

Social and emotional learning (SEL): How it finds a place in an early childhood education curriculum in Turkey

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Abstract: The study aims to identify the Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) skills as defined by Collaborative, Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL) in the Turkish Early Childhood Education Curriculum (TECEC). Recent studies have pointed out that gaining SEL skills at early ages has many benefits for development. Researchers in the SEL area suggest that having a clear conceptual framework benefits both in research and practice. TECEC document is examined based on CASEL's framework. Document analysis was used to identify how SEL standards and objectives in TECEC were conceptually designed. The findings show that out of 17 standards to support social and emotional development, only 10 of them are related to SEL, meanwhile, 7 of them are identified as social studies standards. Out of 53 stated objectives, thirty-one of them are related to SEL skills. The current study will provide a tool for researchers, curriculum developers, and practitioners that feel the need to base their research and practice on a solid conceptual framework.

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Introduction

There is a huge support of evidence-based research which identifies positive effects of providing social and emotional learning (SEL), curriculum, and practices at schools (Durlak et al., 2011; Taylor et al., 2017). Student outcomes are mainly observed in six areas: increase in SEL skills, attitudes toward self and others, positive social behavior, decrease in conduct problems, emotional distress, and academic performance (Weissberg, 2019). Through developed SEL skills, children's self-efficacy gets higher; they develop a more comprehensive sense of community; the ethical values they have are enhanced (Zins and Elias, 2007). Children demonstrate more prosocial behavior; they become more participatory in the classroom. In terms of academic achievement, their mathematics, language, and social studies scores improve along with their learning capabilities (Zins and Elias, 2007). Recent research demonstrates that SEL supports students' academic performance; encourages positive behaviors and decreases negative behaviors like school suspensions and drug use (Durlak et al., 2011; Taylor et al., 2017). SEL Programs are built on systematic classroom instruction which aims to enhance children's capacities to identify and regulate their emotions; develop an appreciation of different perspectives; strengthen children in terms of developing prosocial goals and problem-solving capabilities; and develop effective use of interpersonal and social skills (Payton et al., 2000). SEL programming enhances students' social-emotional competencies through creating positive classrooms, school cultures, and climates. Besides, it helps to maintain caring, cooperative, culturally responsive, participatory and safe learning environments (Zins et al., 2004). Moreover, teaching SEL skills contributes to the future investment in human capital of a country. Research carried out by Columbia University shows that quality SEL programs bring in an 11:1 return on dollars invested (Belfield et al., 2015).

When teaching SEL at early ages is considered, the evidence supports many positive outcomes that are related to young children's academic, social and behavioral achievement in school and well-being in

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general (Bierman et al., 2017; Gol-Guven 2017a, 2017b, 2019). Immediate outcomes of SEL programs on young children include better school adaptation, decreased problem behaviors, higher levels of perseverance, better results in following directions and being attentive in school (Durlak et al., 2011; Jones et al., 2015; McClelland et al., 2017). In the long term, young children have better mental health; their graduation rates and employment opportunities increase; their self-regulation skills are enhanced and they become more engaged citizens and resilient adults (Bierman and Motamadi, 2015; Schindler et al., 2015).

Early Childhood Education in Turkey

Compulsory education is twelve years in Turkey that does not include early childhood education (ECE). Starting from primary school years, schools are state-funded, regulated and free of charge. In the early childhood education, parents pay fees to cover stationary expenses and meals. Turkish educational system is so centralized that programs, textbooks, and teachers' recruitment and training are listed under the authority of the Ministry of Education (Gol-Guven, in press). In the ECE curricula, teaching training, and practice, academic and cognitive skills are emphasized by transferring the knowledge by structured, teacher-directed, didactic methods (Gol-Guven, 2009).

The Turkish Early Childhood Education Curriculum (TECEC) is the only document available for practitioners (Ministry of National Education [MoNE], 2013). In a 114-page long document, the framework presents the aims and principles, the importance of ECE, standards and objectives, and some examples of classroom layouts, monthly plans, daily routines, and some assessment tools and strategies. Out of 349 objectives; 118 of them are cognitive, 73 are language, 53 are social and emotional, 70 are motor, and 35 are self-care skills (Gol-Guven, 2018). Accompanying is the activity book containing 40 in-class activities. Another activity book for teachers was published in 2018 (MoNE, 2018) that was requested by the teachers who reported that the framework is not enough to plan classroom activities.

