate its effectiveness.

Time Involved in Selecting and Preparing SEL Lessons

Many of the participants in this study discussed the struggle with the amount of time required to prepare and plan SEL lessons. All participants were aware that SEL is not one specific program but rather a way of teaching. Teachers often become aware of SEL through a fellow teacher introducing them to an SEL program such as Zones of Regulation (2021) or WITS (2022) or as a classroom management strategy to teach emotional or self-regulation skills. In this study, teachers conveyed a propensity to adopt SEL practices in a piecemeal manner, acquiring fragmented elements without a cohesive framework, thereby impeding the establishment of a robust foundation in SEL principles. With every year that passes, a teacher becomes increasingly experienced and is able to integrate SEL into their everyday teaching style. Their language becomes clearer and their confidence in SEL delivery grows and becomes second nature.

Teachers reported that there always needs to be more time to prepare SEL lessons, especially during the school day. Teachers require time to plan lessons for student learning without interruptions for a prolonged period, which can be challenging to do within the hours of the school day that students are at school. Teachers must work outside their contract hours to get everything done and to maximize student learning hours in the

classroom. In describing facilitating SEL practices, participants discussed the types of programs they found useful and how they organized themselves to implement them.

RP06. It would be beneficial if the school district made SEL programs available for schools and teachers. We hear about or learn about SEL programs, and if our administrator knows a few of us teachers are interested in trying them out, they certainly will try to support us in having them, but I think that's it. I don't know; it seems like they want us to implement SEL in our classrooms, but I don't believe we, as teachers, are given enough time to do so. I don't know; we need more time to do SEL, and time and planning seem to be the biggest issue. There's not enough time, so you do it piecemeal, a little bit here and there. I don't know if that's SEL implementation or if it's just a complicated thing.

In addition to the time required to prepare SEL lessons, participants also discussed how difficult it can be to select appropriate materials due to the large quantity of resources available.

RP05. Our school participated in a professionally funded team learning grant where we assembled a bunch of SEL book kits, which was fun. So, the idea was to get a bunch of SEL books and put them in one place so that, as a teacher, you can go in and grab an SEL lesson with it. It was already pre-done. It is my experience, at least, that one of the most intimidating things about starting SEL in a classroom on your own is the overwhelming amount of SEL resources a school has. Our library has a wall of SEL resources, and if you talk to all your colleagues, they all have a different one that they all favour and will say is the

most effective right.

RP12. One of the things I've been doing in my new role this school year when not face-to-face with the kids I am trying to create as many SEL visuals and resources as possible. To have them on hand, so when a teacher comes to me, they're like, oh do you have this SEL resource, you know, or they say I need something like this for little Johnny, and I'm like, you bet I do. So, teachers are not waiting forty-eight hours for me to go and find something SEL, you know? We're trying to be proactive in our SEL approach in this building, and I feel good about it, and we continue to get more teacher buy-in.

In addition to the time needed to prepare SEL lessons and select the best materials, participants reported experiencing moments of isolation while implementing SEL in their school settings. Specifically, they shared that the introduction of SEL and its implementation were slower than expected, despite their schools' desire to implement it schoolwide. Several participants reported that their initial lack of awareness and understanding of the five core competencies of SEL hindered their engagement. Participants also expressed frustration that SEL often relied solely on teachers and not all school staff. Teachers made statements indicating that when not everyone participates in a school setting, it can create a divide among staff.

Participants elaborated on their experiences of isolation, as demonstrated by their desire for the district to provide opportunities for school teams involved in SEL to connect with other SEL schools. Teachers acknowledged the benefits of sharing among colleagues in their school and expressed a wish for this to extend to other schools in their

district. They recognized the power of relationships and connections among SEL teachers to share their experiences, knowledge, stories, engagement, support, and encouragement. This once again highlights that SEL must be implemented schoolwide for it to be effective and successful.

Teachers and Administration Should Collaborate in SEL Implementation

A significant component of consistency in SEL program delivery is whether there is teacher engagement versus an administrator-driven implementation. Teacher participants clearly stated that SEL must start with teachers' engagement, as they are the primary implementers of SEL practices and programs with students and possess professional autonomy. However, administrator support is needed for teachers to receive training and support in implementing SEL and for engagement in schoolwide SEL implementation. While many teachers implement targeted SEL interventions, implementation quality varies widely, resulting in varying levels of teacher commitment and making it challenging to determine what teachers require for implementation success.

Several participants reported different levels of commitment from teachers, school staff, and administrators during their SEL schoolwide implementation process, highlighting the importance for all stakeholders to recognize SEL's many benefits. The data collected from the interviews revealed commonalities in how the participants viewed their administrator's role, their own roles, and the perspective on the importance of teacher commitment and support required for SEL implementation success. Participants in this study said it is easier for teachers to implement SEL when it is schoolwide and teacher-driven, with other staff and administration supporting.

RP03. I found that SEL implementation success also depends on the people working in your school and your building. And it depends on the teachers. If they don't have the time to do SEL, it's not a priority. There's a substantial upfront money factor for schools and districts to invest in SEL. We had to use our youth care worker at our school who did systematic instruction of SEL with our primary children, and that was highly effective, and I don't think they looked at the data. I don't have data, only anecdotally. I could see the difference right and then.

RP01. I think it's hard because teachers must have SEL knowledge and involvement to implement SEL because if they don't, and their administrators do not like promoting it, it will not carry on the school that year. Teacher buy-in is more critical than administrator driven. Without teacher buy-in, SEL will collapse, and administrators will drop very quickly.

RP09. When we had a principal who supported SEL and firmly believed in SEL, I honestly think that we saw so much success with SEL because of her. I know she really struggled with teacher buy-in, and we had a lot of older teachers who were sort of set in their ways. They were like, no, this isn't how this works. You discipline students and send them home, not realizing you can no longer do that. And then, some teachers practiced SEL and knew what they were doing. The administrator did all of these schoolwide assemblies for intermediate and primary students individually and worked on teaching SEL core competencies.

RP11. I don't think it needs to be admin driven. I think that they definitely need to support SEL and believe in it as well. I haven't seen somebody that doesn't

believe in SEL yet, but teachers must believe in SEL as well the drivers of SEL. I think it's more effective if teacher-driven, so the staff can do that themselves. So rather than it coming top down, it is like the administrator would be acting more as a guide in that respect to help steer it along and offer another voice. So, if there's an SEL committee, that's what I found to be more effective. Usually, a school counselor, youth care worker, resource teacher, and learning assistance teachers are always on the SEL committee. Then, if a couple of dedicated teachers support SEL, that's great, making SEL implementation more successful.

RP12. The administrator needs to be on board for SEL to occur, but SEL must be teacher driven ideally. Teachers must be a united team in a school for SEL to be successful. I think one of the reasons why we're so successful in our SEL practices is that our administrators and teaching staff are on the same page.

