

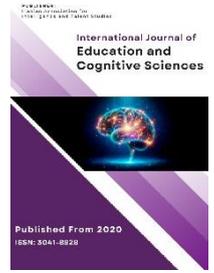


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Exploring the Components of Social and Emotional Competencies (SEC) for Iranian EFL Teachers: Teachers' Perceptions in Focus

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ABSTRACT

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Purpose: This study aimed to explore Iranian EFL teachers' perceptions of social and emotional competencies (SEC) and to identify the main underlying components of SEC from their perspectives.

Methods and Materials: The study employed a qualitative grounded theory design to investigate teachers' perceptions of SEC and extract its main components. Convenience sampling was used to select 40 Iranian EFL teachers (both male and female) holding PhDs in English Language Teaching and working at different universities across Iran. Data were collected through two qualitative instruments: a semi-structured written interview consisting of five open-ended questions and written reflective journals. The interview questions were validated by EFL experts for clarity and relevance and were distributed via Google Forms. Reflective journals were collected through digital platforms to ensure accessibility and flexibility. Data triangulation was achieved by combining interview and journal data. To ensure trustworthiness, member checking and reviewer checking were conducted. The collected data were analyzed through open coding to extract initial themes and axial coding to identify relationships among categories and develop overarching components of SEC.

Findings: The results revealed that Iranian EFL teachers perceive SEC as a multidimensional construct encompassing intrapersonal, interpersonal, managerial, and ethical dimensions. Open coding yielded themes such as emotional awareness, developmental orientation, realistic self-image, emotion and behavior management, classroom management, social relations, rapport, acceptance of differences, appropriate decision-making, anticipation of consequences, and responsibility-taking. Through axial coding, these themes were synthesized into four core components: Self-Awareness Competence, Self-Management Competence, Social Awareness Competence, and Decision-Making Competence. The findings indicate that teachers conceptualize SEC as an integrated framework essential for effective teaching, emotional regulation, relational sensitivity, and professional accountability.

Conclusion: The study concludes that SEC for Iranian EFL teachers is a complex and integrated construct composed of four interrelated competencies—self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and decision-making.

Keywords: English as a foreign language (EFL) teachers, social and emotional competencies (SEC), social and emotional learning (SEL), teacher perception

1. Introduction

Teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL) is an inherently complex profession that extends far beyond the transmission of linguistic knowledge. In contemporary classrooms, teachers are expected to manage diverse learners, navigate emotional tensions, foster inclusive relationships, and make ethically sound decisions under pressure. These multifaceted demands have intensified attention toward teachers' social and emotional competencies (SEC) as foundational dimensions of professional effectiveness. Recent scholarship underscores that teachers' social and emotional learning (SEL) is not peripheral but central to sustainable teaching and student success (Schonert-Reichl, 2017; Soutter, 2023). In emotionally charged instructional contexts, particularly in EFL settings where communication, identity, and cultural nuances intersect, teachers' capacity to regulate emotions, build rapport, and exercise responsible judgment becomes indispensable.

The theoretical roots of SEL can be traced to the construct of emotional intelligence proposed by Salovey and Mayer, who conceptualized emotions as adaptive processes influencing cognition and behavior. Subsequent developments emphasized the integration of emotion and cognition across the lifespan (Schonert-Reichl, 2019). Within educational contexts, SEL has been formalized through frameworks such as the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL), which identifies five core competencies: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making (Casel, 2022). These competencies encapsulate the knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary for navigating interpersonal dynamics and internal emotional processes effectively.

Research has consistently demonstrated that teachers' SEC influences classroom climate, instructional quality, and student outcomes. Teachers who possess strong social-emotional capacities are better equipped to manage disruptive behaviors, reduce emotional exhaustion, and foster positive student engagement (Aldrup et al., 2020; Van Den Brink et al., 2025). Conversely, unmanaged negative emotions may undermine sensitivity toward students and diminish instructional effectiveness (Koenen et al., 2018). In EFL classrooms, where communicative anxiety, cultural diversity, and performance pressure are common, teachers' emotional regulation and relational competence become even more salient (Li, 2021).