The CASEL's Framework

The Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL) is an international organization which developed a framework presenting skills, attitudes, and values necessary to develop SEL skills in schools (Payton et al., 2000). CASEL defines SEL as the process in which both children and adults acquire and implement the attitudes, knowledge and skills which are critical to identify and regulate emotions, create and achieve goals, feel and demonstrate empathy with other people, build and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions (CASEL, 2015). In CASEL's Framework, there are five core SEL competencies in the domains of cognitive, affective and behavioral learning. These are self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. Table 1 shows the basic SEL competencies and skills.

Table 1. SEL competencies and skills

| Self-awareness | Self-management | Social awareness | Relationship skills | Responsible decision-making |
|--------------------------|-----------------------|------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------------|
| Identifying emotions | Impulse control | Perspective taking | Communication | Identifying problems |
| Accurate self-perception | Stress management | Empathy | Social engagement | Analysing situations |
| Recognizing strengths | Self-discipline | Appreciating diversity | Relationship building | Solving problems |
| Self-confidence | Self-motivation | Respect for others | Teamwork | Evaluating |
| Self-efficacy | Goal-setting | | | Reflecting |
| | Organizational skills | | | Ethical responsibility |

Document-based Analysis of SEL

In addition to providing well defined SEL skills that led to numerous amounts of research, CASEL evaluates SEL programs effectiveness by doing document-based analysis. Document-based analysis is done to understand the extent to which programs, frameworks, curricula cover the SEL competencies. Studies that carry out such analysis review SEL programs to document the specific SEL competencies covered in the programs; to report the effectiveness of program implementations, and to demonstrate the methods that are used in the implementation of these SEL programs. Such analysis is carried out in mainly three categories: (a) SEL programs' effectiveness analysis, (b) Analysis of State and/or National frameworks, and (c) Independent evaluation studies of curricula and programs. Document-based analysis aims to evaluate and report which SEL standards and objectives are stated in general educational frameworks or in specific SEL programs.

SEL Program's Effectiveness Analysis

CASEL published three main guides in which SEL prevention and intervention programs are evaluated based on some effectiveness criteria (CASEL, 2003, 2013, 2015). The guides review and select SEL programs based on certain criteria in relationship with the program design, implementation, and evaluation. The programs are analyzed in terms of their alignment with CASEL five SEL competencies, promotion of those competencies, design, length, the opportunities they provide for practicing SEL skills, the quality of the training provided for the implementers, the assessment tools, evidence-based effectiveness studies. The guides also provide information on the targeted age-group, objectives and settings. The guides provide information for school and district-level administrators on how to match district and school level outcomes with the programs listed.

Analysis of State/National Frameworks

The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Report titled Skills for Social Progress - The Power of Social and Emotional Skills (2015) is an extensive review of policies and practices that promote SEL skills in OECD countries and partner economies. The report examines the national education system objectives, curriculum frameworks, the curriculum and content of school subjects, and extracurricular activities related to SEL skills. Autonomy, tolerance, responsibility, critical thinking and intercultural understanding are the mostly targeted skills in the national curricula. Countries under review integrate SEL skills across subjects in their curricula at an increasing rate. In the national curricula of most countries, students' SEL skills are addressed in subjects like physical and health education, civic and citizenship education, moral and religious education.

The recent report written by European Network for Social Emotional Competence (ENSEC) analyzes international and national curricula frameworks, policy and reports on SEL education (Cefai, et al., 2018) and it states that although the value of teaching SEL is recognized in the educational documents, many areas that are related to SEL are covered within the content of citizenship and health education. The report suggested that there should be a distinct place of SEL in the curricula and adequate time and resources should be aligned for its teaching.

CASEL carries out a state scan in which the quality of state SEL standards are reviewed and analyzed across the United States of America (Dusenbury et al., 2014). There are some states advocating that SEL instruction needs to be a part of the core academic curriculum as opposed to standalone competencies. This scan shows that there are states which create guidelines or professional development opportunities to assist students' SEL skills whereas other states determine SEL goals. There are also states making changes in their existing curriculum to include SEL competencies (Dusenbury et al., 2018).