Participants reported that teachers' engagement is essential for successful SEL implementation, but administrators consistent support across time it is also paramount for the continuity of schoolwide SEL. Participants reported that schools can lose interest in SEL programming when they do not see immediate results.

RP01. In SEL research, we cannot measure the outcomes, and it's easier for the school team to say oh well, we tried, or to abandon an SEL program when they are not seeing immediate results right away or in the way they anticipated.

Schools want to see consistent SEL results quickly, yet we do not have one way of measuring outcomes, so we cannot see where we went wrong or how to improve. It is when they cannot see SEL is giving something back. It's when they

give up and abandon SEL schoolwide, just when we know it is working.

RP09. I would hope that SEL programs would have something that would allow you to track. So that you can also reflect on the ecosystem of progress because if you don't have that, you might not realize how much progress is being made because it can be very slow. I often find that teachers are willing to give up on SEL because they're not seeing instant results, but this is the result. These are the results that are going to come after months of SEL implementation.

RP12. You know, I think, with SEL, some of the things that happen is that it can lose stamina in a school, and it is up to the school team to maintain it. If staff do not see results immediately and continue to work on it, you know it's easier to step away. Um, well, we know they (students) need it. Probably, staff like SEL can collapse if they don't see the immediate results in students or the school, or as quickly as they thought they should, or if they are not pointed out or measured.

RP02. SEL training needs to come down from the district level. We need district trained SEL staff or teams, like two or three people working on SEL at the district level, offering teachers a few things they can do to implement SEL. Right now, SEL is an add-on and driven top-down, and you're like, what am I supposed to do?

Finally, participants reflected on the necessity for additional opportunities to disseminate and collaborate on SEL knowledge and experiences with all school staff. Participants acknowledged the significance of nurturing trusting relationships as a strategy for cultivating a positive school culture and enhancing support for SEL

initiatives. Several participants articulated their desire to engage with and collaborate alongside other educators within their district who had also been involved in implementing SEL programs. They identified a dearth of opportunities for teachers to exchange insights and experiences regarding SEL implementation within their school and district.

RP01. Teachers are starting to reflect on their practice and want to learn more about SEL. Although it can be a slow process, more dialogue must occur between teachers and staff schoolwide.

RP06. I think we need more training among teachers, especially if our staff is transitioning a lot. We need more time to share our experiences because we tend to get it then. If you're like this, my ninth year in the school, you can get a bit of a rut. We need more times to connect and train, not just say, this is what we're doing, so all staff can bring new ideas. So, it would allow our team to be on the same page if we had more time to do a bit more collegial brainstorming about SEL, and it would help to have more time to collaborate and share knowledge.

Connecting and Engaging Parents as Co-SEL Educators

Families play a crucial role in their child's development, providing a safe space to ensure their child can continue learning and growing as an individual. While most SEL occurs at school, families must continue to support these skills at home. Family support is critical for long-term SEL skills, which can minimize negative life experiences and make life easier. When parents model positive SEL behaviors, provide practice opportunities, and offer supportive and constructive feedback, children are more likely to develop the

skills they need to succeed. Participants reported their educational experiences implementing SEL practices and programs. They recognized that simply teaching lesson plans with SEL core competencies does not equip students with the skills to navigate social interactions, understand and manage emotions, and make responsible decisions. Participants would like to see families engaged in promoting and using SEL principles at home. They also acknowledge the fast pace of our current lives and reflect on why it is hard to teach and foster SEL in children.

RP04. I think there are a lot of things going on right now with the busy lives that we have nowadays. I don't think we, as humans, were designed to be as busy as we are. I think the parents are busy, causing them to be short with their kids. Kids are also more active on their devices and get consistent stimulation. So, it all contributes to a lack of self-regulation for parents, and they cannot model self-regulation skills. We all look at our phones and even at an appropriate time. I still catch myself sometimes looking at my phone during a conversation with somebody. In the past, children had clear expectations to be quiet, have dinner, finish their meal, and go to bed at a specific time to read before they went to bed. The expectations were commonplace and laid out. Whereas, now, I think we do not put the exact expectations on children in the same way. Ironically, it has made them more anxious because they don't know their boundaries and do not have the guidance they need to understand how to regulate because we've never taught them the skills of how to self-regulate.

Participants in this study reported that schools, teachers, and staff felt more

supported when they could rely on various stakeholders to share in SEL implementation efforts. Furthermore, when teachers can share SEL responsibilities among all stakeholders inside and outside the school setting, students have more opportunities to witness SEL modeled in different settings. Participants recognized the importance of parental and family engagement in SEL and noted that students who receive SEL skills at home develop a more encompassed, strengthened understanding and practice of SEL. However, when interviewed, participants expressed regret that they had not considered and planned how they would engage in their SEL implementation efforts. To ensure their partnership as SEL supporters and co-educators, connect and educate parents, families, and communities on SEL language, competencies, and skills.

Findings supported Mahoney et al.'s (2021) evidence that SEL implementation requires a systemic approach to amplify the benefits of SEL and ensure the sustainability of efforts at every level of the school system, including school leaders, classroom teachers, families, and community partners. This requires coordinated efforts across research, practice, and policy. Participants reported that SEL is not just a classroom practice or program that teaches students what to feel or think; instead, effective SEL teaches students a process of how to think. With SEL skills, students can establish rewarding relationships with others, maintain meaningful relationships, handle difficult social situations, and manage high stress during intense emotions.

All twelve participants shared frustration with engaging families in SEL and the disconnect between what happens in the classroom and at home. Participants identified not having family commitment as impacting their implementation efforts of SEL

practices or programs, or they found it challenging to implement SEL with their students. Teachers' perceptions of family support's impact on their implementation efforts influenced whether they adjusted their SEL program or delivery.

RP05. One of my personal fights is getting more parent buy-in and involvement; I struggle to connect with my parents. Many of my phone calls are like I talk, and I get, yep, okay, thanks, okay, bye. So, I can't really speak all that much to how much parent buy-in is at that end, which is very frustrating. So, I like to make that my next goal for next year, really trying to loop my parents in on SEL, and I hope to see some growth in that space.

RP09. It really would be great if everybody would buy into SEL. You'd have education, parents, teachers, school educators, and the community on board. The reality is that's not going to happen. You have parents, teachers, and administrators who are just never on the same page. So, I feel the most important thing is that you have one person consistently implementing SEL. So, if it's your classroom teacher, that is great. So, the classroom teacher is consistent throughout that year. And then next year, if the classroom teacher is not consistent again, they might not be the same sort of thing, but it's close enough that students should eventually be able to pick up on SEL skills. And as long as you're doing SEL strategies and giving students tools. Then they should be able to take those SEL skills, the majority of them. Anyway, one hundred kids should be able to take that and use it and work with it, and any little bit helps at this point because if you get nothing, you get nothing at all, but having one or two things, it's better than

nothing. As long as there's one consistent person constantly teaching SEL skills, the best person would be the parent because they're constantly there and, if not the parent, the classroom teacher because they are always with your kid(s).

