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THE SOCIO-EMOTIONAL COMPETENCIES OF TEACHERS IN RURAL PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN YUCATÁN

Maika Maria Dorantes Moguel
University of Manitoba
Ph.D. Student

Abstract: The COVID-19 pandemic significantly transformed the educational environment, highlighting the need to address the social-emotional health of teachers and students. This qualitative study, focused on discourse analysis, explores how the social-emotional competencies (SEC) of rural elementary school teachers in Yucatán affect their perception and readiness to implement social-emotional learning (SEL) approaches in their classrooms. Through reading and reflection circles, teachers developed greater awareness of their own emotions and their impact on teaching. The results revealed four main themes: personal empowerment, improved communication, adaptability and flexibility, and reflection and self-knowledge. Teachers reported feeling more confident and empowered to implement SEL, improving communication with students and families, and adapting effectively to the individual needs of their students. The self-exploration promoted by the reflection sessions helped teachers recognize the importance of their SECs, strengthening their commitment to SEL and improving their pedagogical practices. However, several limitations were identified, including the initial reluctance of faculty, the limited study sample, and the duration of the project, which may affect the generalizability of the results. The analysis highlights the importance of communication and emotional management in creating positive relationships and a healthy learning environment. This approach is essential to improve educational quality and student well-being. The research concludes that addressing the socio-emotional needs of teachers not only improves their well-being, but also has a positive impact on the academic performance and comprehensive training of students, promoting an education of excellence.

Keywords: socio-emotional education, teacher well-being, emotional competencies of teachers, primary education.

INTRODUCTION

Society has changed. Today, schools need to adapt to a generation of students where educational services must prioritize not only knowledge, but social skills and the objectives of a globalized society (OECD, 2019; United Nations, 2015). In this context, we need to provide a healthy and peaceful classroom to have meaningful learning environments. For this reason, Mexican schools need comprehensive approaches to address the social and emotional needs of their students (Garcia & Luna, 2018).

And at the same time, take care of the well-being of the teachers.

However, many classrooms fall short of this ideal. There are hundreds of teachers who don't know what to do when their students start behaving impulsively in the classroom. The lack of support from parents who are not usually at home, the lack of counselors or other support professionals at school, and the disengagement with the management figure are factors that detract from this situation (Montgomery & Rupp, 2005).

Currently, there are few policies that try to establish a link between institutions. Teachers need to figure out how to manage the conditions of these students, increasing teachers' risk for developing psychological or psychosomatic disorders (Sieglin & Ramos Tovar, 2007).

To be able to manage groups and establish healthy learning climates with students, particularly those with challenging attitudes, has been managed by the majority of OECD countries and economies that participated in TALIS (2018) through teacher training, where 72% of all teachers have participated in Continuing Development Programs (CDP) that include instruction on student behavior and classroom management and its

relationship to social and emotional learning (OECD, 2019). But in Mexico, attention to psychological and psychiatric disorders has rarely been addressed and there is a "taboo" in educational policies in that area (Sieglin & Ramos Tovar, 2007). Additionally, there are not enough courses to help teachers and even less focused on their well-being. For example, each year each state can create its PDC system, or use those offered by the federation, and each teacher can choose their PDC according to their interests. In Yucatán in 2019, of at least 70 different courses for PDC offered at the beginning of the school year, only 17% are related to the treatment of behavioral problems or social-emotional learning according to the Professional Development Program (PRODEP).

The lack of support for the teacher increases levels of stress and frustration that combine withpoor management of social and emotional challenges in their schools and classrooms, creating conditions that reduce student achievement and increase problem behaviors, deteriorating classroom climate, and increasing the likelihood that teachers will be in a "burnout cascade", or the accumulation of stressors that can cause teachers to become "emotionally exhausted" (Marzano, et al., 2003; Osher, et al., 2007).

Therefore, a work proposal is established focused on promoting the socio-emotional competencies (SEC) of teachers from 3 rural primary schools in Yucatán, since the low development of teachers' SEC affects the implementation of socio-emotional education approaches (SEL for its acronym in English) (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009), in accordance with the theory of change shown in figure 1.

