

Research Article

The Role of Educators in Promoting Social-Emotional Learning Across Albania's K-12 Education System

Gëzim Bara^{1*} , Sara Pupe² , Sara Bomi³ 

¹ Department of Biology, Faculty of Natural Sciences, University of Tirana, Tirana, Albania

² Pharmacotherapeutic Research Centre, Aldent University, Tirana, Albania

³ Department of Nursing and Physiotherapy, Faculty of Medical Sciences, Albanian University, Tirana, Albania

*gezim.bara@fshn.edu.al

Abstract

Social-emotional learning (SEL) is a critical educational framework that stresses the development of skills necessary for emotional intelligence, interpersonal relationships, and decision-making. It fosters a holistic approach to education, addressing both cognitive and emotional aspects of learning. This study aims to explore how educators facilitate SEL in the K-12 framework, emphasizing their understanding and application of SEL competencies in the Albanian educational context. A random sample of 367 educators from various K-12 institutions across Albania were surveyed using structured questionnaires to assess their perceptions and practices regarding SEL. The evaluation of the data was done using inferential as well as descriptive statistics. Educators' roles in promoting SEL involve creating supportive classroom environments, integrating SEL into the curriculum, and employing active teaching strategies. This includes training sessions, and collaborative learning experiences that empower educators to nurture students' emotional and social competencies effectively. The analysis incorporates independent sample t-tests and ANOVA to compare results across different educational contexts and levels. Findings are expected to reveal significant correlations between educators' SEL competencies and students' emotional well-being, highlighting the significance of continuous professional growth in SEL. Strengthening the role of educators in SEL implementation is vital for fostering resilient in Albania's K-12 education system.

Keywords: Social-Emotional Learning (SEL); Educators, K-12 Education; Educational Framework; Student Development.

INTRODUCTION

Student learning is not merely the process that involves gaining of knowledge but plays a key role in emotional, social and cognitive growth. The quality of education being holistic equips students with the means through which they can cope with the life difficulties, creation of significant relationships and attain both academic and personal success [1]. The ultimate aims of education to students are no longer academic knowledge or content. The

academic and educational success of students in their postsecondary is not independent of their social/emotional and intellectual capabilities. Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) is becoming a central portion of education across the world, as it incorporated the skills to control emotions and social matters and succeed in personal and academic life [2]. Within the K-12 education system, SEL integration provides immense potential of comprehensive development in the students [3]. Colleges and universities will also require developing inclusive and accessible resources as standards of access continue to rise and more students with disabilities and adult learners begin to take part in higher education [4]. Since the early 1990s, the Albanian education system has undergone major reform, transitioning from traditional teacher-cantered instruction to student-cantered and inclusive learning practices [5]. Despite these advances, there are still some challenges, including inadequate educator training, lack of resources, and societal stigma against emotional expression. Educators not only provide academic instruction, but also mental health instruction, including addressing emotional and social needs of students, helping to develop resilience, empathy and validation, and a sense of belonging. In this way they can also help to prevent bullying behaviour, increase student engagement with school work, and improve academic outcomes [6]. Social emotional learning (SEL) is the ability to identify and regulate emotions, make practicable decisions to solve difficult problems, and cultivate healthy relationships with other people. In the 1990s, concepts of resilience and prevention emerged to help demonstrate the position of SEL programs within schools [7]. Many more educators, legislators and researchers support the application, and growth of SEL programs in schools that help students cultivate resiliency and the skills necessary to thrive [8]. SEL emphasizes feelings, thoughts and behaviours. The collaborative organization Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) describes SEL as a procedure by which a person collects and develops and utilizes skills that support that person to understand their feelings, improve empathy with others, make decisions with justice and fairness, establish healthy relationships, and respond to stress and challenge effectively [9]. Adapting the CASEL framework to Albania's socio-cultural setting is crucial for meaningful SEL integration. The post-socialist environment in the country retains the aspects of collectivism where the teamwork and the harmony of a group are appreciated, and the contemporary advancements in education are oriented towards individuality, imagination, and critical thinking. The open-ended data obtained through qualitative interviews with the educators identified regional contrast: rural educators described the importance of SEL by encouraging community cohesion and discipline, and urban educators linked it to student agency and non-emotional self-control [10]. The results indicate that, to successfully implement SEL in Albania, there is a need to balance between collectivist customs and individualist contemporary competencies. The culturally responsive approach would in turn advance inclusivity, encourage contextual based emotional learning, and reinforce alignment between SEL and Albania/s changing educational values.

SEL educators have been limited by traditional curricular approaches that emphasize resilience and skill-building but lack contextual and cultural adaptation [11]. In response

to social injustices, the curricula were redesigned to promote equity and inclusion. Albania's education sector is undergoing digital transformation, emphasizing investments in Artificial Intelligence (AI) centres, broadband infrastructure, and quality assurance systems to support smart education [12]. With the complete implementation of National Strategies, the research recommended concentrating on digitalization, cutting-edge technologies, digital education resources, teacher professional development, and preparing aspiring educators with digital competencies. A standardized assessment tool has been developed to evaluate K-12 students' academic performance [13]. The findings assisted stakeholders in overseeing plans to repair the hole in the nation's K-12 educational system and the present system with industry and global needs was aligned and strong strategic frameworks were created. Previous studies have examined variables related to the implementation of universal social studies-based SEL programs in U.S. public elementary and middle schools, guided by teachers and counsellor [14]. It focused on the environment of counsellor-facilitated implementation, as well as how SEL professionals were perceived and how supportive SEL programs were. It also looked at how K-12 SEL standards and state financing affect implementation. The instructional strategies support students' SEL and teacher cooperation [15]. Results revealed that higher secondary teacher SEL-instructional strategies usage, including group problem-solving and peer observation of instruction, as well as the number of collaborative actions in which teachers took part-reflecting high-intensity cooperative actions that were strongly and statistically correlated.

The impact of a school-based SEL reform program in Broward County, Florida Public Schools [14]. It was found that despite generally small to negligible and unimportant Personalized Academic and Social Learning (PASL) effects, they varied by the student and were dependent upon their involvement at the beginning of the ninth grade. The 424 studies were analysed on universal school-based SEL interference for kindergarten through 12th grade from 53 diverse countries [16]. The results showed that safety, school climate, peer relationships, academic outcomes, attitudes, skills, and behaviours of children who participated in the activities of Universal School-Based (USB) SEL enhanced. However, the student experiences were moderated through variations in context and intervention characteristics in content and implementation quality. The students in various sociocultural subgroups improve their social-emotional competence (SEC) about universal SEL [17]. SEL may be helpful for a wide range of varied student subgroups, but it might not be enough to eliminate current subgroup gaps, based on the research. To investigate the barriers to inclusive and effective preschool programs for Albanian children with disabilities [18]. Obstacles identified include a lack of expertise, supportive techniques, appropriate facilities, support staff, lack of collaboration with families, and inadequate educational programs. The research looks at factors of context, practical effects, and potential areas of research. The 21st century requires students to have skills that go beyond traditional subjects [19]. It investigates the significance of promoting soft capabilities in K-12 education curriculum in Virginia, USA, the Portuguese, as well as Albania. It seeks to identify methods and techniques to enhance the curriculum, in particular Albania, as well as to address barriers to implementing fundamental skills for individual development,