Whoever spends the most time with the child is probably a good person to be the steady person teaching kids SEL skills.

RP12. I don't know if it is an outreach thing, but I would love for families and parents to access specific resources or become aware of SEL processes and programs and access them even earlier than Kindergarten. The sooner you start, the better, honestly. And it's interesting, too, when you have a kid come in, and you can tell how this is a conversation and an ongoing lesson they've had at home. I feel this happened to me today. A parent informed me that their child was struggling before coming to school. I was able to say thank you for sharing that with me versus the child who collapses on the floor screaming and crying because they're feeling something big and they don't know how to verbalize it to you or explain it to you. So that, yeah, the sooner families can become involved, the better definitely; I can see that within our building. We tend to do a big schoolwide SEL push at the beginning of the school year in kindergarten just because maybe some families haven't had those opportunities yet. Still, I think it is crucial for all grades, and we need to determine the best option or different supports to offer families for that process to be well received.

Need for Formal SEL Outcome Assessment

This study highlighted participants' recognition of the need for formal SEL

assessment to identify student and schoolwide outcomes. Researchers have commonly stated, "What gets assessed, gets addressed," encouraging districts and school teams to focus on formal SEL assessment that develops better ways to determine if SEL is working effectively. Consequently, high-quality SEL assessments are necessary, as they are required to enable teachers, schools, and districts to build a responsive education system. SEL assessments can effectively reduce problems, promote social-emotional competencies, and improve student and school success. Teacher participants interviewed for this study urged future districts, schools, and educators to examine the CASEL online SEL Assessment Guide (2019c) to help select and effectively use the most popular and effective SEL assessments.

Effectively measuring SEL programs' effectiveness allows for the review of targeted interventions for all students in all grades and curricula. However, despite increasing evidence-based research that shows SEL implementation's effectiveness on students, many studies have yet to consider the need for formal assessment to identify elementary SEL schoolwide outcomes, which can help provide potential economic benefits from implementing SEL practices and programs in schools. Data collected from participants demonstrated that all teachers had some familiarity with using SEL. All participants spoke of their efforts to understand SEL and integrate practices and programs into their classrooms. They spoke of the benefits they witnessed in their students and themselves. Participants reported not having specific school district or school-level assessment tools for collecting and reporting SEL outcomes. While school districts need to clearly understand where their schools stand regarding their SEL implementation-

related efforts, participants said their school district did not have a clear systematic way to assess SEL outcomes.

Participants openly shared their frustration that no districtwide SEL assessment tools are available. Additionally, their school did not have one specific assessment that all teachers used to collect data to help determine if the SEL interventions they implemented were effective. As a result, teacher participants reported relying on CASEL SEL core competency of self-assessment with their students. Participants shared it is a way teachers can help their students see their growth. It allows the teacher to determine if their SEL practices and programs integrated into their classroom are effective with their students, helping them grow and develop their teaching and SEL best practices. The absence of formal SEL assessments initiated and promoted by school administration prompted participants to create their own SEL assessments. However, they acknowledged that more formal assessments were needed to demonstrate schoolwide progress.

RP05. I have been creating a dungeons and dragons character sheet with students, with a bunch of stats on it, and it's all numbers. I want to help my students increase their self-awareness by asking them to choose a number to identify how they feel about each SEL core competency. So, this year, we did one at the start of the school year, and I asked each student how they felt about each of the five core SEL competencies areas. For example, I would say, okay, how are you feeling? On this scale, where would you rate yourself from one (low mood) to six (happy)? What strategies have you used that help, or what do you think you can do that will help? Where do you think your interpersonal communication is? How do you

communicate with others? How do you gather your ideas together? How are you handling arguments with your friends? Then, the individual student will put a number that correlates to how they feel about each SEL domain. We did that all in September, and then we did the same self-assessment when February came around. I brought out that same sheet again, but blank and asked students to reassess themselves to select a new number for each SEL core competency. Then, I got something to compare to the last one student completed. I was like, okay, what do you think you've gone up to, or do you think you've gone down? Or do you feel the same? There is a lot of time students will share. "No, I am better at this now, or I am better at doing that," and they put their number up from where it was before—helping students become more self-aware and improve their understanding of SEL core competencies and skills.

RP07. I have used more self-awareness to examine SEL outcomes for some of our older intermediate students or intermediates in general; it's hard for kids, in general, to investigate themselves. When students know themselves, they know when they need to step out of the room to take a break, when to ask for help, and when to stay quiet and avoid getting involved in situations. All that would show that we are on the right track. I think that would be what I am looking for as SEL outcomes.

RP09. Schools need to have a way of tracking SEL. It is a slow process to track and identify a student's feelings and emotions or how to measure relationship building. You know we have ways to track academics, and you realize what's

working and what's not, but you also see the progress yourself, so you don't feel discouraged about it. I think tracking is easier for teachers. Maybe I am totally out of left field here but from my experience. It is easier for teachers to track academic things because it is very concrete. You know a student got 5 out of 10 on this test; this is what they got. It is very tangible. I think it is easier for teachers to track that, and they have a lot of well-known methods for doing that. Teachers do not have as many known ways for tracking student behaviours or SEL outcomes. All we can do is tallies, but it is such an individual skill too, and sometimes the school just needs to pick a specific method schoolwide for measuring SEL outcomes.

Summary

In chapter four, I provided a detailed description of the research findings from the current study. The research question for this study was: What are British Columbia teachers' beliefs and experiences in the implementation of SEL? Participants used their own words to describe their personal and professional beliefs and experiences. They offered information on how they perceived and understood SEL implementation schoolwide in their elementary school and classroom setting. Participants shared how they used SEL practices and programs in everyday teaching with diverse student populations with limited resources. The themes identified in this research study provided a collective story of the teachers' understanding and experiences of SEL implementation schoolwide at an early elementary level. The synthesis of the interview dataset reveals three overarching themes that underscore the importance and challenges of SEL

implementation in elementary schools.

The first theme emphasizes the critical need for consistent and effective SEL programs to support student development comprehensively. Participants unanimously recognized SEL as a universal tool to address diverse student needs, citing its efficacy in reducing problem behaviors, enhancing mental health, improving academic success, and fostering positive relationships and learning environments. Within this theme, three significant beliefs emerged: the necessity for schoolwide SEL implementation to ensure continuity and maximize outcomes, the importance of consistent and effective SEL programs across schools, and teachers' recognition of the pivotal role of SEL in establishing a positive emotional environment conducive to academic learning and overall well-being.