The importance of teacher well-being is further emphasized in studies linking SEC to professional thriving and reduced burnout (Collie & Perry, 2019). Emotional exhaustion has been shown to mediate the relationship between disruptive student behavior and teachers' competence beliefs (Van Den Brink et al., 2025). Moreover, effective teachers are often characterized by interpersonal warmth, adaptability, and reflective awareness—qualities deeply embedded in SEC constructs (Alzobiani, 2020; Renandya & Jacobs, 2021). These findings suggest that SEC is not merely an auxiliary skill set but a core professional attribute.

Empirical investigations into educators' perceptions of SEL reveal both recognition of its importance and ambiguity in its conceptualization. School leaders and teachers often acknowledge the relevance of SEC but struggle to articulate its components clearly (Bailey & Weiner, 2022; Jones & Cater, 2020). In some contexts, weak conceptual understanding has limited effective implementation (O'Conner et al., 2017). At the same time, other studies report positive perceptions and perceived necessity of SEC for academic and life success (Al-Matari et al., 2022; Dyson et al., 2023). Such mixed findings highlight the need for contextualized explorations of teachers' own understandings of SEC.

In language education specifically, the relational and affective dimensions of teaching are magnified. Instruction in idiomatic language, communicative competence, and cultural pragmatics requires sensitivity to learners' emotional states and social backgrounds (Fatehi Rad & Atashdast, 2023). Moreover, fairness perceptions, feedback practices, and assessment-related decisions in EFL contexts are deeply intertwined with socio-emotional dynamics (Rayani & Fatehi Rad, 2023). Iranian EFL teachers operate within sociocultural environments that demand responsiveness to institutional expectations, learner diversity, and evolving educational reforms. Despite these realities, systematic investigation into their SEC perceptions remains limited.

The global shift toward competency-based education further reinforces the importance of teacher competencies beyond subject-matter expertise. Contemporary research on teacher competence modeling emphasizes multidimensional constructs integrating cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions (Zlatkin-Troitschanskaia et al., 2025). Studies on instructional quality demonstrate that teachers' competence significantly predicts students' affective learning outcomes (Yang et al., 2025). Furthermore, teacher

transformation and continuous professional development increasingly emphasize social and personality competencies, particularly among younger generations of educators (Utami, 2025; Yonson, 2025). Inclusive education research also highlights the necessity of socio-emotional competence in addressing diverse learner needs (Tveitnes et al., 2025).

Recent technological and pedagogical innovations likewise intersect with socio-emotional dimensions of teaching. For instance, preservice teachers' competence development through innovative instructional strategies has shown positive impacts on motivation and professional growth (Schröder et al., 2025; Wang & Kale, 2025). These developments underscore the evolving landscape in which teacher competence must be understood holistically. SEC, therefore, emerges as a cross-cutting dimension connecting teacher well-being, instructional effectiveness, inclusion, and professional identity.

Despite extensive international scholarship, contextual research within Iran remains scarce. Existing Iranian studies have primarily focused on instructional strategies, classroom management, and learner outcomes, with limited attention to teachers' own socio-emotional frameworks (Marashi & Naghibi, 2020). Moreover, foundational discussions introducing SEL to broader audiences have not sufficiently addressed localized teacher perceptions (Jones & Doolittle, 2017). Considering the socio-cultural particularities of Iranian higher education and EFL environments, exploring teachers' lived perceptions of SEC becomes essential for culturally responsive program development.

State-level and systemic efforts to strengthen SEL emphasize the necessity of comprehensive support structures and implementation policies (Dusenbury & Weissberg, 2018). However, such initiatives must be grounded in educators' contextual realities and subjective understandings (Hamilton & Doss, 2021). Scholars caution that advocacy for SEL must be accompanied by clarity of purpose and practical guidance to avoid superficial adoption (Hess, 2020). Thus, identifying how Iranian EFL teachers conceptualize SEC can inform more targeted professional development initiatives.

The conceptual overlap between SEC and broader notions of social competence further enriches the theoretical foundation of this study. Social competence has been described as a multidimensional construct encompassing effectiveness in social interaction and emotional understanding (Rose-Krasnor, 1997). Integrating this perspective with contemporary SEL frameworks allows for

a nuanced understanding of teacher competencies within relational classroom ecologies.