Independent Evaluation Studies on Curricula and Programs

Studies are conducted to understand the effective components of psychological treatments (Chorpita et al., 2005; Forman et al., 2009; Garland et al., 2008; Lawson et al., 2019; McLeod et al., 2017). In these studies, various forms of documents on SEL instruction and implementation are reviewed with several

aims; demonstrating the core features and effectiveness of SEL programs so that practitioners and policy-makers can benefit in their program selection; scanning the curricula and policy documents of states and countries in order to describe and revise the different approaches towards high quality implementation of SEL skills; and mapping out the common core elements of SEL interventions and programs to point an effective framework for assessment and evaluation of the current program, future program development, and research. One significant aspect of effective SEL programs and curricula is that they have a clear theory base, well-structured frameworks, and measurable learning objectives. The common/core elements of these programs are; social skills, identifying others' feelings, identifying one's own feelings, problem solving and behavioral coping skills/relaxation.

The current study is a combination of state framework analysis and evaluation of curricula that aims to identify to what extent Turkish Early Childhood Education Curriculum (TECEC) social and emotional development standards and objectives are related to SEL. CASEL's framework is used as a guide (CASEL 2017a) to evaluate how much of SEL skills can be identified in TECEC. The aim of the study is to (a) categorize the standards and objectives related to either SEL skills or social studies, (b) identify how TECEC standards and objectives are related to CASEL's SEL competencies and skills, (c) evaluate what is missing in the current form of TECEC in relation with SEL. This study contributes to the field by exemplifying a systemic evaluation of national curricula about the integration, coverage and matching SEL skills.

Method

This is a qualitative case study as the study focuses on understanding a single curriculum. The method adopted is content analysis as the study aims to study the topic of concern; integration of SEL in TECEC, in detail and to give a holistic, in depth and detailed description of the situation (Fraenkel et al., 2011). The method is based on systematic analysis and interpretation of what is stated in and beyond the documents that are investigated. The documents that are used in this study are official documents (Bogdan and Biklen, 2007).

In TECEC, the general aims of the program are referred to as standards and the subcomponents of these standards are addressed as objectives. While referring to CASEL Framework, SEL competencies and skills are the chosen terminology in this study. Specifically, TECEC standards define knowledge, abilities, and competencies that should be reached by children. When it comes to the objectives, they are arranged from simple to complex and from concrete to abstract hierarchically to serve for the occurrence of learning standards. According to TECEC, the objectives are observable versions of the standards (MoNE, 2013). When the number of standards and objectives are considered, it is seen that cognitive developmental area is focused the most, and it is followed by social emotional development, language development, motor skills, and self-care skills (Gol-Guven, 2017c).

The Procedure

Data coders of the current research are the authors of this article. The codes used for analyzing the TECEC document are *a priori* codes, based on CASEL Framework. This is done to relate these codes and bigger categories to an analytic framework in SEL literature (Creswell, 2007). After the first coding, the coders discussed the discrepancies and ambiguities. Later, they reconvened with the first author of the article, and they brought their disagreements and consensus to compare codes. Through discussion with the expert coder, discrepancies and ambiguities were resolved and the coders reached a mutual decision on a coding scheme. Hereafter, the two coders met weekly to control for coder drift and to discuss questions and solve them.

During the coding process, some common themes emerged, and they were used to make decisions in the following steps of the study (Creswell, 2007). In the first step of the data coding, the coders congruently realized that some of the SEL developmental domain standards and objectives of TECEC do not directly address SEL, but rather, they are more relevant to social studies. For doing this distinction appropriately, different educational curricula and their suggested standards and objectives were examined in detail. For identified social studies standards, Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) (2010) and National

Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) (2018) were decided to be used for coding.

To examine the social studies standards, ISBE Early Learning and Development Standards (2010) have been selected because it is developed for the use of public schools in Illinois in the US, which can be representative for examining the TECEC which is basically used by public ECE institutions in Turkey. ISBE Early Learning and Development Standards integrate Language Arts, Mathematics, Science, Social Studies, Arts and Social and Emotional Development, which makes it clear for the researchers and coders to distinguish SEL standards from social studies standards. In ISBE Early Learning and Development Standards document, social studies domain includes several sub concepts related to civic engagement, history, citizenship, the community the child grows in, economy and geography. The document plays the role of a benchmark to find corresponding social studies standards in TECEC.