The second theme revolves around professional awareness and training, highlighting the importance of educators' understanding and proficiency in delivering SEL programs effectively. Participants stressed the significance of access to training and professional development opportunities to enhance their SEL knowledge and teaching skills. However, the study uncovered a gap in initial awareness and training, with many teachers reporting stumbling upon SEL without formal introduction or pre-service education. Subthemes within this theme include the influence of experienced teachers as SEL role models and the lack of SEL training in preservice teacher education programs.

The third theme delves into the barriers and challenges faced by teachers in implementing SEL effectively. These challenges include the time constraints associated with selecting and preparing SEL lessons, the necessity for collaborative efforts between

teachers and administration to drive SEL implementation, the difficulty in engaging parents as co-SEL educators, and the need for formal SEL outcome assessment to demonstrate effectiveness. Notably, participants highlighted the intertwined nature of administrative support and teacher autonomy in overcoming implementation challenges, emphasizing the pivotal role of both stakeholders in fostering successful SEL integration within schools.

In summary, results of this study underscore the critical need for consistent and effective SEL programs, the importance of ongoing professional development for educators, and the necessity for collaborative efforts and systemic support to overcome implementation barriers and maximize the benefits of SEL for student well-being and academic success. In the next chapter, I discuss the interpretation of the findings. Additionally, the limitations of the study, the recommendations and implications for future research and applications are presented.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Teachers play a central role in implementing SEL, yet they often lack preservice training in SEL programming and practices (Schonert-Reichl, 2019). Research suggests that teachers' beliefs and experiences with SEL significantly influence their implementation strategies, particularly in challenging environments such as impoverished schools where stress levels are high (Schonert-Reichl, 2017). SEL has been recognized as crucial for promoting positive mental health in schools and fostering safe and caring environments. However, teachers face numerous challenges, including limited resources, large class sizes, and high levels of stress, which can lead to burnout and job dissatisfaction (Gimbert et al., 2021). In BC, Canada, the implementation of SEL programs varies across school districts, with some facing additional challenges such as Indigenous student retention and teacher retention issues (Wallace, 2016). Despite the recognition of SEL's importance, there is a need for enhanced implementation and integration of SEL into the curriculum. The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore elementary teachers' beliefs and experiences implementing SEL practices and programs in their school and classroom. Twelve teacher participants were recruited from one BC school district, located in the province's center and the second-largest school district in geographical size. It is the only school district serving this northern community.

Results of this study revealed three key themes derived from interviews regarding SEL implementation in elementary schools. These themes encompass the need for consistent and effective SEL programs to support student development comprehensively,

the importance of professional awareness and training for educators, and the barriers and challenges faced in facilitating SEL implementation. Overall, results underscore the significance of SEL in promoting student well-being and academic success, the role of ongoing professional development for educators, and the necessity for collaborative efforts to overcome implementation hurdles. Chapter 5 presents an analysis of the research findings, outlines the limitations of the study, suggests directions for future research, discusses the implications of the findings, and provides a concluding summary.

Interpretation of the Findings

The current study's findings confirm and extend the understanding of teachers' beliefs regarding SEL. Participants shed light on how teachers perceive and navigate the implementation of SEL in their classrooms. All themes identified in this study align with existing literature on SEL implementation. By comparing these findings to the established understanding of teachers' beliefs and practices related to SEL, this study offers insights for further research and practical applications in education.

Theme 1: Teachers' Beliefs and Experiences of SEL

This theme revealed teachers' recognition of the importance of consistent and effective SEL programs in supporting student development. Participants emphasized SEL as a significant tool to address diverse student needs, citing its value in reducing problem behaviors, enhancing mental health, improving academic success, and fostering positive relationships and learning environments. Within this theme, participants advocated for schoolwide SEL implementation to ensure continuity and maximize outcomes, highlighted the necessity of consistent and effective SEL programs across schools, and

underscored the benefits of implementing SEL in creating a positive emotional environment conducive to academic learning and overall well-being. Subthemes within this theme further elaborated on the benefits of SEL implementation, including the need for elementary schoolwide SEL implementation, the advantages of consistent SEL practices and programs, and the positive outcomes of teaching SEL to prepare students for success. Disorganized approaches to SEL programming can do more harm than good and negatively impact staff morale and student engagement (Durlak et al., 2011). Many participants reported various problems, such as access to a comprehensive school action plan, their awareness of consistent SEL practices and effective programs, and inconsistency of skills and efforts by themselves and colleagues. Participants in this study indicated that today's students and teachers face increasing demands, making SEL implementation more challenging but also more necessary.

A growing body of research emphasizes the importance of effective SEL implementation. Studies confirm that school educators have a significant influence on the adoption and implementation of school-based interventions and SEL programs, especially for those who work in at-risk schools with diverse student populations (Dyson et al., 2023). Teachers are key stakeholders and the engine that drives SEL programs; therefore, they must invest in SEL to provide social and emotional competence support for their students throughout the school day and as part of the school curriculum (Forrester, 2020; Schonert-Reichl, 2017). In one of the most extensive reviews of prevention programs, Durlak et al. (2011) found that in more than 500 studies, SEL implementation had a significant impact on program outcomes. A meta-analysis of 213 school-based universal

SEL programs conducted by Durlak et al. further showed that students who participated in SEL programs demonstrated significant improvements in their skills, attitudes, behavior, and academic performance. This research aligns with the first finding of this study and prior research studies' results, showing that SEL presence in the classroom is affected by teachers' beliefs and experiences with SEL and their confidence in instructing students in SEL implementation (Forrester, 2020; Jomaa et al., 2023).

Many participants described their ongoing efforts to build warm, welcoming, safe classrooms. They highlighted the importance of nurturing trusting relationships that allowed for open communication and caring interactions, demonstrating genuine interest and regard for all students in the class. The literature also demonstrates that students reach their full potential through positive relationships with their teachers created in positive learning environments (Schonert-Reichl, 2017; Lawlor et al., 2023).

Furthermore, SEL interventions and skill development are more effective within supportive classroom and school environments that create a positive climate. Students and teachers who feel a sense of belonging in school feel more accepted and valued. Students who feel comfortable with their teachers and peers are more willing to persevere with determination and grit when faced with challenging learning materials (Thapa et al., 2013). It is well-documented that students learn best when they have caring, supportive relationships with their teachers and peers, creating an atmosphere of safe, trusting relationships that supports students to regulate, focus, and make informed decisions (Allensworth et al., 2018; Klem & Connell, 2004; MacNeil et al., 2009; Thierry et al., 2022). The quality of teacher-student relationships, classroom management, and effective

SEL program implementation also mediate classroom and student outcomes (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). Thus, schools must balance operating as systems with providing space for unique class cultures formed by human connections within supportive classroom environments.