Using comprehensive programs, it is intended to impact the development of teachers' SEC, improving their well-being, improving the implementation of SEL approaches, decreasing student interruptions, and improving students' SEL competencies.
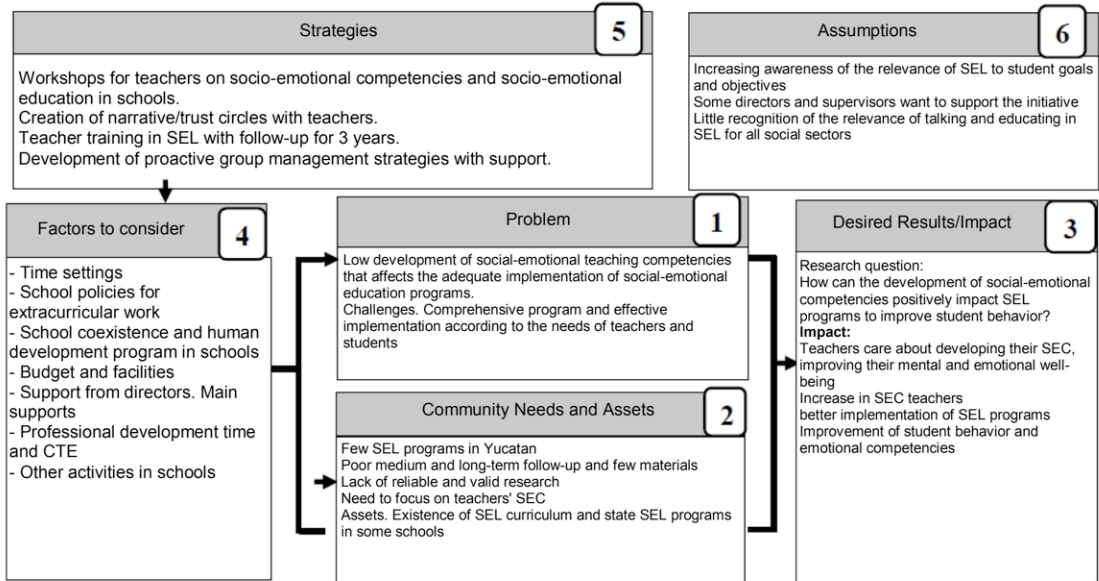
The program focuses on the following items:

1. The creation of a Plan for teachers and schools based on their needs, their socio-emotional competencies and the construction of awareness and commitment.

2. Promoting students' SEL with the implementation of SEL approaches and their alignment with the curriculum.

3. Collecting data to establish a cycle of continuous improvement.

4. The use of explicit classroom SEL practices, imbued instruction, and stewardship to sustain change.

Using various strategies such as workshops, seminars, circles of trust and constant evaluation, the results will help achieve the objectives of Mexican education. For the purposes of this work, we will focus on the socio-emotional aspects of teachers, which include an intervention based on the discovery of the strengths of each of them and systematic work with activities focused on promoting their SEC in classrooms.

This is intended to impact classroom educational processes and also improve the socio-emotional well-being of teachers. Teachers need to enjoy their work to educate and inform their students because they are the key to improving student learning (Catone, et al., 2017). To build a healthy environment for learning, teachers' mental health conditions cannot be separated from inherent factors of educational quality such that supporting our teachers can help all children access safe learning environments., inclusive and health-promoting (UNESCO, 2016).

THEORY OF CHANGE

Strategies	5
Workshops for teachers on socio-emotional competencies and socio-emotional education in schools. Creation of narrative/trust circles with teachers. Teacher training in SEL with follow-up for 3 years. Development of proactive group management strategies with support.	

Assumptions	6
Increasing awareness of the relevance of SEL to student goals and objectives Some directors and supervisors want to support the initiative Little recognition of the relevance of talking and educating in SEL for all social sectors	

Factors to consider	4
- Time settings - School policies for extracurricular work - School coexistence and human development program in schools - Budget and facilities - Support from directors. Main supports - Professional development time and CTE - Other activities in schools	

Problem	1
Low development of social-emotional teaching competencies that affects the adequate implementation of social-emotional education programs. Challenges. Comprehensive program and effective implementation according to the needs of teachers and students	

Desired Results/Impact	3
Research question: How can the development of social-emotional competencies positively impact SEL programs to improve student behavior? Impact: Teachers care about developing their SEC, improving their mental and emotional well-being Increase in SEC teachers better implementation of SEL programs Improvement of student behavior and emotional competencies	

Community Needs and Assets	2
Few SEL programs in Yucatan Poor medium and long-term follow-up and few materials Lack of reliable and valid research Need to focus on teachers' SEC Assets. Existence of SEL curriculum and state SEL programs in some schools	

If teachers invest time and effort to develop their social-emotional competencies (SEC) and the relevance of social-emotional education (SEL), then the implementation of SEL programs will positively impact student behavior.