NAEYC (2018) explains how social studies learning lays the foundation for children to discover the world and society they live in, the interactions among the community members, roles, and responsibilities in a society and what it means to participate in the social life as members and citizens of the society. NAEYC shows how different curricular approaches are taken in integrating the standards of social studies in early years. It also dwells on the linkage, overlapping points and differences between children's social development and social studies. NAEYC depicts the different ways social studies are represented in early years standards like citizenship education, character education, moral education, community learning, etc. So, the document has been helpful for the coders to understand how social studies differ from social emotional development standards.

For identified SEL standards, CASEL documents (CASEL, 2017a, 2017b) and SEL standards of Michigan Department of Education (MDE) (2017) The Rhode Island Council for Elementary and Secondary Education (RIDE) (2017) are used as a guide for data analysis. An open and exclusive coding method is adopted specifically, and the coders worked on the coding separately. At the end of the separate coding process, firstly the two coders met and compared their codes. As suggested by Creswell (2007), the contrasts and comparisons emerging out of the coding process are noted and used for analyzing how SEL is conceptualized in TECEC.

The interrater agreement decision is reported in percentages like similar qualitative document-based studies in the field (Forman et al., 2009; Lawson et al., 2019). The data coders have 100% agreement on the distinction between SEL or social studies. There is a 95% agreement on the evaluation of SEL related standards and objectives of TECEC between the two coders. Low inter-rater agreements were addressed by discussing, and re-establishing consensus on the codes followed by another round of independent coding until the agreement has reached 100%.

Results

TECEC has 17 social emotional development standards and 53 objectives in total. All these standards along with their objectives are analyzed to see their coverage of SEL skills and their alignment with CASEL Framework. The analysis shows that out of 17 standards, 10 can be considered as SEL standards whereas 7 standards can be categorized under social studies. Out of all 53 objectives, 31 belong to SEL objectives and 22 belong to social studies objectives. Later, TECEC standards are categorized into two groups: the compact and mixed SEL standards. In the compact SEL standards, the standard addresses only one CASEL competency, meaning it does not belong to another SEL competency. On the contrary, standards coded as mixed refer to the standards that have one or more objectives that are stated under other SEL competencies. Out of 10 TECEC standards, 6 of them are coded as compact whereas 4 of them are coded as mixed. Overall, self-awareness is only addressed by 2, self-management by 6, social awareness by 14, relationship skills by 7, and responsible decision making by 2 objectives. In total, when social-awareness and relationship skills are considered together, social aspects are covered by 21 objectives out of 31.

Social Studies

Social studies include the subjects that are history, geography, diversity and human rights, and arts.

The first analysis showed that seven standards directly referring to social studies are related to the learning of arts, civics and human rights, citizenship education, life skills, history, and national symbols (Table 2). Standards 1, 2, 3, 11, 13, 14, and 16 fall under the content of social studies. It is seen that standards 1 and 2 are related to life skills. Standard 3, 13, and 14 are matching more to the objectives of an arts curriculum. Standard 11 is more related to history and national symbols of social studies curriculum. Standard 16 is categorized under objectives of social studies with a focus on civics and human rights education (ISBE, 2010; NAEYC, 2018).

Table 2. Social studies standards

| Standards | Social Studies |
|--|-------------------------|
| (1) introduces his/her own features. | Life Skills |
| (2) introduces family-related features. | Life Skills |
| (3) expresses himself/herself in creative ways. | Art |
| (11) takes responsibility for activities related to Atatürk. | History |
| (13) protects aesthetic values. | Art |
| (14) realizes the value of works of art. | Art |
| (16) explains that individuals have different roles and duties in social life. | Civics and human rights |

Compact and Mixed SEL Standards

In review of TECEC, Standards 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 12, 15, and 17 are found to be directly related to CASEL competencies and skills. Further analysis showed that there are two groups that hold two distinct characteristics. Compact SEL standards are standards 4, 5, 6, 7, 9, and 17. Mixed SEL standards are 8, 10, 12, and 15. Within 6 compact SEL standards, 2 self-management, 3 social awareness, and 1 relationship skills are addressed. Within 4 mixed SEL standards, the objectives are scattered, not aiming directly to specific SEL competencies. Within 4 mixed SEL standards 2 are related to self-awareness, 2 are related to self-management, 2 are related to social awareness, 2 are related to relationship skills, and 1 is related to responsible decision-making. Table 3 shows the TECEC standards either belonging to the mixed or compact category; the corresponding CASEL competency, TECEC objective and the corresponding CASEL sub skill.