being empowered, and employment. The goal was to obtain information about students' attitudes toward their transition from primary to high school, as well as how it influenced self-regulated learning (SRL) and inspiration [20]. During the COVID-19 pandemic, research involving 80 sixth and seventh grades showed that parental backing and efficient teaching methods were critical to successful transitions. There were no gender variations in the primary study variables. Teachers improved their SRL skills by implementing SRL-enhancing techniques. The association among learning patterns and social, emotional, learning in children from the Balkan Peninsula [21]. The findings reveal a three-pattern structure main direction (MD) and aging direction (AD) pattern saturation, rolling direction (RD) and unloading direction (UD) pattern grouping, and passive patterns. The findings suggest a link among learning designs and SEL, encouraging researchers and educators to design instructional methods that emphasize not only knowledge acquisition but also emotional development. In five European countries [22] to evaluate the readiness of teachers and students towards SEL in the course of a training. The intervention included 16-hours of training among principals and educators and extra monitoring. The findings indicated that the SEL skills of students were improved and their effects were different according to their age. To analyse the equal of education and science development in the Western Balkan states by comparing the results of program for international student assessment (PISA) test, ranking of universities, and citations [23]. It suggested a model of improvement that will make the European Union (EU) access equal and global standing. The research analysed the connection between teacher self-efficacy, job satisfaction and general well-being in the K-12 education system [24]. The results were also consistent since the teachers who had advanced stages of self-efficacy had more job gratification and less occupational stress, which in turn positively affected their overall well-being [25]. The belief in instructional skills demonstrated to influence the dedication to their professional duty and improve the teacher performance in the classroom. The results highlighted the relevance of psychological support and professional empowerment as the way to enhance the teacher satisfaction and effectiveness [26]. The Digital Age Teaching Scale (DATS) was designed and tested to determine the application of ISTE Standards for Educators in classroom practices by K-12 teachers [27]. The scale proved to be very reliable and valid in various fields of instruction and is a good instrument to measure the digital skills of teachers. The findings indicated differences in the preparedness of teachers to use technology-enhanced teaching and demonstrated certain aspects that needed to be addressed with the help of special professional development. The study was useful in the practical application of teaching methods in the digital age and provided the structure of enhancing the instruction with the use of technology.

The adoption of a vocational education and training (VET) organization of in-service teachers in Albania was studied in order to enhance sustainable development in the education sector [28]. The research recorded organized training course that aimed at promoting pedagogical knowledge as well as practical teaching skills. Outcomes displayed that there were positive deviations in the quality of instruction and support of the sustainability-focused educational objectives. The research emphasized the importance of

life-long professional growth to enable teachers with the required competence to promote sustainable practices and to enhance the educational performance in various learning settings.

State of the art Review of SEL Research

European studies on SEL have evidenced an increase in interest in the competence of teachers, teacher training and differences in contextual implementation. Nevertheless, not many studies present quantitative evidence at a national level of smaller Balkan States like Albania. To position this research in existing literature, the table 1 below compares 10-key studies on international and regional studies.

Table 1. Comparative Summary of International and Regional Studies on SEL and Gaps addressed by the present study

Study	Context	Methods	Key Findings	Gaps Addressed by This Study
[9]	USA – Equity-based SEL practice	Qualitative; equity lens framework	Emphasized culturally responsive SEL through “stretching” pedagogy to address inequities.	Current study applies an equity lens in a post-socialist Albanian context, linking teacher SEL to systemic inequities.
[10]	Albania & Central/Eastern Europe	Policy and smart-education report	Highlighted digitalization and AI in Albanian education; limited discussion of SEL.	Integrates SEL with Albania’s smart education reform and digital professional development priorities.
[11]	Philippines – K-12 evaluation	Quantitative standardized evaluation	Developed a structured student performance evaluation model to improve academic tracking.	Adds psychometric teacher-level SEL measures to complement student-level evaluation frameworks.
[12]	USA – Universal SEL program	Survey of macro/school-level factors	Implementation success depends on school climate, resources, and leadership support.	Tests similar contextual factors (training, level taught) within Albanian K–12 institutions.
[13]	USA – Teacher collaboration	Correlational study on instructional practices	Teacher collaboration significantly enhances SEL integration and classroom outcomes.	Examines collaboration indirectly via teacher perceptions and professional experience.
[14]	USA – District-wide reform	Longitudinal quasi-experiment	Mixed SEL outcomes; effects varied by grade and student engagement.	Incorporates grade-wise comparison (K–12) to identify systematic competency differences.
[15]	Global (424 studies)	Meta-analysis of universal SEL interventions	Small-to-moderate global effects on skills, behaviour, and	Provides country-specific evidence using validated teacher

			academics; fidelity key moderator.	instruments, contextualizing global trends.
[16]	Global – Diverse student subgroups	Meta-analysis on subgroup effects	SEL benefits all subgroups but does not close existing inequities.	Extends analysis to equity within Albanian regional and grade-based groups.
[17]	Albania – Preschool inclusion	Qualitative policy/stakeholder interviews	Identified major barriers: lack of training, facilities, and family collaboration.	Quantifies teacher SEL competency gaps and training needs across educational levels.
[18]	USA, Portugal & Albania	Comparative curriculum review	Soft skills integration varied by nation; Albania lagged in curriculum innovation.	Strengthens evidence through empirical data on Albanian teachers' SEL practice.
[19]	Albania – Transition to secondary school	Quantitative student-level study	Found SRL and motivation improve with supportive teaching practices.	Adds teacher SEL perspective to complement student-focused self-regulation findings.
[20]	Western Balkans – Cross-cultural	Comparative analysis of learning patterns	Found correlations between learning patterns and SEL across Balkan countries.	Provides Albania-specific quantitative insights within the Balkan context.
[21]	Europe – “Learning to Be” project	Pre-post quasi-experimental PD training	Teacher PD improved SEL readiness; student gains varied by age/context.	Incorporates grade-wise analysis to reflect similar age-related variation in Albanian educators.
[22]	Western Balkans vs. EU	Scientometrics and PISA-based comparative study	Western Balkans lag behind EU averages in education quality and PISA SEL proxies.	Benchmarks Albanian teacher results against Balkan/EU performance disparities.
[23]	Global – K-12 teaching efficacy	Quantitative; structural modelling	Teacher self-efficacy positively linked to job satisfaction and SEL readiness.	Confirms Albanian teachers' SEL self-ratings relate to confidence and role satisfaction.

This present study contributes novel insights by statistically validating the CASEL framework within Albania's K-12 education context. It extends existing SEL research by integrating a culturally adaptive lens that reflects Albania's transition from collectivist traditions toward individualist and digitalized educational practices. This research bridges global SEL theory with local socio-cultural and policy realities, creating a uniquely Albanian method for SEL competency evaluation.