Given the increasing emphasis on teacher quality and competence in global education discourse, it is critical to investigate SEC from the perspective of those directly engaged in instructional practice. Understanding teachers' perceptions can illuminate implicit frameworks guiding their professional behavior, reveal culturally embedded interpretations of competence, and contribute to the development of context-sensitive assessment tools and training programs. Therefore, the present study aims to explore the components of social and emotional competencies (SEC) for Iranian EFL teachers based on teachers' perceptions.

2. Methods and Materials

2.1. Study Design and Participants

Based on the study's aims, a grounded theory design was employed to explore teachers' perceptions of SEC, extract the main components of SCE. Grounded theory is characterized by grounding themes, theories and instruments upon the data that could be in different forms including texts, interviews, narratives, and so on.

Convenience sampling was used to select 40 EFL teachers from both genders for participation in the semi-structured written interview and reflective journal. The purpose was to extract their perceptions of SEC and its components to develop a SEC scale. This group was diverse in terms of teaching experience and age. They were PhD holder in English Language Teaching (ELT). Their work place was different universities in Iran. They were selected based on ethics. That is, no force was exerted in their selection. Their private information was not leaked. They were justified on the research aims.

Prior to the implementation of the study, the semi-structured interview was prepared and sampling was done based on ethics. Then, the Google form of the semi-structured written interview was released among the participants to be answered. Next, the participants were asked to share their written reflective journals with the researchers.

2.2. Measures

2.2.1. Semi-Structured Written Interview

The participants underwent a semi-structured written interview in five open-ended questions as a choice to

uncover how they perceive SEC and its components. The interview questions were developed in a way to prompt the participants to reflect on their understanding of SEC and its components in EFL teaching. More specifically, the questions were concerned with the participants' perceptions of SEC for EFL teachers, and their perceptions of personal, social, management-related and decision-making-related competence(s) of social and emotional competencies (SEC) for EFL teachers. Then, a group of EFL experts who were faculty members evaluated interview questions for consistency, relevance, and transparency. To avoid the participants' inconvenience, the interview questions were designed via Google Forms and release through WhatsApp or telegram.

This study benefited from the written form of the interview because there was no need to arrangement of interview sessions or meeting locations. Additionally, in this type of interview, the participants were reached regardless of their time and location. More importantly, this interview method did not need transcription. To ensure credibility of interviews, the researchers shared the findings with the participants to confirm they have interpreted their sayings correctly. This is called member checking. To check dependability of data, the researchers invited a reviewer outside the study to review the interview method and findings to ensure everything was clear and consistent. This is called reviewer checking.

2.2.2. Written Reflective Journal

As we know, trustworthiness of the qualitative data requires different strategies one of which is data triangulation. Triangulation means using different data sources. In this study, to achieve triangulation, in addition to the written interview, written reflective journals were also used. This involved asking the participants to write freely whatever they know and think about SEC and its components and send their outputs to the researcher via WhatsApp or Telegram. This could be anything including their narratives, reflections, stories, free associations, personal notes, and so on. To ensure credibility and dependability of journals, member checking and reviewer checking were used.

2.3. Data Analysis

To analyze the data, the collected interviews and reflective journals were subjected to open and axial coding to extract the participants' perceptions of SEC and its

components and finally develop a SEC scale for Iranian EFL teachers. Open coding involved categorizing data (in order to answer the first research question), and axial coding identifies relationships between categories and sub-categories (to answer the second research question).

3. Findings and Results

With regard to the first research question (i.e., What are Iranian EFL teachers' perceptions of SEC?), the following themes were extracted:

Awareness of ones' emotions: Awareness of one's emotions was among the frequent perceptions mentioned by the participants. The participants defined this perception as their recognition of their emotions in teaching. They believed that teachers should be aware of their emotions, and their contributions to teaching. For example, participant 7 stated that: *"I think SEC means awareness of emotions and feelings in teaching. It also means how these emotions contribute to teaching. You cannot deny the effect of emotions on teaching. Therefore, a main part of SEC is awareness of emotions and contributions of them to teaching."* This participant perceived that there is an affinity between teachers' emotions and their teaching. He believed that teaching and emotions are tied strongly.