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Table 3. Compact and mixed TECEC SEL standards compared to CASEL

| Compact/ Mixed | TECEC SEL Standards | CASEL Competencies | TECEC Objectives | CASEL Skills |
|-------------------|--|-----------------------------|---|---|
| C | (4) expresses/explains other people's feelings about a situation/case. | Social Awareness | 4.1 able to tell other people's feelings. 4.2 able to tell the reasons for other people's feelings. 4.3 able to tell the consequences of other people's feelings. | Perspective taking |
| C | (5) demonstrates his/her positive and negative emotions related to a situation/case through proper/appropriate ways. | Self-management | 5.1 able to explain his/her positive and negative emotions verbally. 5.2 able to demonstrate negative emotions through positive behaviors. | Stress management Impulse control |
| C | (6) protects his/her own and other people's rights. | Social Awareness | 6.1 able to tell his/her rights. 6.2 able to tell that other people have rights, too. 6.3 able to tell what he/she can do when faced with unfairness. 6.4 able to tell what to do to be able to protect other people's rights. | Appreciating diversity |
| C | (7) motivates himself/herself to achieve a task or duty. | Self-management | 7.1 able to start a task without adult guidance. 7.2 tries to finish a task on the assigned time. | Self-motivation Self-discipline Organizational skills |
| C | (9) explain different cultural characteristics. | Social Awareness | 9.1 able to tell the cultural features of his/her own country. 9.2 able to tell the similar and different features of his/her country and other countries. 9.3 able to tell the different features of different countries. | Appreciating diversity |
| C | (17) solves his/her problems with others. | Relationship Skills | 17.1 able to solve his/her problems with others through talking to them. 17.2 asks adults for help when he/she cannot solve his/her problems with friends. 17.3 makes a compromise when necessary. | Communication Social engagement Relationship building |
| M | (8) respects differences | Self-awareness | 8.1 able to tell that he/she is different. | Accurate self-perception |
| | | Social Awareness | 8.2 able to tell that people have different characteristics. 8.3 able to take part in activities with children who have different characteristics. | Appreciating diversity |
| | | Self-management | 10.1 shows that he/she is willing to take responsibility. | Self-motivation |
| M | (10) fulfills his/her responsibilities. | Responsible Decision Making | 10.2 fulfills the responsibilities he/she undertakes. 10.3 able to tell the consequences of not fulfilling responsibilities. | Ethical responsibility Reflecting Evaluating |
| M | (12) follows the rules in different settings. | Social Awareness | 12.1 gives his/her opinions when rules are determined in different settings. 12.2 tells that rules are necessary. | Persevering in addressing challenges |
| | | Self-management | 12.3 adheres to the rules when his/her wishes and rules conflict. | Impulse control |
| | | Relationship Skills | 12.4 follows the etiquette rules. | Communicating clearly |
| | | Self-awareness | 15.1 tells what he/she likes about himself/herself. 15.2 able to express himself/herself in front of a group. | Accurate self-perception |
| M | (15) has self-confidence. | Relationship Skills | 15.3 able to give his/her different opinions when necessary. 15.4 takes the leadership role when necessary. | Social engagement Teamwork |

*C stands for compact and M stands for mixed SEL standards.

Compact SEL Standards

Standard 4 corresponds with perspective taking of CASEL social-awareness skill. To express and respond to others' feelings and to express reasons and consequences of others' feelings, one needs to understand one's own and others' emotions. There is no standard or objective addressing this skill. Standard 5 overall corresponds with self-management, specifically addressing impulse control and stress management. Without any prior focus on identifying emotions, controlling them could be difficult. Standard 6 corresponds with appreciating diversity of social awareness. However, it only refers to promoting the rights of all individuals. Understanding, accepting, and recognizing rights and differences of all individuals need to be addressed as well. Standard 7 is mainly about self-motivation, self-discipline, and organizational skills related to self-management. However, a very limited version of self-management is provided with the two objectives: starting a task without adult guidance and finishing it on time. Standard 9 corresponds with appreciating diversity related to social awareness. The main aim of including appreciating diversity in SEL is to help children understand differences based on values, beliefs, and perspectives starting from their own cultural contexts (e.g., within the groups in schools). Standard 9 only deals with children telling the similarities and differences between their own and other countries. Standard 17 corresponds with relationship skills (i.e., communication, social engagement, and relationship building). The objectives are only about managing conflicts, but they do not cover the ability to have a clear communication, listen carefully, cooperate with other people, and refuse improper social pressure.