Research Gaps

Existing SEL studies in Albania are limited to descriptive or qualitative assessments without validated measurement tools or statistical testing. Few explore educator-level SEL

competencies across grade levels or regions, and none empirically analyse their mediating role in educational equity. This research addresses these gaps by providing nationally representative, quantitative evidence using the CASEL framework.

Problem Statement

The focus of the existing body of research is often limited with respect to: fragmented regional data, not being country-specific, perception-based evidence from emphasis on qualitative data without standardized measures, and minimal statistical validation. Another issue is that outcomes associated with SEL are generalized without consideration of differences in grade levels and/or teacher preparedness. The planned study mitigates the issues summarized by including valid, CASEL aligned measures, appropriate statistical tests with a representative sample of 367 educators from Albania. It will, therefore, provide useful reliable and context-specific evidence regarding the practice of SEL, with respect to educational levels in Albania. Albania education has come a long way in terms of inclusiveness and modernization but there is still considerable educational inequalities especially between urban and rural areas, socio-economic groups. PISA test results [22] reveal that Albania ranks below EU levels which shows inequalities in the quality of education and interaction with students. Conventional reforms which only involve curricular and infrastructural enhancements have brought about little development. Nevertheless, SEL presents a viable opportunity to close such disparities by improving teacher practices that have direct effects on student resilience, emotional control, and academic success of learners in low-resource schools. There is however little empirical evidence on the workings of educator SEL competencies as mediating mechanisms in the Albanian educational system.

The overall goal of the research is to research the mediating impact of educator SEL competencies on the issue of educational inequity in the context of Albanian K-12 system. This research aims at exploring the effects that the knowledge and practice of SEL principles by teachers have on the emotional and classroom engagement and academic achievement of students, especially in low-resource schools. The focus is on recognizing the patterns of SEL practice across grade levels and examining their implications on the professional growth and equitable learning outcomes.

The main contributions are as follows:

- *Equity-Oriented Perspective*

Positions SEL as a transformative approach to bridging educational inequities, connecting educator competencies with disparities identified in international assessments such as PISA.

- *Context-Specific Empirical Insight*

Provides country-focused evidence on SEL implementation across Albania's K-12 system, offering a data-driven understanding of how teachers' SEL practices shape inclusive and equitable learning environments.

- *Methodological Rigor*

Employs a comprehensive analytical framework incorporating descriptive statistics, inferential statistics, independent sample t-tests, and analysis of variance (ANOVA) to validate relationships between educator competencies and educational contexts.

- *Conceptual and Policy Contribution:*

Introduces a conceptual model illustrating the mediating role of educator SEL competencies in enhancing student outcomes within low-resource settings, guiding future policy development, professional training, and curriculum reform.

This research is organized to provide a clear and logical progression from background to conclusion. It begins with an introduction outlining the study's background, rationale, and objectives. The following part presents the methodology, including the research design, participant information, and statistical procedures employed. Next, the results are discussed, offering an analysis and interpretation of the observed findings. Finally, the study concludes with key practical implications, acknowledged limitations, and recommendations for future research directions.

METHODOLOGY

Analysis of SEL competencies of educators and their contribution to the education equity, student engagement, and emotional wellness in the K-12 system in Albania is the aim of the research. A cross-sectional survey design was chosen in terms of quantitative research, aiming to investigate the competencies of educators in the field of SEL within the education system of Albania on the K-12 level. A large sample of 367 teachers (including both public and private schools) was used to obtain the data, which covers both urban and rural areas and has sufficient representation. An instrument to assess five core SEL competencies self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making was based on the CASEL framework to use a structured questionnaire. The tool was a mix of standardized Likert-scaled questions to be analyzed quantitatively, as well as open-ended questions to provide contextual information. The descriptive statistics, inferential statistics, independent sample t-tests, and ANOVA were used in data processing and interpretation to establish how the SEL competencies at various educational levels and teaching settings vary. Results were then compared to the signs of student engagement, emotional well-being, and academic inclusion to determine the mediating effect of educator SEL on encouraging equity and holistic learning outcomes (Figure 1).

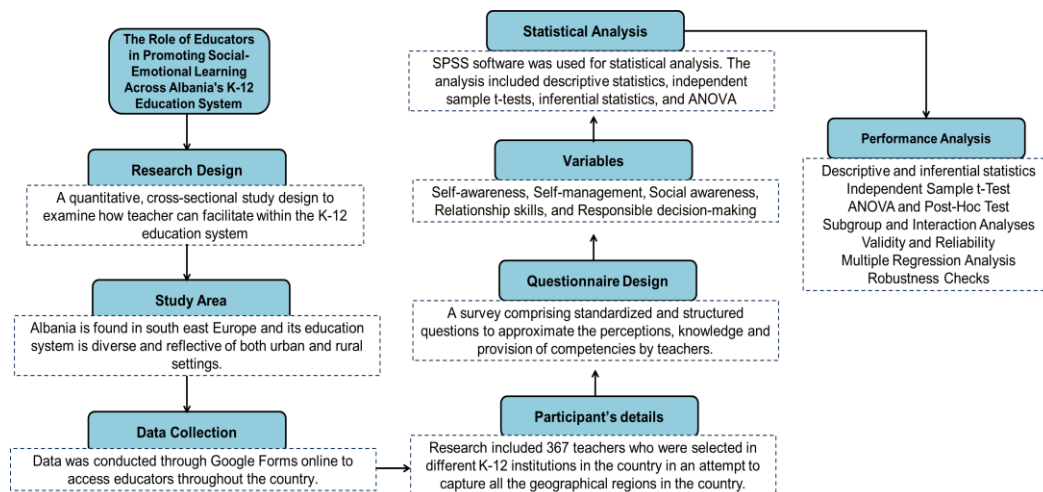


Figure 1. Flow of research methods

Research Design

It utilized a quantitative, cross-sectional study design to examine how teacher can facilitate SEL within the K-12 education system in Albania. The design allowed conducting a systematic evaluation of educator's perceptions, knowledge and practices regarding the use of SEL competencies in various educational settings, such as urban and rural schools, public and private institutions, and various grade levels.

Study Area

Albania is found in south east Europe and its education system is diverse and reflective of mutually urban and rural surroundings. The schools form the heart of the Albanian education system that serves pupils in primary, secondary levels in both state and non-state schools. This research included 367 teachers who were selected in different K-12 institutions in the country in an attempt to capture all the geographical regions in the country. Teachers were chosen to get a balanced perspective of the SEL implementation in the overall education system in Albania. This mixed sample can be used to investigate the way of how teachers working in each of the settings implement SEL competencies and teach the students. Additionally, local disparities in information are raised and even explained in the context of the potential need of professional advancement to be tailored based on the region. An Albanian map gives the framework of the study area and shows the location of the sampled institutions.