CASEL (2020c) promotes a framework for SEL that focuses on developing five core interconnected sets of competencies and skills (self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making) for students and the teachers who teach them. When teachers offer students various opportunities to learn and practice SEL skills by embedding them in the curriculum and utilizing them systematically in classroom management, they promote mental health, civic learning, and workplace readiness. Schonert-Reichl (2017) confirmed that classrooms with warm teacher-student connections promoted deeper learning among all students. Further research found positive effects of school belonging on academics and SEL outcomes (Sauve & Schonert-Reichl, 2019).

Theme 2: Teachers' Professional Awareness and Training of SEL

The second theme underscores the importance of professional awareness and training in effectively implementing SEL programs. Participants highlighted the need for further training in SEL. However, participants revealed challenges stemming from varying levels of professional awareness, understanding, and training in SEL, which hindered consistent implementation and identification of effective practices. Results of this study indicated that teachers' initial awareness of SEL was often accidental, with many stumbling across SEL without recognizing it as such. This lack of deliberate

exposure hindered their initial beliefs and experiences with SEL. Moreover, participants reported receiving no specific introduction to SEL during their preservice teacher education, including no dedicated courses or training focused on SEL practices. Instead, they often practiced SEL unknowingly until they gained specific knowledge and awareness later in their careers. Participants emphasized the importance of having positive role models who introduced them to SEL principles, suggesting that mentorship played a significant role in their SEL journey.

This study's findings aligned with previous research results that highlighted the necessity for all teachers, including preservice and new teachers, to have access to seasoned teachers who support SEL and can model SEL instruction (Goegan et al., 2017; Soutter, 2023). When districts invest in training seasoned SEL teachers, they ensure greater awareness of the CASEL guide to schoolwide implementation, which provides schools with a detailed and collaborative systematic plan to roll out and implement SEL skills, helping all diverse students gain stronger academic relationships and life skills to live happier and healthier lives (CASEL, 2019d). This finding acknowledges that teachers must be provided with opportunities within their school setting to connect, collaborate, and learn from experienced teachers who are well-versed in SEL and willing to model SEL instruction in the classroom setting.

SEL well-being begins with adults first; extensive findings have shown that when SEL is implemented effectively by teachers, it teaches students the skills to recognize and regulate their emotions and behavior, manage relationships, and make decisions to promote school and life success (CASEL, 2012; Schonert-Reichl, 2017). Teachers'

relationship skills, attitudes toward SEL, and perceived knowledge about SEL are related to the quality of practices and programs (Durlak et al., 2011). Preservice education understanding the relationship between these variables provides valuable insight into what teachers need to implement SEL and what at-school relationships foster teachers' confidence to ensure success (Schonert-Reichl, 2017; 2019). This information gained can then, in turn, advise teacher training on what teachers need to improve their SEL competencies and improve the limited SEL training teachers receive.

In 2017, Schonert-Reich et al. collaborated with CASEL and the University of BC to publish the SEL report "Reach the Students, Teach the Teachers: A National Scan of Teacher Preparation and Social Emotional Learning." Educators who responded to the scan often reported that they do not have enough time for SEL either because it is something new or seen as an add-on. CASEL has compiled 22 years of research that supports how SEL benefits teachers and students, and yet educators worldwide are still struggling to implement SEL in the classroom. The report also stated that while most educators acknowledge their students' success is contingent on providing a caring, responsive classroom community, they reported receiving no SEL education in pre-service teacher programs. Schonert-Reichl et al.'s groundbreaking study recognized the urgency to integrate SEL into the fabric of education by ensuring the incorporation of SEL into teacher education programs to improve effectiveness among all students and teachers. Despite this, limited evidence exists today on SEL presence in preservice teacher education (Goegan et al., 2017; Schonert-Reichl et al., 2015, 2017; Waajid et al., 2013).

Theme 3: Teachers' Barriers and Challenges in Facilitating SEL Implementation

This theme delved into teachers' obstacles and hurdles when it comes to implementing SEL. Participants described various challenges within four key subthemes: time constraints in selecting and preparing SEL lessons, the necessity for collaboration between teachers and administration in SEL implementation, engaging parents as co-SEL educators, and the importance of formal SEL outcome assessment. Firstly, participants expressed difficulties in choosing and implementing SEL lessons due to the abundance of materials and lack of guidance on suitability. Time constraints were also cited as a major barrier in preparing SEL lessons effectively. Secondly, collaboration between teachers and administration emerged as crucial for successful SEL implementation. While teachers are seen as primary SEL implementers, administrative support is essential for accessing resources, training, and fostering broader adoption of SEL initiatives. Thirdly, participants highlighted the challenge of involving parents and families as co-SEL educators, emphasizing the importance of continuing SEL practices at home to reinforce their effects. Lastly, participants recognized the necessity of implementing formal SEL outcome assessments to demonstrate effectiveness. Overall, the study underscores the multifaceted challenges teachers face in facilitating SEL implementation and emphasizes the importance of collaboration, support, and assessment in overcoming these hurdles.

Teachers' beliefs in their substantial role in facilitating SEL are consistent with previous findings. Durlak et al. (2011) recognized teachers as among the most crucial factors impacting student and school outcomes. Their attitudes and beliefs about SEL affect their adoption, sustainability, and delivery of SEL program implementation (Zinser

et al., 2018). Schools are perfect learning environments in which to promote SEL. When teachers have solid social-emotional competencies, they can consciously teach their students SEL skills over time and, at the same time, gain greater confidence in their skill set. Teachers at the forefront of SEL implementation are responsible for creating a positive classroom learning environment and school climate that promotes SEL competencies and skills, directly impacting their students' wellbeing (Brackett et al., 2011; Schonert-Reichl, 2017).

A growing body of research has recognized the role of teachers as primary implementers of SEL (Brackett et al., 2011) and drivers of SEL programming (Schonert-Reichl, 2017), who are responsible for modeling SEL skills (Schonert-Reichl et al., 2019). Previous findings confirmed that teachers' beliefs about SEL affect the quality of their program delivery (Brackett et al., 2011; Zinner et al., 2014) and how the school climate and social-emotional learning skills impact teachers' commitment (Collie et al., 2011). Earlier studies have outlined the power of SEL programs that support the wellbeing of students, teachers, classrooms, and school learning communities (Cahill & Dadvand, 2020; Durlak et al., 2011; Schonert-Reichl et al., 2017). Researchers Oberle and Schonert-Reichl (2017) investigated SEL growth in education by exploring how teachers firmly integrate SEL practices and programs into their curricula and every daily classroom activity to teach students core social and emotional competencies that correlate with improved trajectories in their health, wellbeing, and life success. In addition, they recognized that teachers can only successfully implement SEL with confidence if they have developed their own social-emotional competence and receive the appropriate

education and training. Extensive, evidence-based results show why it is vital for teachers in all schools across all grade levels to develop culturally responsive SEL skills (Immordino-Yang et al., 2019; Schonert-Reichl et al., 2017). Donahue-Keegan et al. (2019) recognized that new teachers must require culturally responsive skill development in their preservice education programs that allow them to develop core competencies for maintaining their students' health and wellbeing.