Figure 1. *Theory of Change in the Socio-Emotional Education Program.*

RESEARCH QUESTION

How do the socio-emotional competencies of rural Yucatan primary school teachers affect their perception and preparation to implement SEL approaches in their classrooms?

THE PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of the project is:

Increase teachers' Social Emotional Competence (SEC) and awareness of Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) to implement SEL approaches that improve student behavior, peacefully building, safe and healthy classroom environments.

To achieve this and achieve the impact with the schools participating in the project, it is necessary to carry out certain steps, which are none other than the SMART objectives that the realization and alignment with the expected impact SEL can help us increase the care of teachers of the safety section to develop better relationships and classroom management skills with your students, and following that direction, improve student behavior. Therefore, the objective is:

Increase teachers' awareness and motivation about their own SEC and creating a plan to develop them, improving satisfaction and instructional effectiveness.

For the purposes of this article, the results of the first stage of the project with the 3 mentioned schools are shown, with the implementation of reading circles for teachers with which they designed their socio-emotional development plans and allowed the development of consciousness. and commitment to each of the participants.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The world in the 21st century has changed rapidly in many aspects. Children today express their needs in different ways that teachers and schools must address in the best possible way. By doing this, they are preparing children to be knowledgeable, responsible, and caring adults who can solve the problems facing this world (Elias, et al., 1997). According to the OECD (2019) "social and emotional skills have been shown to influence many important life outcomes".

To achieve that goal, research has shown that the development of social and emotional competence is the "missing piece" to provide formative development of our children to improve personal and social outcomes (CASEL, 2017; Durlak et al., 2015; Elias et al., 1997; OECD, 2019;

Teachers are the key to implementing SEL programs in schools and classrooms. As stated above, all SEL approaches begin with a training of school staff, where teachers play a leading role (Schonert-Reichl, 2017).

Teachers strongly agree with the relevance of SEL approaches, because these approaches support students' development for their future outcomes in school, work, and life. In the National Teacher Survey conducted by CASEL they found three important conclusions: first, teachers value and support SEL for all students and think that it must be given significant emphasis because the benefits are visible; Second, they believe that SEL can improve school and life outcomes, such as increasing academic achievement, increasing interest in learning, improving behavior, preventing and decreasing bullying, and improving the climate of schools; and third, teachers identify four SEL accelerators: using school-wide programming in SEL, establishing clear and explicit standards in the curriculum, increasing and improving professional development, and student engagement. parents and the community. (Bridgeland et al., 2013)

Furthermore, Schonert-Reichl's (2017) study demonstrates that teachers' social emotional competence (SEC) "strongly influences their students." It is easy to see this influence as teachers have the opportunity to "set the tone" of their classrooms when they foster positive, supportive, and strong relationships with and among students, plan lessons based on students' strengths, skills, and abilities, are Clear and explicit

expectations and behavioral guidelines that support intrinsic motivation, coach in difficult situations, encourage cooperation, and be a role model for prosocial behavior and respectful communication. These characteristics improve classroom climate and student outcomes (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009).

But, when teachers lack the resources to succeed with these tasks and have poor management of the social and emotional challenges in their schools and classrooms, students reduce their achievement and increase problem behaviors (Marzano, et al., 2003). These conditions deteriorate classroom climate and increase the likelihood of teachers being in a "burnout cascade," or the accumulation of stressors that can cause teachers to become "emotionally exhausted." This could lead to the use of more reactive and punitive responses that do not allow for self-regulation and can maintain a cycle of disruption in the classroom, increasing teachers' stress level and reducing their performance (Osher et al., 2007).

We can find that some characteristics are what is expected from teachers' SEC. The first is self-awareness, or your ability to recognize your emotions and know your strengths and weaknesses and use them in a realistic way. Secondly, social awareness is related to understanding the emotions of others and how one can affect others; This helps build understandable relationships based on cooperation and negotiation. Third, cultural responsiveness is the ability to understand that others may have different perspectives and take them into account in your interactions. Fourthly, prosocial values and responsible decision making, evaluating the factors that influence each situation and being responsible for the effects that each decision has on others. Fifth, emotional regulation or managing emotions and behaviors even in

difficult situations. Once these characteristics are mastered, there is an improvement in the perception of well-being (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009).