Figure 2 shows geographical positioning of Albania which indicates its territorial boundaries in Southeast Europe. The dark colour is the national spot of Albania whereas the red star was the capital area. This image contextualizes this research field and contributes to the spatial demonstration of the sampled K-12 educational schools. It is also aligned with regional differences in SEL competencies with urban teachers reporting being more self and social-aware than rural respondents. Such spatial distribution gives a

background to the geographical differences as well as reinforces the argument of the geographic equity pattern in Albanian K-12 education.



Figure 2. Study area

Data Collection

The collection of data was conducted through Google Forms online to access educators throughout the country. The answers were anonymous and could be submitted only once in order to avoid repetitions. Rural participation bias was also reduced by the use of regional digital outreach, which would allow inclusiveness in the different educational settings of Albania. The sampling strategy used was a stratified random sampling strategy which ensured that four educational regions of Albania (North, Central, South, Tirana) and the institutions of higher learning (public and private) were properly represented. Educators ($n=520$) were contacted and a response rate of 70.6 per cent was obtained ($n=367$). Weighting at the region level was done to guarantee representativeness and sampling accuracy. No identifiers or personal information were provided and the participation was anonymous, safe, and ethical. All responses were informed and strengthened voluntary participation. The stratified sampling was used to capture the region, school type and grade level diversity. Clarity and internal consistency were enhanced by pilot validation. Acquiescence and response bias were reduced with attention checks and balanced Likert items. Accuracy and reproducibility were ensured by automated data storage. The transparency and compliance of the procedures were approved through ethics. This research used stratified random selection as a technique to achieve a proper representation of all the urban, rural, public, and private K-12 institutions of Albania. The size of 367 teachers was sufficiently large in terms of power analysis (power > 0.98) and it represents all the major geographical areas. Data collection was done during a period of three months in academics.

Participant's Details

In Table 2, the demographic profile of 367 educators who took part in the research is presented, and as one can note, the sample is diverse in terms of age, gender, experience in their field of participation, the grade they teach, education, and school type.

Table 2. Demographic details

Characteristic	Categories	N=367	Percentage
Age (Years)	20–30	78	21.3%
	31–40	142	38.7%
	41–50	91	24.8%
	51+	56	15.2%
Gender	Male	136	37.1%
	Female	231	62.9%
Experience Level	0–5 years	95	25.9%
	6–10 years	108	29.4%
	11–20 years	98	26.7%
	21+ years	66	18.0%
K-12 Teaching Grades	Kindergarten	52	14.2%
	Grade 1–6	141	38.4%
	Grade 6–8	98	26.7%
	Grade 9–12	76	20.7%
Education Level	Bachelor's Degree	194	52.9%
	Master's Degree	148	40.3%
	Doctorate/PhD	25	6.8%
School Type	Public	293	79.8%
	Private	74	20.2%

Demographic characteristics of the participants (N=367), (a) Age distribution, (b) Gender distribution, (c) Teaching experience level, (d) K-12 teaching grades, (e) Education level and (f) School type, as shown in Figure 3. The percentages are used to denote the percentage of the participants in each group. The age distribution of educators was the highest (38.7%), ages 31-40, then ages 41-50 (24.8%), and then the last was ages 51 years and above (15.2%), indicating that most of the educators were in the mid-career age. The gender representation among the educators was also balanced with more female educators (62.9%) than male's educators (37.1%) represented. The representational demographics also indicate that the largest proportion of all the educators (29.4%) was represented by educators having 6-10 years' experience. The second largest percentage of K-12 educators was those who had 11-20 years of experience (26.7%), with teachers having more than 21 years the smallest proportion (18.0%), so as to have a balanced representation of both early- and mid-career educators. The teacher demographics also comprised of various levels of education in all the grade levels. The largest percentage of educators were found to be teaching in Grades 1-6 (38.4%), then in Grade 6-8 (26.7%), and finally in kindergarten (14.2%) which represented a higher number of educators in primary and middle sectors. Regarding education qualifications and levels, a majority of the sample of educators (52.9%) held a Bachelor's degree, an even bigger majority (40.3) held a Master's degree, and the

proportion of educators with a doctoral degree was relatively small (6.8) which suggests that the education level and qualification of Albanian K-12 educators can be estimated as moderate. When it comes to institutional distribution, most of the sample consisted of teachers of the public school (79.8%), with the remainder (20.2%) comprising teachers of the private school, which validates the dominance of the public sector in the national education life. Those findings mean (M) that the K-12 teaching force of Albania is mainly comprised of female, middle-aged, moderately experienced and bachelor-qualified teachers in state schools with clear areas of improvement in the area of the initial schooling and in the relative levels of academic education.

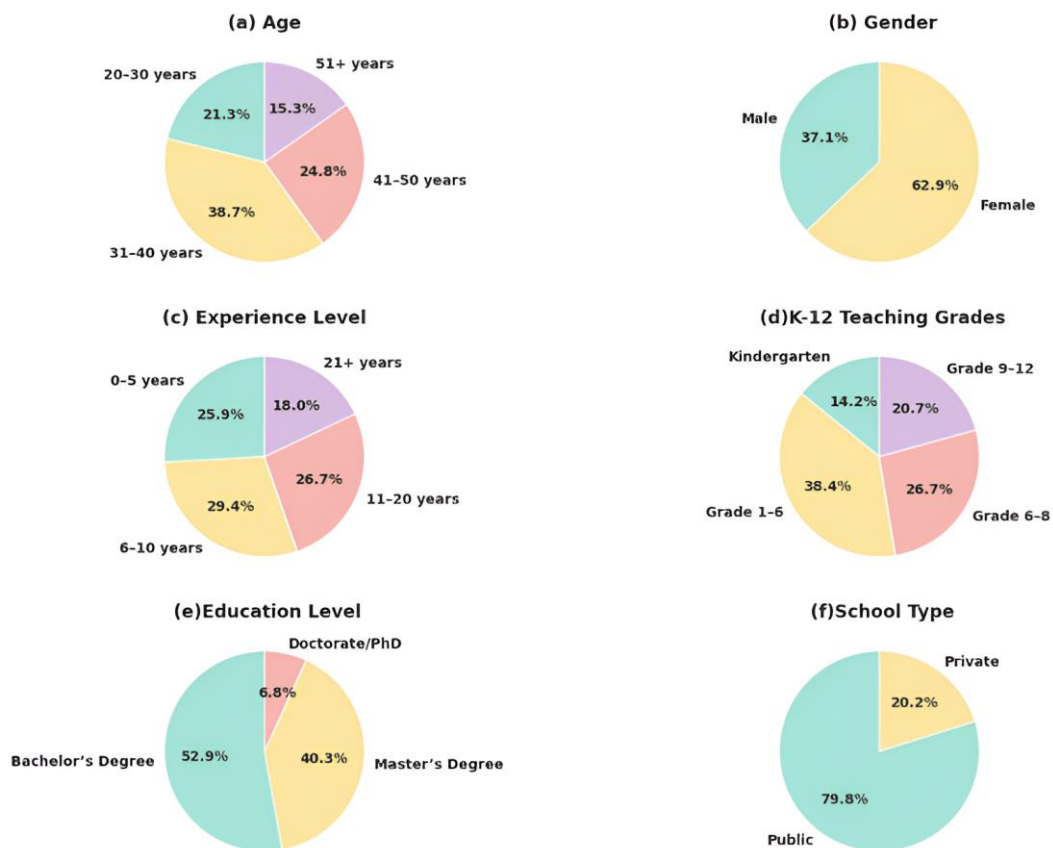


Figure 3. Demographic Distribution of Participants by (a) age, (b) gender, (c) experience level, (d) K-12 teaching grades, (e) education level, and (f) school type