Participants of this study acknowledged the importance of school administrators' engagement in SEL. According to Jerrim et al. (2020), school leadership is more strongly associated with teacher retention than other factors influencing teachers' work environments, including student discipline and workload. This study's participants recognized the administrator's role in helping teachers, as the primary implementers of SEL, to create a positive school climate and build community connections required for student and school success. Throughout their interviews, many participants shared ways their administrator helped their schoolwide SEL initiative by offering resources, access, and autonomy to use evidence-based programs, encouragement, and ongoing support throughout the implementation process.

Research studies have demonstrated that teacher engagement and commitment to SEL implementation and program delivery will be instrumental to its success. Therefore, districts must focus on what teachers require to ensure commitment to schoolwide SEL initiatives and implementation for success (CASEL, 2020b; Schonert-Reichl, 2017). Research findings have shown that districts and schools must provide teachers with the resources, curriculum, and ongoing support to help with their SEL endeavors that affect

student teaching and implementation success. Kolleck et al. (2021) outlined a robust collaborative culture among teachers as one of the most widely acknowledged factors for facilitating school and classroom improvements. Furthermore, districts expect teachers to find the time to create and work in teacher teams, collaborate closely with colleagues, construct classroom practices, and thus strengthen trust relationships within their colleagues, students, and their families, leaving teachers no additional opportunities to share and collaborate on SEL knowledge and experiences.

Finally, participants reflected on the role of parents and families in the implementation of SEL. Donahue-Keegan et al. (2019) pointed out that new teachers already enter the classroom feeling overwhelmed by school environmental factors that mirror systemic realities of the diversity of their students' backgrounds and needs, academic testing and accountability pressures, mental health, and socioeconomic struggles. Therefore, districts and schools must ensure that teachers across all grades have access to SEL education to develop rich SEL skills and competencies before they enter the classroom and are expected to teach students. Teacher education programs must provide all preservice teachers with the necessary SEL education, and districts need to give all school staff meaningful SEL training that instructs them on how to successfully implement SEL practices and programs to teach to the diverse needs of their student populations.

Participants highlighted the urgency for research to develop new SEL frameworks and programs that incorporate partnerships and engagement with all stakeholders. Participants reported that one of the most significant factors missing from their SEL

implementation efforts and long-term student success was parents' and family awareness and involvement. According to Durlak (2015), SEL is embedded in the context and the environment of education through the use of coordinated classroom, school, family, and community strategies. Previous findings have shown the importance of districts, schools, teachers, and staff developing collaborative partnerships with all stakeholders, including parents, families, and community partners. When all stakeholders become SEL co-educators, there is a shared responsibility to introduce them to the social-emotional competencies and curriculum while encouraging them to improve current practices (Kolleck et al., 2021; Mahoney et al., 2021). Participants in this study reported that all schools, teachers, and staff feel more supported when they can rely on various stakeholders to share in SEL implementation efforts. Furthermore, when teachers can share SEL responsibilities among all stakeholders inside and outside the school setting, students have more opportunities to witness SEL modeled in different settings. Participants recognized the importance of parental and family engagement in SEL and that students who receive SEL skills at home develop a more encompassed, strengthened understanding and practice of SEL. However, when interviewed, participants expressed regret that they had not considered and planned how they would engage in their SEL implementation efforts. To ensure their partnership as SEL supporters and co-educators, connect and educate parents, families, and communities on SEL language, competencies, and skills.

Theoretical Framework Implications

The theoretical framework used for this paper and research study was based on

two separate but related models: CASEL's five framework for SEL (2003, 2012) and Schonert-Reichl's (2017) three-component framework for SEL. The findings of this study confirmed the importance of SEL researchers using systemic frameworks that consider the social-emotional competencies of all stakeholders. Participants from rural and inner-city schools reported a lack of SEL pre-service training and in-depth knowledge at the beginning of their teaching careers. Yet, they acknowledged they believed in SEL's extensive benefits when implemented correctly. Nevertheless, educating and training teachers to understand how SEL impacts teaching and learning requires a systemic approach, which CASEL Five (2003, 2012) and Schonert-Reichl (2017) frameworks offer.

Participants interviewed recognized they were the primary SEL implementers accountable for student outcomes. Teachers also recognized inadequate education and training influenced their practices and overall experiences implementing SEL in the classroom. Participants identified several essential teacher practices to promote students' SEL: some described using SEL practices and programs that address children's context beyond the school setting, while others recognized the importance of teacher-student relationships. Some participants focused on supporting students' mental and emotional wellbeing, while others emphasized creating a safe and supportive classroom and school climate through morning check-ins, restorative circles, and inclusion. Lastly, teachers reported paying closer attention to classroom management and using incentives to teach students behavior and social skills. These practices by teacher participants align with CASEL's (2012, 2015) process through which young people and adults acquire and apply

the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to develop healthy identities, manage emotions, achieve personal and collective goals, feel, and show empathy for others, establish and maintain supportive relationships, and make responsible and caring decisions.

Schonert-Reichl (2017) considers CASEL's five core competencies and recognizes teachers as the 'engine' that drives SEL practices, competencies, and overall wellbeing, influencing the three-component framework for SEL, including the SEL of students, the SEL of teachers, and the learning context. Schonert-Reichl (2017) recognized that if we do not understand how teachers' SEL competencies impact overall wellbeing, we cannot determine what directly influences students' SEL. Therefore, we must fully comprehend what teachers need to promote SEL and successfully implement it in the classroom. This research study aimed to accurately understand teachers' beliefs and experiences implementing SEL to gain direct knowledge of teachers' SEL practices and programs that supported successful implementation.

The theoretical frameworks of this study are grounded in a systemic approach that emphasizes the importance of establishing efficient and equitable learning environments and coordinating practices across four key settings: classrooms, schools, homes, and communities. The integrated frameworks chosen are due to familiarity with CASEL's (2003) extensive online database and evidence-based research use. The frameworks provided theories and further evidence of how SEL was understood and perceived by the participants in this research study. They offered a clear definition of SEL and outlined various ways SEL is addressed in the classroom to maximize the impact on teachers and students. All teacher participants in this study were SEL implementers when interviewed;

however, all reported limited knowledge of SEL interventions and a lack of confidence in their implementation strategies. Schoolwide SEL implementation was an activity all teachers participated in before being interviewed and before data from this study was collected and examined. The data from this study were consistent with the frameworks used for this study, and all teacher participants reported experiencing positive beliefs and experiences with SEL implementation.