According to Jennings & Greenberg (2009), there are three main outcomes that teachers with high SEC skills display in their classroom. First, a strong and supportive teacher-student relationship because they understand the cognitive and emotional motivations behind students' behavior, treating them as human beings and responding effectively to their needs. Secondly, teachers are more proactive, skilled in expressing their emotions, stabilizing better communication with their students and leading them to better behavior management. Or, in other words, teachers have more effective classroom management because they understand the dynamics in the classroom. And third, teachers become an outstanding role model of the desired SEC and behavior. These three elements influence the creation of a healthy climate in the classroom.

The Mexican educational policy (SEP, 2017) designated teachers as responsible for creating healthy environments in the classroom. However, it lacked precision and development of practical tools, so it became another stress factor for teachers. It failed to align the pedagogical approach and educational purposes with the competencies and characteristics that teachers must improve to effectively teach and help their students.

To improve teachers' SEC we need to provide them with tools and mechanisms to cope with stressors that develop negatively oriented emotional responses and increase the potential for burnout (Montgomery & Rupp, 2005).

Although research in the area is limited, some of the approaches show promising evidence of their effectiveness as workplace wellness programs, social and emotional learning programs including professional learning for teachers, and mindfulness-based interventions. (MOS), such as the Cultivating Awareness and Resilience in Education (CARE) program (Dorman, 2015; Jennings et al., 2017, 2019). Along with these approaches, having a support network helps maintain well-being. (Fiorilli et al., 2017).

Although none of the approaches to supporting teachers is perfect and needs a deeper understanding of the different factors that stress teachers, to overcome these challenges, it is a step forward to build better conditions so that they can cope with the high expectations that they assume daily in their classroom.

To understand the great importance of teachers' SEC in building a prosocial environment with students and how this is related to the classroom climate can give us points to support them in their work and care for them to improve the well-being of both students and teachers. the teachers.

INTERVENTION AND METHODOLOGY

The intervention focused on discovering the strengths of each teacher and promoting their socio-emotional competencies both in the classroom and in remote work. Two-hour reading and study circles were held biweekly, in which teachers and directors, with the support of a supervisor and certified specialist on the subject, and supported by a psychologist, were able to express their ideas, needs and design improvement plans. of their socio-emotional competencies. This safe and reliable space allowed teachers to discover their voice and become empowered to recognize their teaching profile, understanding how their identity influences their students' learning.

To recognize the progress in socio-emotional awareness and teaching commitment during the first stage of the project, a qualitative methodology focused on discourse analysis

was used. This approach allowed us to explore in depth the experiences, perceptions and reflections of the teachers participating in the reading circles, providing a rich and nuanced understanding of the phenomenon studied. The research was structured as a qualitative study with a discourse analysis approach, aimed at capturing how teachers' SEC influence their perception and preparation to implement socio-emotional education approaches in their classrooms. This approach allowed us to capture the complexity of teaching experiences in the specific context of rural primary schools in a school area in Yucatán.

PARTICIPANTS

The sample was composed of 10 teachers from three rural elementary schools in a school area of Yucatán, selected through purposive sampling to ensure diverse representation in terms of experience and socio-emotional background. With them, biweekly online reading and study circles were organized, where teachers discussed texts on socio-emotional education and shared experiences and reflections.

At the end of these sessions, each teacher wrote a brief reflection in what were called "reflective journals" where they recorded their thoughts, feelings, and observations about the process of implementing SEL in their classrooms. These diaries provided a continuous and detailed account of their experiences and evolution over time.

ANALYSIS RESULTS

During the project, the teachers reflected on these topics, guided by the themes raised in each session:

1. Teach from Within. Recognize the strengths that form the teaching identity through the reflection of their professional experiences.

2. The Circle of Understanding. Delve into the fears that impact teaching work by sharing experiences and ideas in a safe and reliable space.

3. The Paradoxes of the Teaching Profession. Analyze the paradoxes inherent to teaching to understand its complexity. Based on Palmer (2018), six educational paradoxes were explored that allowed teachers to accept and manage the ambiguity of their work.

4. The Importance of Relationships in Schools. Recognize the relevance of developing healthy relationships in the school community to improve the perception of well-being.

5. Create my Socio-Emotional Development Plan. Design a socio-emotional development plan implementing actions that promote well-being. This allowed them to move from awareness to action.

6. Share Reflections of Gratitude and Appreciation. Adopt a comprehensive vision of the teaching profession and its impact on daily practice.