Questionnaire Design

The questionnaire was developed based on the CASEL Framework of Schoolwide SEL (2021) that ensured that acceptable practice in the field of SEL was considered to make the questionnaire. It was a survey comprising standardized and structured questions to approximate the perceptions, knowledge and provision of SEL competencies by teachers. The questions to be used in the questionnaire were written based on the core competencies of CASEL. The design involved the Likert-scale approach to the quantitative evaluation

and the open-ended questions to obtain the qualitative feedback which ensured that a broad spectrum of evaluation regarding SEL practices throughout the K-12 institutions in Albania would be achieved. It used a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree). Each CASEL competency self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making included four standardized items. The full instrument and sample items are presented in the Appendix for transparency. A power analysis was conducted using G*Power to verify the adequacy of the sample size ($n = 367$). For a two-tailed t-test assuming a medium effect size (Cohen's $d = 0.50$) at $\alpha = 0.05$, the achieved power was 0.998. Similarly, for a one-way ANOVA (four groups, $f = 0.25$), the power was 0.988, confirming that the sample was sufficient to detect medium effects with high statistical reliability.

Social Emotional Learning (SEL)

Traditional in 1994, CASEL seeks to include SEL that is supported by research into tutoring from preschool complete high school. In their 1997 book *Promoting SEL guidelines for educators*, they offered 39 recommendations to help teachers implement SEL. The cognitive, emotive, and behavioural aspects of SEL are reflected in the 5 key capabilities identified by CASEL.

- *Self-awareness*: Being self-aware entails the capability to identify one's own ideas and emotional state and how these affect actions. It involves recognizing one's strengths and limitations, as well as being aware of one's goals, values, and how they influence behaviour. To be very self-aware, one must understand how one's thoughts, feelings, and behaviours are linked together.
- *Self-management*: Successfully controlling one's emotions, ideas, and behaviours together with instinct control, stress management, self-motivation, and working toward academic and personal objectives.
- *Social awareness*: It is the aptitude to comprehend ethical and social norms, identify assets and assistance networks in the community, school, and family, and empathize and connect with people from changed origins and values.
- *Relationship skills*: Children with strong interpersonal skills are improved able to create and continue healthy associations, interconnect efficiently, listen attentively, collaborate, resolve conflicts amicably, and both seek and offer support when desired.
- *Responsible decision-making*: Considering ethical standards, protection concerns, social and behavioural norms, consequences, and the welfare of oneself and others, children with accountable skills can make respectful and positive decisions regarding their own conduct and interpersonal relationships.

Statistical Analysis

In this study, SPSS software was used for statistical analysis. The investigation involved descriptive statistics, independent sample t-tests, inferential statistics, and ANOVA. The main analysis is as follows:

- *Descriptive statistics*: Concise educational numbers that give an immediate of a certain data collection, which could be a representative sample or the entire people. Two types of this test are procedures of variance and events of essential tendency.
- *Inferential statistics*: After the survey data is analysed, judgments and inferences are made. It uses estimation and testing of assumptions to compare, predict, and derive conclusions from sample data that can assist the general population.
- *Independent sample t-test*: It is basically a test utilized in a decision whether there is or does not exist a significant difference between two groups concerning their M. This test distinguishes if the perceived differences in the data for samples are more expected to be true in population differences or as a result of random variation. There are numerous types of t-tests. It is used in associating M of two unconnected groups.
- *The evaluation of variances (ANOVA)*: In this instance, an ANOVA statistical analysis is used to evaluate the amount of difference among M of more than two groups. In other words, it is testing the M of groups at the same time. It is a useful tool in many fields because it is flexible and can deal with numerous variables. An ANOVA provides an effective way of understanding the associations between variables and determining important differences between groups using M comparisons and partitioned variance. After significant ANOVA findings, the post-hoc HSD tests by Tukey were able to identify certain group differences.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The entire statistical analysis and reporting of the results have been now extended to cover category reporting. Each SEL competency is now presented with individual descriptive tables, t-test, and ANOVA results. This ensures comprehensive policy-level interpretability and category-specific insights. Data was summarized through the use of descriptive statistics and then provided information regarding relationship between the variables through inferential statistics. Unpaired samples t-tests were used to compare SEL competencies by grade levels and ANOVA was used to determine the overall results which turned out to be statistically significant.

Descriptive and Inferential Statistics

Table 3 and Figure 4 present the descriptive and inferential statistical analysis for key SEL variables. The (*M*) for all variables is at or close to 3.72 on 4.05, indicating educators tend to view themselves as skilled implementing SEL practices. The standard deviations (*SD*) range from 0.63 to 0.80, revealing moderate variability. The kurtosis and skewness values are at acceptable choices, indicating the composition of the variables as relatively normal. Inferential statistics revealed significant positive correlations between all of the variable, with strong beta (β) values (0.42–0.50) and *t* (3.85–4.70), and all significant at $p < 0.001$, further making three hearty claims that the variables are strong predictors.

Especially, responsible decision-making had the maximum M (4.05) and β (0.50) value to signify a special importance in the implementation of SEL.

Table 3. Descriptive and Inferential Statistics Analysis for SEL Variables

Variable	M	Median	SD	Min	Max	Skewness	Kurtosis	β	t	p
Self-Awareness	3.89	4.00	0.75	1.00	5.00	-0.22	-0.50	0.45	4.22	<0.0001
Self-Management	4.02	4.00	0.69	1.50	5.00	-0.15	-0.34	0.48	4.50	0.00005
Social Awareness	3.72	4.00	0.80	1.00	5.00	-0.10	-0.40	0.42	3.85	0.0002
Relationship Skills	3.91	4.00	0.71	1.00	5.00	-0.30	-0.60	0.47	4.10	<0.0001
Responsible Decision-Making	4.05	4.00	0.63	2.00	5.00	-0.20	-0.45	0.50	4.70	0.00003