Limitations of this Study

This study had several limitations that could impact its transferability to different research contexts and its practical application to other school districts. First, the findings of this study were bound to a Northern BC district's unique geographical area with a regional population of less than 100,000. All participants in this study identified as Caucasian, with nine women and three men. Given these limitations, the findings may be less transferrable to urban settings with more extensive and more diverse populations. Second, the timing and approach to recruitment may have missed potential participants. It is not uncommon for teachers to change their school assignment and therefore, some staff may not have been present for the full two years of SEL implementation. Despite advertising, there may have been teachers who were unaware of the study at the time of recruitment or transferred into the school after the recruitment window.

Third, teacher participants had varying amounts of knowledge and interest in SEL that may have influenced the SEL practices and programs they selected, how they implemented SEL, how they included diverse students, how they supported vulnerable students, and their overall confidence with delivery and implementation. Consistently,

none of the participants received preservice training during their professional teaching programs; some had access to in-service training once they were employed but most reported relying on the knowledge and skills of teacher mentors with whom they worked alongside. Therefore, the findings of this study may not transfer to districts that provide more consistent and in-depth training on SEL curricula. With growing evidence-based research on its benefits, professional teacher programs may dedicate more course time to SEL education, improving motivation and competency in new and future teachers.

Fourth, the interviews with teacher participants occurred in the (2021-2022) school year, shortly after the Provincial British Columbia (BC) Government lifted the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions. The Northern BC School District started their (2021-2022) school year in uncertainty, wondering if learning instruction would remain online or return to in-person learning. The start of the school year in September 2021 was slow, and while all district staff and teachers eventually returned, students were slow to return to in-person instruction. As a result, participants interviewed still adhered to changing COVID-19 restrictions and were preoccupied with adjusting to ever-changing provincial and district requirements, which may have influenced their ability to reflect on their earlier beliefs and experiences of SEL schoolwide implementation efforts.

Finally, I expected the potential for personal bias to be a limitation of this study. As I identified in earlier chapters of this study, I also work for the same Northern British Columbia school district. In my research on this topic, I developed a personal passion for SEL and the subject of SEL investigation and target population. I was aware of researcher biases that can occur with each step, which helped me to be more mindful of

my research practices. However, I grounded myself by being mindful of my personal and professional biases and used a reflective journal to prevent interfering with participants sharing their beliefs and lived experiences. I consistently reviewed my qualitative research steps and took my time to ensure I was analytical at each stage. After I completed each participant interview, I sent the recorded Zoom video and audio transcript to my chair, who reviewed and provided feedback, helping me to identify and improve my interviewing skills and debrief the process.

In summary, the limitations of this study included the research design, the population studied, the geographical area, the varying knowledge of participant teachers, the restrictions placed on schools due to COVID-19, a limited pool of participants from diverse gender or ethnic backgrounds, and finally my own personal bias. Future studies could address these limitations by focusing on all teachers across their district, in elementary and high schools, including predictor and outcome variables that adhere to CASEL Five Framework for SEL (2020c) broad and interrelated areas of competencies to determine self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making processes utilized in their implementation approach.

Recommendations

Results of this study shed light on the challenges teachers encounter in implementing SEL materials. Further research is needed to identify resources, information, or support mechanisms that can assist both novice and experienced educators in feeling confident about integrating SEL best practices and programs into their classrooms and school environments. It is imperative to delve deeper into all school

districts and engage both elementary and high school teachers in collaboration with universities and preservice teacher education programs. This collaborative effort aims to assess the current school climate and determine the specific SEL awareness, design, and implementation practices necessary to foster supportive learning environments.

In this study, participants emphasized the need for their preservice teacher education to offer more comprehensive SEL knowledge and specific instruction on how to implement it effectively. They expressed that the lack of such preparation hindered their success in SEL implementation. Another critical recommendation is for districts to focus on enhancing the SEL core competencies of educators and administrators alike. This entails fostering increased dialogue and engagement with relevant stakeholders, including parents, community partners, and professionals working directly with children and youth. Teacher participants in the study underscored the importance of collaborating with parents, highlighting a consensus that SEL instruction should be reinforced both at school and at home. However, they also acknowledged the need for improvement in their SEL implementation practices, recognizing this as a significant area for growth.

Beyond the previous recommendations, there are several areas warranting further research on the development and implementation of SEL training for teachers. Over the past few decades, there has been notable progress and a deeper empirical and practical understanding of SEL-based prevention in education. Evidence-based SEL curricula have shown promise in reducing adverse mental health symptoms, disruptive behaviors, bullying incidents, substance use, and associated risk factors. Despite this progress, the economic benefits of implementing SEL in schools need clarification, which may pave

the way for widespread district mandates. Future research should also explore the demand for a universal SEL-targeted prevention curriculum that is readily accessible and user-friendly for all stakeholders. Moreover, participants in this study identified parents, families, and community partners as crucial stakeholders in supporting students who may be at risk of behavioral issues or mental health concerns. Future research could delve into the relationship between teachers, students, and parents' well-being, while school districts should proactively seek parental perspectives on necessary supports and barriers affecting student well-being.

Lastly, future SEL research should aim to include perspectives from all stakeholders, including administrators, staff, students, parents, and community partners. This holistic approach ensures a comprehensive understanding of what SEL supports are effective and necessary for bringing about schoolwide change. Qualitative research methodologies, such as interviews and focus groups, can provide valuable insights into individual school contexts, informing staff training, professional development, and implementation planning.

Implications

Within the goal of better understanding the lived experiences of elementary teachers who participated in the SEL schoolwide initiative for two or more years, there is an assumption that participants' stories will shape and inform this Northern BC district and other districts, focusing on teachers as primary SEL implementers. All districts and schools should utilize the themes from participants' shared accounts in this study to enhance how they support teachers' competence and well-being, enabling them to

confidently teach SEL strategies and implement SEL practices and programs in the classroom. Worldwide, teachers have expressed frustration with district expectations that they should understand SEL and effectively instruct students with best practices. Participants in this study overwhelmingly agreed with one another and previous findings that teachers are the engine driving SEL programs and practices in schools and classrooms, and their own social-emotional competence and well-being significantly influence their students (Schonert-Reichl, 2017).

The design of this study facilitated the identification of rural and inner-city elementary schools at risk due to limited resources, aiming to examine the diverse needs of their student population, especially those at risk of increased disruptive behaviors, mental health issues, and intense emotions. This study aimed to determine or enforce a methodology of SEL implementation schoolwide. The data and findings highlighted the need for districts to provide classroom teachers with consistent SEL support, practices, and programs to teach students SEL effectively. Additionally, it emphasized the importance of districts providing all schools with CASEL-approved (2019c) SEL assessment tools to collect data, assess implementation efforts, and evaluate student and school outcomes.