The reflection circles were essential for teachers to value their own voices and ideas, listen to other points of view, and recognize themselves in what they and others said. Although all activities were conducted online, providing this space was crucial for participants to feel heard, safe, and trusting. This environment facilitated changes in existing educational models and promoted the socio-emotional well-being of teachers.

Based on these themes, the analysis of the participating teachers' discourse revealed several ways in which their socio-emotional competencies influenced their perception and preparation to implement socio-emotional education approaches, with four main themes emerging:

Personal Empowerment. Teachers who developed their SECs reported feeling more confident and empowered to implement SEL in their classrooms. This confidence translated into a greater willingness to adopt new pedagogical strategies. One teacher expressed it this way:

"I have had students with mental illnesses who presented aggressive behavior and high impulsiveness, which they could not control because they were victims of physical violence from the first months of birth, with little parental responsibility and only having the paternal grandmother as support. I felt guilty and helpless for not being able to help the student. However, I can see that there are actions that I can take, even if I cannot completely change the spaces in which my students operate. What I need is to make the decision, adapt class times to give priority to these students, respect their own pace, and thus promote formative education. It's not easy, but I feel more confident doing it."

We can observe that empowerment is manifested in how daily work is carried out in the classroom, which implies an evolution in the relationship with knowledge. This, in turn, promotes educational transformations, allowing constructive training for both teachers and students through interactive and active experiences (Asunción, 2019).

2. Improvement in Communication. Teachers with more developed social-emotional skills showed better communication with their students and their families, which facilitates the implementation of SEL and the creation of a more positive learning environment. An example of this is a teacher's comment:

"To have good communication helps me improve relationships with my students and my colleagues, since it allows me to have healthy relationships to improve the learning of my students and in the work of the teaching team to make decisions agreed upon by everyone".

This analysis highlights the importance of communication in developing positive relationships. According to Redó (2010), intelligent communication, which balances emotion and reason, is based on emotional self-knowledge and effective management of both communication and relationships. Therefore, as the vignette expresses, recognizing our strengths in communication allowed teachers to interact better, valuing emotions and being empathetic in the formation of healthy relationships.

3. Adaptability and Flexibility. Teachers with advanced social-emotional competencies demonstrated a greater ability to adapt to the individual needs of their students and adjust their SEL approaches effectively. A teacher shared:

"Education is undergoing transformations and in order not to remain stagnant we need to constantly update ourselves to enrich our educational practice and for them we first need willingness and not to be afraid of changes."

This vignette highlights the need for flexibility and adaptation to change in the educational field. In the current context, the ability of teachers to stay updated and open to new methodologies is crucial to not remain stagnant. The concept of flexibility, understood as the ability to adapt to circumstances, adjust rules according to situations, apply criteria to solve problems and be supportive of others, is essential. This approach has a close relationship with resilience, since it involves recognizing transformations and adapting to them, overcoming the fear of change. The willingness to accept and adapt to new educational realities allows teachers to not only enrich their practice, but also foster a dynamic and resilient learning environment for their students.

4. Reflection and Self-knowledge. The process of self-exploration and reflection promoted by reading circles and reflective journals helped teachers recognize the importance of their SECs in teaching, strengthening their commitment to implementing SEL. One teacher reflected:

"Identity is what we are, it is the result of everything we have experienced and integrity represents the way we act in accordance with our values and principles that give us identity. To have integrity we need to recognize our identity. Every day in the classroom with our students we show our identity as teachers and by carrying out our teaching work with ethics and professionalism we demonstrate our integrity. Through the reflection sessions, I have better understood my own emotions and how they affect my teaching. This has strengthened my commitment to SEL, knowing that my emotional well-being is key to the success of my students."

This last vignette highlights the importance of identity and integrity in teaching. Identity, understood as the result of our experiences and experiences, is essential to act with integrity, which is manifested by aligning ourselves with our values and principles. Constant reflection in the classroom allows teachers to show their identity and act with ethics and professionalism, which in turn reinforces their integrity. Through the reflection sessions, teachers have deepened their understanding of their own emotions and their impact on teaching. This has strengthened their commitment to social-emotional education (SEL), recognizing that their emotional well-being is crucial to the success of their students.

From identity, we can understand who we are. Sharing with others facilitates the recognition of our emotions, underscoring the importance of SEL. Emotional awareness involves knowing both our own emotions and those of others, achieved through self-observation and observation of others (Solano Rodríguez & Reyes Vega, 2020). Therefore, recognizing our strengths and emotions becomes an action that allows teachers to interact more effectively, valuing emotions and promoting empathetic and healthy relationships in the educational environment.