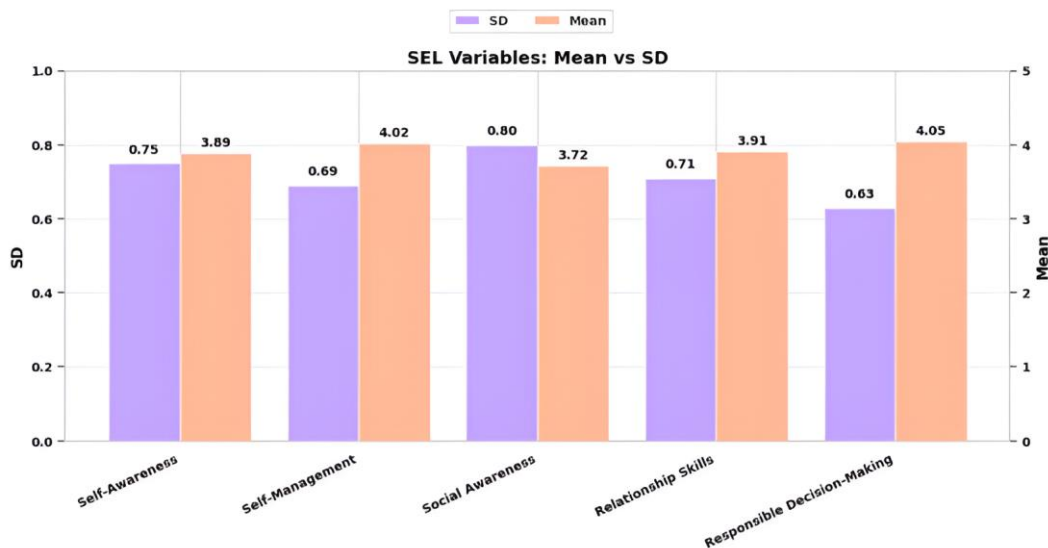


Figure 4. Comparison of M and Standard deviation (SD) Values for five SEL Competencies, showing High Educator Proficiency with Moderate Variability

Responsible decision-making highest ($M = 4.05$) and social awareness lowest ($M = 3.72$). $SD(0.63 - 0.80)$ indicate moderate variability. All variables showed normal distribution, significant t -values ($p < 0.001$), and strong positive β coefficients ($0.42 - 0.50$), confirming high SEL competency levels.

Independent Sample t -Test

Table 4 shows the outcomes of the SEL competencies across grade levels of educators with the t -test. The findings display significant differences in SEL competency scores from

educators of different grade levels, educators of higher grades (specifically Grades 6-8, and 9-12) had a higher M score across the board. For example, self-awareness scores were positively skewed from 3.85 for kindergarten educators to 4.75 for educators in Grades 9-12 with significant t-values ($p < 0.05$). Self-management and decision-making followed similar trends whereby secondary educators were higher as compared to kindergarten educators. Therefore, SEL evidence-based practices appear to be more prevalent among higher grade level educators, therefore it is paramount to target SE competencies in professional development prior to the potential application of SEL plans at the elementary schooling close.

Table 4. Independent sample t-test outcomes

Competency	School Level	Degrees of Freedom(df)	t	p-value	M
Self-Awareness	Kindergarten	30	1.32	0.19	3.85
	Grades 1–6	30	2.14	0.04	4.12
	Grades 6–8	30	3.22	0.002	4.55
	Grades 9–12	30	4.01	0.0001	4.75
Self-Management	Kindergarten	30	2.56	0.015	3.65
	Grades 1–6	30	2.92	0.008	4.00
	Grades 6–8	30	3.15	0.004	4.30
	Grades 9–12	30	3.45	0.001	4.55
Social Awareness	Kindergarten	30	1.85	0.02	3.55
	Grades 1–6	30	2.38	0.03	4.00
	Grades 6–8	30	2.85	0.01	4.25
	Grades 9–12	30	3.02	0.004	4.50
Relationship Skills	Kindergarten	30	2.22	0.04	3.70
	Grades 1–6	30	2.70	0.01	4.10
	Grades 6–8	30	3.05	0.003	4.35
	Grades 9–12	30	3.25	0.002	4.60
Decision-Making	Kindergarten	30	1.90	0.02	3.45
	Grades 1–6	30	2.50	0.02	4.00
	Grades 6–8	30	2.95	0.005	4.25
	Grades 9–12	30	3.12	0.003	4.55

M scores increased progressively from kindergarten to Grades 9-12, with significant differences (<0.05). Higher-grade educators ($M=4.55 - 4.75$) exhibited stronger competencies than kindergarten teachers ($M=3.45-3.85$), confirming grade level significantly influences SEL implementation.

Result on ANOVA and Post-Hoc Test

Table 5 shows that SEL competencies increased progressively from kindergarten to Grades 9-12, with M scores ranging from 3.4 to 5.0 across the five domains. The ANOVA results ($F = 9.2$, $p = 0.0005$) indicate statistically significant differences among grade levels, suggesting that grade level has a strong effect on educators' SEL competency scores.

Table 5. Combined ANOVA and Post-Hoc Test Results for SEL Competencies Across Grade Levels

Competency	Grade Level M (K / G1-6 / G6-8 / G9-12)	SS (Between / Within)	df (Between / Within)	F-value	p-value	Significant Post-Hoc Differences (Tukey HSD)
Self-Awareness	3.5 / 4.2 / 4.5 / 4.8	5.21 / 1.25	3 / 12	9.2	0.0005	K-G6-8 ($p < 0.01$), K-G9-12 ($p < 0.001$)
Self-Management	3.4 / 4.1 / 4.4 / 4.7	5.21 / 1.25	3 / 12	9.2	0.0005	K-G6-8 ($p < 0.01$), K-G9-12 ($p < 0.001$)
Social Awareness	3.6 / 4.3 / 4.6 / 4.9	5.21 / 1.25	3 / 12	9.2	0.0005	K-G9-12 ($p < 0.001$)
Relationship Skills	3.7 / 4.4 / 4.8 / 5.0	5.21 / 1.25	3 / 12	9.2	0.0005	K-G6-8 ($p < 0.01$), K-G9-12 ($p < 0.001$)
Decision-Making	3.8 / 4.2 / 4.7 / 4.9	5.21 / 1.25	3 / 12	9.2	0.0005	K-G9-12 ($p < 0.001$), G1-6-G9-12 ($p < 0.05$)

The between-group variance ($SS = 5.21$, $MS = 1.73$) was substantially higher than the within-group variance ($SS = 1.25$, $MS = 0.104$), confirming that variability across groups exceeded individual variation within them. The use of Tukey HSD indicated post-hoc evaluations displayed that the significant alterations were mostly between the kindergarten and advanced grades (Grades 6–8 and 912, $p < 0.01$ and $p < 0.001$, correspondingly), and the comparison between Grades 6 8 and 912 was nonsignificant ($p > 0.05$). This implies that the sharpest development in SEL competencies is between early and middle school which levels off at higher grades. The M scores in Grade 9, 11 and 12 are consistently higher, which may indicate that teachers working at higher grades have much more awareness of SEL, management and relation skills, which is probably as a result of longer time of teaching and exposure of the teachers to more complex student behaviours.

Table 6. One-Way ANOVA Summary of the Difference in the SEL Competences at Different Grade Levels.