The findings of this study provided insights into SEL and elementary school teachers' understanding and implementation of SEL. They indicated that teachers' SEL must precede students' SEL or the learning context. Teacher participants voiced that they cannot effectively teach SEL concepts in the classroom without adequate education regarding SEL competencies. All teacher participants reported receiving no formal

preservice teacher education or meaningful training on SEL instruction made available by their district on professional development days. Districts must recognize their responsibility for teachers' social-emotional competencies and overall well-being by providing adequate SEL education and training, ensuring teachers gain a deep understanding of social-emotional competencies and SEL implementation. Furthermore, districts should ensure teachers are directly taught by seasoned teachers who have successfully implemented SEL and can model how to instruct SEL lessons in the classroom. They should also provide opportunities for teachers to connect and collaborate with trusted colleagues who support SEL, fostering a positive learning environment and school climate. Additionally, districts must recognize teachers as the primary SEL implementers and carefully listen to their needs for effective SEL practices and programs in the classroom.

If replicated more broadly, the findings of this study could inform districts, schools, and teachers of best practices for incorporating SEL practices and programs with their students. Each of the 12 elementary teacher participants interviewed expressed their personal beliefs about SEL and shared their professional experience implementing SEL schoolwide in their classroom and school setting. Despite all 12 participants reporting that they believed in the effectiveness of early SEL implementation, some found it challenging to consistently incorporate SEL into their daily practices.

Conclusion

This study examined a sample population of elementary teachers from both rural and inner-city schools to gain detailed knowledge of their accounts of SEL

implementation, identifying what worked for them and what they would have liked to see more of to ensure future success. By understanding teachers' SEL competencies and wellbeing in school, educators can effectively implement SEL interventions that strengthen student relationships and improve SEL, mental health, and academic achievement. Participants in the study concurred with existing evidence-based research on the importance of SEL in schools and recognized its vast positive impacts on diverse students. Feedback from teachers revealed that for successful SEL implementation, it must be embraced schoolwide, employing effective, consistent SEL practices and programs, and be teacher-driven to ensure engagement and the necessary investment of time in SEL practices that foster positive relationships and learning environments.

Interviewed participants echoed the existing research demonstrating the importance of teaching SEL competencies across all grades and schools. They recognized the positive impacts of schoolwide SEL implementation for all stakeholders, especially in meeting the diverse needs of students. Participants perceived that successful SEL schoolwide implementation hinges on increased efforts to connect parents and families with SEL awareness and education, district support to address the isolation reported by teachers during implementation, opportunities for teachers to share and collaborate on SEL knowledge and experiences, and formal assessments to identify SEL outcomes for schools and districts. These findings align with previous research on teachers' perceptions of SEL and their experiences with schoolwide implementation.

The emergent themes revealed through this study indicated that teachers need to receive adequate SEL introduction through preservice education programs or meaningful

district training opportunities on SEL instruction. Teacher participants recognized themselves as the engine that drives SEL and emphasized that teacher and staff early engagement is critical to successful SEL implementation, as opposed to administrator-driven efforts. Participants stressed the importance of all teachers and staff having opportunities within the school setting to connect, communicate, and share their beliefs and experiences of SEL, along with the challenges faced in implementing SEL, to ensure a significant decrease in students' behaviors and mental health issues. Moreover, teachers must receive district and school support through access to SEL mentors who can model, teach, and provide direct 1:1 instruction on embedding SEL into the curriculum and implementing it throughout the school day. Teachers expressed a need for more time to prepare and plan SEL lessons to build the confidence required for successful implementation. Lastly, participants emphasized that teachers cannot be the sole drivers of SEL implementation, underscoring the importance of equal support from parents, families, districts, leadership, school teams, outside agency community partners, and professionals involved in child and youth development.

This study offers valuable insight into teachers' beliefs about SEL and their experiences implementing SEL schoolwide, providing qualitative data that can spark rich conversations with districts and schools to discuss further ways teachers need support to develop socio emotional competencies and implement SEL to ensure long-term benefits and outcomes for students. The findings of this study have the potential to enable the Northern BC school district to establish structures that prioritize teachers' social-emotional competencies, ensuring their wellbeing and competence as a necessary

investment in SEL best practices and programs, thus continuing to build on significant findings of earlier research studies.

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Appendix: Interview Guide

Demographic Questions

1. What is your Age?
2. What is your Ethnicity?
3. What is your Marital Status?
4. Do you have your children living at home?
5. What is your Education? (formal/informal)
6. Have you had any prior education /training in SEL?
7. How many years have you been teaching?
8. How many of those years have been in an elementary school setting?
9. How many of those years have been at your current elementary school?
10. Currently, what grade do you teach?
11. How many students are in your class?
12. How many of these students have a formal Ministry of Education Designation?
13. How many students in your class are on an Individual Education Plan (IEP)?

Interview Questions:

RQ Primary: What are British Columbia teachers' beliefs and experiences in the implementation of SEL?

1. Tell me about your general perception of SEL.
 - a. What are your beliefs, perspectives, and attitudes around SEL?
2. Talk about when you first became aware of SEL. Has that shaped your outlook of SEL?

3. Tell me about your personal experiences or awareness of SEL?
4. Share your professional Education or experiences that have shaped your beliefs and perspectives of SEL?

Additional Guiding Interview Questions

- 1) In your perspective, what are the characteristics of effective SEL programs?
 - Tell me about the needs of your school and students.
 - What are the short and long-term goals for your students?
 - Talk about the SEL practices and programs used in your school.
 - When did you first become aware of evidence-based SEL programs, and are the ones that you are aware of that best match your needs and goals?
- 2) What implementation strategies do schools, teachers, and district policies use to support SEL programming?
 - What are the attitudes of school staff?
 - Talk about your relationship with the Administrators and your school team.
 - What SEL training have you had, and what has your school district or school provided you?
 - Is there funding available for SEL training? If so, who is responsible for the training?
- 3) What teacher and classroom strategies contribute to social and emotional learning?
 - Describe your school and classroom setting? (environmental setting, student population)

- Tell me about your classroom strategies that you have used that contribute to SEL.
 - How did your school support the lessons of SEL, and were they incorporated into a whole-school culture?
 - Describe how teachers at your school are encouraged to embed SEL lessons in the curriculum and classroom.
- 4) What outcomes have you observed from implementing the SEL program?
- Can you tell me about the outcomes you expect from SEL programs?
 - Describe how you know that SEL introduction and implementation has been successful. What does it look like?
 - What are some of the ways that you know or feel that SEL outcomes have been demonstrated?