The results showed a significant impact on the educational processes and the socio-emotional well-being of teachers. Improvement in these areas is essential for teachers to enjoy their work and be able to train their students, as they are key to improving student learning (Catone et al., 2017). Creating a healthy environment for learning means that teachers' mental health cannot be separated from educational quality, and supporting teachers helps create safe and inclusive learning environments (UNESCO, 2016).

TEACHER LEARNING

Social-emotional education has a significant impact on the development of students' life skills (OECD, 2019). This program allowed teachers to recognize and develop their own social-emotional competencies, which in turn facilitated better implementation of the SEL curriculum in their classrooms.

Through reading circles, teachers reflected on their professional profile and beliefs about teaching, discovering that each one is different and that their teaching style must reflect their unique identity. This process helped demystify the idea of the "perfect teacher", promoting more authentic teaching that is respectful of the individualities of teachers and students.

The impact of these activities was evident: teachers began to approach their students with greater empathy and flexibility, better recognizing and responding to their needs.

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These results mark a first step towards an education of excellence with the participating teachers and schools. Continuing with these efforts promises to continue improving absenteeism and dropout levels, thus consolidating a more effective and humane educational environment. The pandemic taught us that the social-emotional health and well-being of the teacher are fundamental to improving student learning and the classroom environment. We cannot ignore these needs, and only by internalizing and reflecting on these issues can we carry out appropriate educational processes, offering the excellent education that students deserve.

LIMITATIONS

The present project, although revealing and effective in several aspects, was not free of limitations that must be considered when interpreting its results and planning future interventions, which is why they are considered of greater relevance in future stages of this project.

First of all, we must consider modifying all activities to be carried out online. Although this project was initially planned to be carried out in person with direct support in the school communities, all activities were modified to be carried out online due to the restrictions of the pandemic. This may have limited the interaction and impact of some strategies that could have been more effective in a face-to-face environment.

Another significant limitation was the initial reluctance of the teaching staff. Although this situation improved over time, resistance during the first sessions may have influenced the speed and depth of the changes observed. If teachers do not understand or agree with the program, they are likely to perceive it as an additional task on their already busy schedule, underscoring the importance of fostering acceptance, understanding and

commitment to effectively integrate teaching practices. socio-emotional education in its teaching (Schrank, 2021).

Additionally, the limited sample that participated in the project represents another important limitation. The study was carried out in a specific context of rural primary schools in a school area in Yucatán, which makes it difficult to generalize the results to other educational contexts, especially those that are urban or have different sociodemographic characteristics. Therefore, it is essential to develop new stages of this and other SEL integration projects to understand their particularities in various educational contexts.

Finally, the duration of the project is also a limitation. Although short-term improvements were noted, the project was limited in duration. At the time of writing, analysis to evaluate the long-term impact of the interventions on teachers' social-emotional competencies and students' academic performance is ongoing. Continued monitoring and evaluation is necessary to gain a more complete understanding of the sustained effects of implemented interventions.

CONCLUSION

The needs of students have evolved, and academic preparation alone is no longer sufficient to respond to the challenges of a globalized world (OECD, 2019). The SECs are now essential so that students can interact and adequately face the multiple situations they will encounter throughout their lives.

This project highlights the importance of investing time and effort in developing teachers' social-emotional skills. Through the work sessions, teachers were able to value their voice, identity, and personal and professional processes, understanding how these aspects directly impact the teaching and learning

of their students. This awareness allowed us to rethink and develop actions for personal and professional improvement, with positive short-term results.

Furthermore, the project in its first stage demonstrated that, by improving their SEC, teachers significantly changed the way they related and interacted with their students and their families, improving communication and causing more than 85% of students to maintain a sustained communication during distance education time. This change had a notable impact on learning and reducing dropout and absenteeism rates, making them more empathetic and close to families, especially those in vulnerable situations.

In conclusion, addressing the socio-emotional needs of teachers has positive impacts both in the academic field and in the comprehensive training of students. Promoting and caring for the socio-emotional environment allows teachers to model healthy behaviors and improve relationships and interactions within the educational community. Therefore, it is essential that educational institutions continue to develop and support programs that promote the socio-emotional well-being of teachers, since this translates into an education of excellence and comprehensive training for students, better preparing them for life's challenges, in a globalized society.

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