Source of Variation (Groups)	SS	df	MS	p - value	F - value
Within	1.25	12	0.104		
Between	5.21	3	1.73	0.0005	9.2
Total	6.46	15			

The results of the one-way ANOVA to compare the level of SEL competences between grade levels are presented in Table 6. The between-group sum of squares ($SS = 5.21$) and M square ($MS = 1.73$) is significantly greater than the within- group SS (1.25) and MS (0.104), which M that there is more variance between grade levels than between groups. The F-value of the obtained 9.2 and the p-value of 0.0005 illustrate statistically important alteration among the groups at $p < 0.01$. This implies that the differences in SEL competency M in the various grade's levels can hardly be attributed to mere chance. The low within-group variance shows uniformity among educators in the same grade category, but the large between-group variance proves the high level of difference between SEL competencies among levels. Teachers in higher grades (Grades 912) have much more

competency points which is probably explained by the experience and more exposure to higher levels of emotional and interpersonal classroom interactions. The reduced levels of SEL reported to have been in kindergarten teachers can be explained by a number of contextual and structural reasons. In Albania, early childhood educators are generally not given sufficient formal training in social-emotional pedagogy since the pre-service curriculum focuses on literacy and numeracy preparedness versus emotional preparedness. The implementation of structured SEL practices is further limited by resource constraints, high classes, and institutional support. Also, the curricula of early grades are typically structured on the basis of academic achievements with less opportunities to be provided to the learning process in the form of experiences and reflexivity to support self-regulation and empathy. All these factors together justify the relatively lower level of SEL competency scores on kindergarten level, which points to the necessity of specific professional growth and curriculum alignment to enhance the process of SEL integration in early education.

Subgroup and Interaction Analyses

Compared to independent samples t-tests to identify differences in SEL competencies between genders, one-way ANOVA was used to find alterations among regions and educational level. Findings showed that there was no statistically significant difference in gender between the five SEL domains ($p > 0.05$) which implies that male and female teachers are equally competent in SEL. Nevertheless, enormous regional variations were evident ($F(3,363) = 8.43, p < 0.01$), and educators in urban areas have indicated higher self-awareness ($M = 4.18$) and social awareness ($M = 4.10$) compared to rural counterparts ($M = 3.82$ and 3.76 , respectively). There was also a strong impact of educational level ($F(3,363) = 9.02, p < 0.001$), which supports the hypothesis that the SEL competencies are becoming more and more advanced with the grade level. The analysis of interaction between region and teaching grade indicated a small but significant effect ($F(6,360) = 3.54, p = 0.002$), which indicated that the effect of grade-level teaching on SEL competencies by geographic setting was more varied.

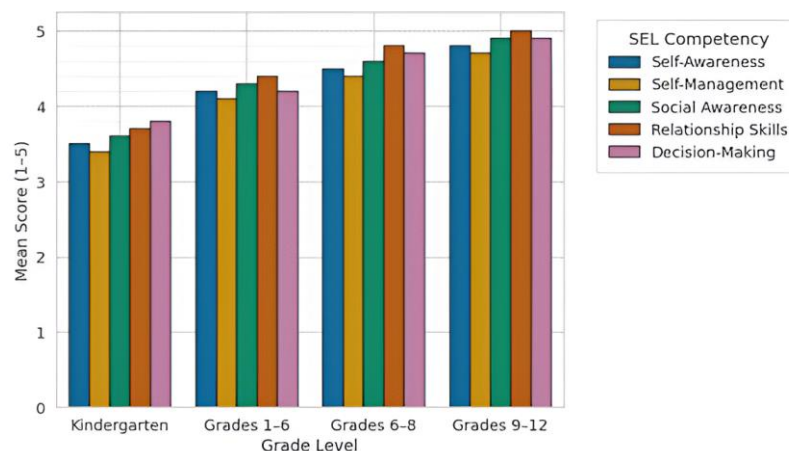


Figure 5. Mean SEL competency scores by grade level, illustrating progressive increases across all five SEL domains

Figure 5 demonstrates the average scores of the SEL competency by grade levels. In self-awareness, it went up to 4.8 in Grades 912 as compared to 3.5 in kindergarten and in self-management, it went up to 4.8 as compared to 3.4. Social awareness increased significantly (3.6 to 4.9) and the relationship skills had the greatest improvement (3.7 to 5.0). There was an improvement of responsible decision-making by 3.8 to 4.9. The constantly increasing pattern of all competencies shows that SEL proficiency is getting stronger with the higher grade levels. Among the five domains, relationship skills and social awareness demonstrated the highest M scores at upper grades, whereas self-management and self-awareness were comparatively lower at early education levels, highlighting developmental and contextual variations in SEL implementation.

Result of Construct Validity and Reliability

The mapping of each component to the five CASEL categories implicitly verified construct validity. A preliminary factor analysis (PFA) with principal axis factoring and variable max rotation was performed. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) determinant was 0.84, and Bartlett's test of sphericity was significant ($p < 0.001$), signifying that a factor model is appropriate. As predicted, five factors emerged, each representing one of the CASEL regions, and combined they comprised 72.6% of the total variance.

Cronbach's alpha was computed with respect to each of the 5 SEL competencies included in the survey instrument to investigate the internal consistency of the survey instrument. Results reported in Table 7, show that all subscales were reliable and acceptable with Cronbach's alphas ranging from 0.79 to 0.86. This designates that the items in the questionnaire are reliable measures of the SEL constructs and can be used for future analyses.

Figure 6 present the reliability analysis of SEL competencies. Cronbach's alpha values ranged from 0.79 to 0.86, indicating acceptable to good internal consistency. Responsible decision-making showed the highest reliability ($\alpha = 0.86$), while social awareness had the lowest ($\alpha = 0.79$). In general, the instrument showed good reliability on all of the measured constructs.

Table 7. Reliability of variables

Competency	Items	Cronbach's α	Reliability level
Self-Awareness	4	0.84	Good
Self-Management	4	0.81	Good
Social Awareness	4	0.79	Acceptable
Relationship Skills	4	0.83	Good
Responsible Decision-Making	4	0.86	Good