Mixed SEL Standards

When mixed standards are considered, the following points were found. Standard 8 corresponds with self-awareness (accurate self-perception) and social awareness (appreciating diversity). "Being able to tell that he/she is different" needs to address strengths and limitations. Other two objectives related to appreciating diversity need to include attitudes and values as well. Standard 10 corresponds with self-management (self-motivation) and responsible decision-making competencies (ethical responsibility, evaluating, and reflecting skills). It seems that the standard addresses "taking responsibility" but many aspects of controlling impulses and problem solving were not stated. Standard 12 "following the rules" involves many competencies such as self-management, social awareness, and relationship. In one learning standard, three different SEL competencies and skills are stated. Standard 15 "having self-confidence" corresponds with self-awareness (accurate self-perception). Three objectives are directly related to relationship skills (social engagement and teamwork) that could be only observed as a result of self-confidence.

What is Missing?

Self-awareness and responsible decision-making are the two competencies addressed at the lowest rate. Only 2 objectives were presented aiming for accurate self-perception. Identifying emotions, recognizing strengths, self-confidence, and self-efficacy were not represented by any objectives. Same wise, responsible decision-making requires many steps such as identifying problems, analyzing situations, evaluating, reflecting, taking ethical responsibilities. They were either missing or not identified in an organized way. On the contrary, social awareness is the most addressed competency; still, empathy and respect for others are missed. Although other competencies found themselves a place, they were not addressed fully. For instance, rather than addressing proactive self-management such as goal-setting and organizational skills, reactive skills such as emotion and impulse control were given more importance. Relational skills are not provided to build and maintain social relations but could become handy when conflicts arise and good behaviors in a group are needed.

Conclusion and Discussion

The study aims to examine to the extent to which TECEC has qualities of SEL standards and objectives identified by CASEL. The findings showed that TECEC does not have a well-designed SEL framework. First, TECEC covers both SEL and social studies. Second, while some standards are well-structured and their objectives aim for the same SEL skill, some are not in alignment with each other. Lastly, some SEL skills are not addressed at all.

First, having well-structured standards that have corresponding objectives might help practitioners to address certain competencies and skills more comprehensively. Three approaches are suggested by Dusenbury and colleagues (2011): (a) SEL standards that are free-standing and comprehensive/extensive, (b) free-standing standards targeting one or more dimensions of SEL (c) synthesis of goals and benchmarks linked to SEL in other sets of learning standards (e.g., English language arts, health, social studies). When TECEC is reviewed, it is clearly seen that some standards are a combination of objectives in other majors such as social studies, referring to arts, history, civics, and life skills majors. Developing SEL standards that are free-standing, comprehensive/extensive, and clear is suggested (Dusenbury et al., 2011).

Second, both designing standards and objectives conceptually and lining them up with gradual scaling are important. To demonstrate, certain skills are prerequisites of others, for instance self-awareness precedes social awareness. For developing responsible decision-making, social awareness and relationship skills of individuals need to be supported. From a developmental perspective, being aware of one's own emotions and thoughts is an ability that develops prior to being aware of other people's feelings and ideas (Bronson, 2000; McClelland et al., 2015). Same wise, being aware of one's own emotions and thoughts is an ability that develops prior to expressing, controlling, and managing feelings and stress (Bronson, 2000; McClelland et al., 2015). Also developing self-management competency could not be left without teaching children the self-regulation cycle; planning, monitoring, controlling, reflecting and evaluation (Pintrich, 2000; Zimmerman, 2002). Bailey and colleagues (2019) in their recent article propose a developmental model that suggests that we introduce recognizing and communicating feelings before managing feelings that could serve as a foundation for empathy, perspective taking, conflict resolution, and relationship skills. These suggestions would help TECEC reformulate its current state of non-ordered SEL skills.