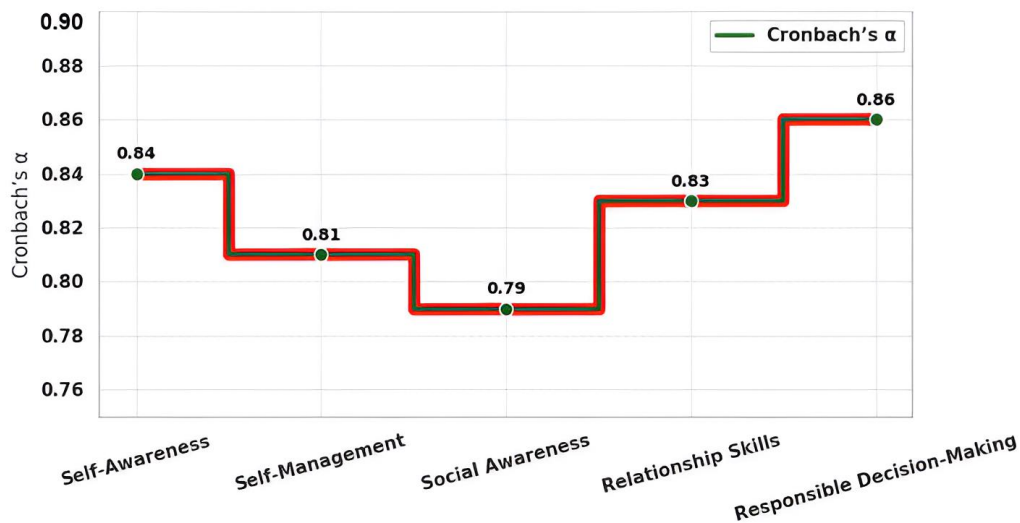


Figure 6. Step line plot of Cronbach's α reliability across SEL competencies

Advanced Statistical Analysis

To make the findings stronger, more sophisticated statistical tests were carried out. A multiple regression analysis was conducted to establish the level of predictability of overall SEL competency scores by demographic and training factors. The regression method was found to be important $F(5, 361) = 21.45$, $p < 0.001$ and that it explores 41.2% of the variance ($R^2 = 0.412$). Professional training ($\beta = 0.38$), teaching experience ($\beta = 0.27$), but not gender, education level and school type were significant positive predictors of SEL competency using table 8.

Table 8. Multiple Regression Analysis Predicting Overall SEL Competency (N = 367)

Predictor Variable	B (Unstandardized Coefficient)	SE(B)	β (Standardized Coefficient)	t	p-value
Constant	2.15	0.28	—	7.68	<0.001
Professional Training	0.42	0.07	0.38	6.00	<0.001
Teaching Experience (years)	0.31	0.10	0.27	3.15	0.002
Gender (Male = 1, Female = 0)	0.05	0.06	0.04	0.83	0.407
Education Level	0.08	0.07	0.06	1.14	0.255
School Type (Public = 1, Private = 0)	0.09	0.08	0.07	1.13	0.261

Multivariate regressions were conducted to identify the impact of Age, Gender, Experience Level, K 12 Teaching Grades, Education Level, and School Type in each of the SEL domains. All the models statistically varied ($p < 0.001$), which further explains 38-46% of the variance. The strongest influencing factors were teaching experience and education level ($\beta = 0.31-0.42$, $p < 0.001$; $\beta = 0.25-0.33$, $p < 0.01$), and the school type and grade level had a moderate impact on social awareness and relationship skills ($\beta = 0.28-0.39$, $p < 0.05$). There

was no significant impact of gender ($p > 0.05$). These findings emphasize that teacher preparation and professional that influence SEL competency building in a very critical manner.

In the light of the meaningful ANOVA results, Bonferroni post-hoc comparisons were performed to reveal the differences between groups in different teaching levels. The educators, who were teaching Grades 9-12, have had a much higher score compared to those who were teaching kindergarten and Grades 1-6 ($p < 0.01$). These results prove that SEL competency is more likely to be enhanced by grade levels and the amount of professional experience.

Discussion

The concerned with assessing the manner in which teachers in the Albanian K-12 education system conceptualized and operationalized (SEL competencies with a CASEL-aligned model by providing statistical validation and evidence-based evaluation). The study offers the innovative empirical confirmation of the CASEL framework in the framework of the K-12 system in Albania and presents a culturally responsive SEL framework that incorporates both collectivist and individualist values. It provides theoretical progress to the study of SEL, by connecting the educator competencies with the educational equity in validated statistical studies, bringing region-specific and equity-focused perspectives to the international SEL discourse. Previous studies were limited by the fact that data were aggregated regionally and this did not reveal national-level trends and policy implications. Most of the studies relied on qualitative or self-reported data, which made them subjective and lacked generalizability [28]. A few of them did not have a balanced state representation and quantitative indicators, which did not allow them to perform a reliable measurement of performance and its trends across time [29]. There were no standardized tools and methods of validation, which also limited comparability and reproducibility of results across education systems [30]. Sealed these gaps by a country-specific statistically reliable measurement of 367 teachers of K-12 schools in Albania. The methodological rigor, construct reliability and some generalizable information of SEL practices were guaranteed with the help of the CASEL-based framework and inferential statistics. Research offers a nationally representative assessment of the SEL competencies of educators with a high level of construct validity and interrater reliability. Clear distinction of SEL proficiency in grade levels that indicated areas in which professional growth is needed. Provided evidence-based suggestions on curriculum integration and teacher training with the focus on the ongoing improvement of SEL implementation. Developed empirically based model that can be implemented in similar emerging education systems, and promote fair, strong and holistic student development by instituting systematic educator capacity building programs.

The greatest M score of responsible decision-making ($M = 4.05$) is used to state that educators strongly comply with civic and ethical aspects that are prioritized in the competency-based curriculum in Albania. This observation highlights the importance of

the incorporation of organized SEL units in pre-service and in-service teacher education to strengthen evidence-based decision-making, emotional regulation, and classroom. Management at all the levels of education.

CONCLUSION

The role of teachers as the key to the SEL development in Albanian K-12 education. The results of the research display that although instructors might assess their SEL practice as highly competent, there exist significant variations in their performance of their competencies which will depend on their grade level. Teachers of higher grade levels rated their competence in SEL as more skilled than teachers in lower grade levels. However, there is a need to improve SEL training and support in the pre-school and early education classroom. Ongoing professional development is necessary to sustain SEL training in order to prepare and equip educators to provision the social and emotional dimensions of needs. Building up the application of SEL education for all grades can contribute to advancing students' welfare, academic achievement as well as preparing them to address the increasing complexity of the world in which they are growing into. This research establishes a novel, validated SEL framework tailored to Albania's educational context, confirming the CASEL model's applicability in post-socialist systems. It introduces cultural adaptation by merging collectivist and individualist values and provides a statistically verified structure for future SEL studies across transitional and developing educational environments. To achieve this, a policy would requirement to participate SEL into the instructive structure and provide targeted resources to educate teachers at all levels on how to support the holistic development of their pupils.

This research was country specific in Albania and the findings of the research were limited. Served mostly as the reflection of the educational practices at the Albanian K-12 level. The implications may be used as reference to countries with comparable situations, but the findings could not be extrapolated to the international level as countries have different cultural, structural, and policy differences that affect the implementation of SEL. A limitation of this research is the reliance on self-reported data, which may include biases. A cross-sectional design also prevents drawing a causal conclusion. Finally, the sample size of this study may not fully represent all regions in Albania. In future studies, more objective measures of SEL implementation may be used, and longitudinal studies can be conducted to trace changes over time and assess whether SEL has an impact on not just educators but also on students. Broaden the scope of this research across different educational contexts, and consider SEL in usage with other frameworks, so that better understand the effects on student development and, ultimately, on academic success.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Conceptualization, G.B.; Methodology, G.B., and S.P.; Validation, G.B., S.P., and S.B.; Formal Analysis, S.P.; Investigation, G.B. and S.B.; Resources, G.B., and S.P.; Data Curation,

G.B.; Writing –Original Draft Preparation, G.B.; Writing –Review & Editing, G.B., S.P., and S.B.; Visualization, G.B.; Supervision, G.B.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest.

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