Third, the analysis reveals that what is not stated in the curriculum is as important as what is stated. Self-related competencies are covered by only one third of overall SEL. This finding could be the result of the cultural values related to collectivism, which is heavily observed in Turkish culture. Collectivism and interdependence are the features of traditional cultures as theorized by Kağıtçıbaşı (2005). In such cultures, there is less focus on individual development in upbringing children. Rules, rights, responsibilities, and roles (e.g., within family and society) are the concepts that are addressed more frequently. This seems to be the case for other European countries (Cefai et al., 2018). Appreciating diversity that is another skill related to social awareness was only addressed by focusing on respecting differences. Yet, the term diversity suggests that differences are complementary and commonality of needs, feelings and wants among individuals or groups are cherished. Understanding the wholeness of humanity is the first step of respecting differences.

The clear emphasis is placed on responsibility, not on responsible decision-making. Before taking the responsibility of one's actions, children need to acquire "the ability to reflect on and evaluate the results of his/her actions and decisions" in the problem-solving process. Without provisions of responsible decision-making and problem-solving skills (i.e., identify/analyze/solve/evaluate problems), children might experience difficulties to assume responsibilities in certain areas. Children need to have conditional knowledge (IF-THEN) to evaluate current situations and to make predictions about the consequences of their decisions before choosing to apply them (Winne and Azevedo, 2014).

Overall, a possible explanation of missed and overemphasized aspects of SEL in TECEC could be found on the basis of perceptions of children and childhood. As reminded by James and Prout (2015), children have long been regarded as passive individuals who have limited or no capacity to manage their

lives; thus, they need to be controlled by adults. In such cultures, what is expected from children is staying obedient and silent, maintaining the social order and hierarchy. However, conceptions of children are also changing in other cultures which accept that children have agency, rights to make their decisions; they are strong and capable; and they can fulfill many roles and responsibilities in the society when given adequate opportunities and support (James and James, 2012). IN TECEC, there is no sign of an agent, right-holder, active, participating child who is independent and receives support from the family and school to reach his/her potential. In TECEC, it is seen that (child) self is valued as long as it is social, responsible, and managed. The lack of “self” focused SEL standards and objectives can be considered a base for this interpretation. This can be accepted as a compromise of healthy social emotional development in exchange for socially adaptive behavior.

The aim of teaching SEL skills is not only supporting children in school but also developing their skills that will be necessary for them in life (Zins and Elias, 2007). It is appropriate to teach SEL skills to children at school because schools are places which welcome all children and contribute to their social, emotional, and academic development (Zins and Elias, 2007). According to Cefai and colleagues (2018), countries need to develop a framework for the integration of SEL skills into the curricula. It is highlighted that SEL education needs to be structured and integrated into the curriculum. Based on the comprehensive framework they suggest, the curricula need to include both intra and inter-personal SEL competencies; SEL skills should be instructed regularly, these skills need to be supported by activities across the curricula besides the classroom atmosphere and by using a whole-school approach.

The study examined TECEC to investigate whether it carries out proposed SEL standards based on the CASEL framework. One major contribution of this study is proposing document analysis as a method to investigate other curricula or educational materials used in other grade levels to see how much they incorporate SEL and what is left out. In depth analysis will allow policy makers, curriculum developers, and teachers to effectively integrate SEL standards to educational policies and classroom practices to support children’s SEL.

One of the key implications of this study can be that any systems or structures need to review SEL objectives, the framework it adopts and learning outcomes. If done so, this will give a clear view to the teachers willing to provide SEL skills to their students, to tie their practices to SEL that will in return help them evaluate their practices on a theory basis. Having a look at the TECEC will help us observe the real classroom practices in ECE classrooms to match the curricula and the actual work done. It can also shed light on how to make appropriate revisions based on the discrepancy between basic SEL competencies and SEL objectives of TECEC. The effective inclusion and integration of SEL skills at the national level will pave the way for schools to adopt its implementation. In the design of the national SEL curriculum, importance should be given to creating mechanisms for effective planning, delivery and quality implementation and evaluation of the SEL instruction. It is also suggested for the effective school implementation that school administrators and teachers also need ongoing support and guidance in addition to theoretically sound curricula.

Declarations

Authors’ Declarations

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