The participants also believed that SEC means awareness of both positive and negative feelings. For example, participant 3 mentioned that *"It means recognition of your positive and negative emotions. Teachers cannot claim that they only experience positive emotions. Negative emotions are also there to influence our teaching."* According to this participant, SEC in teaching means presence of both positive and negative emotions.

Having a development mentality: The second frequent perception pinpointed by the participants was having a development mentality, meaning that SEC means teachers' having orientation toward development and tendency to improve in their job. This theme means that teachers should always think about development and improvement in their profession. For example, Participant 15 stated, *"I believe that SEC means seeking to develop and improve in teaching. It means that teachers should not be satisfied with academic stagnation. Instead, they should use different tools, strategies, and opportunities to improve and develop."* According to this participant, a sign of SEC is seeking development and improvement in teaching and avoidance of stagnation.

Having a real image of oneself: Having a real image of oneself was another frequent perception expressed by the participants. This perception showed the participants' consideration of having a real image of oneself as part of SEC. Having a real self-image means that the participants associated SEC with an accurate evaluation of oneself. For instance, participant 1 highlighted that "*SEC is the ability to recognize oneself realistically. We should identify a real image of ourselves. Having a true self-concept is a dimension of SEC.*" This quotation implies that SEC refers to teachers' correct evaluation and image of themselves.

Management of emotions: Management of emotions was among the salient perceptions highlighted by the participants. The participants believed that SEC is characterized with their ability to manage their emotions in teaching. This theme signaled that the participants defined SEC as the ability to control their emotions in the class. For example, Participant 16 said: "*It refers to teachers' mastery in managing their emotions. Quality of teaching is affected by teachers' emotion management*". Participant 12 also added: "*SEC signals the teachers' ability to control their anxiety and anger. These feelings debilitate teaching.*"

Management of behaviors: Management of behaviors, as another prominent perception extracted from the participants, revolved around the meaning that SEC means teachers' ability to manage their various behaviors in the classroom. The participants highlighted that controlling class behaviors is an indication of teachers' SEC. Participant 3 defined SEC as "*The level of teachers' success at managing their behaviors. Behaviors show social and emotional features of teachers. Accordingly, when teachers can control their behaviors, they have both social and emotional competencies.*" This participant suggested that behavior control is a pure sign of SEC.

Closely related to this, the participants believed that teachers should present appropriate behaviors in the class as an index of their SEC. In this regard, Participant 34 added: "*SEC index is proper behaviors in the class. When a teacher has appropriate behaviors, it shows his or her SEC.*"

Management of classroom: The participants mentioned management of classroom as part of teachers' SEC. They perceived that a sign of teachers' SEC is their competence in managing their classroom. It shows that the participants considered SEC as the ability to control the classroom atmosphere. In this regard, Participant 20 said: "*Classroom management is a kind of ability that constitutes SEC. Atmosphere of the classroom is complex and requires management and control by teachers. Teachers who are*

expert in this ability have a high SEC." Participant 40 also believed that teachers' class control manifests their SEC, saying that "*A manifestation of teachers' SEC is their ability in and awareness of class control.*"

Ability in social relations: Ability in social relationships was another prevalent perception stated by the participants about SEC. The participants defined SEC as teachers' ability to create social relationships with students, colleagues and parents. In this regard, Participant 39 noted: "*Ability in social relations helps teachers build their SEC. It establishes a kind of competence that empowers teachers to have social relationships with students, colleagues and parents.*" This respondent perceived that relations with different groups is a building block of SEC for teachers.

Additionally, the participants referred to teachers' awareness of the role of social relations in teaching effectiveness as a dimension of SEC. For instance, Participant 22 stated: "*SEC is teachers' awareness of how social relations with others play a key role in teaching effectiveness. Teaching effectiveness is under the influence of social relations.*"

Rapport: Another recurrent perception of the participants was rapport. The participants specified that teachers' ability to feel togetherness with students and show empathy for them builds their SEC. As stated by Participant 31: "*Teachers' SEC includes their ability to empathize with students and feel togetherness with them. Teachers should be supportive to students*".

Also, the participants admitted that teachers' SEC encompasses their ability to identify the needs of different students. In this regard, Participant 19 admitted: "*Different students have different learning needs. Teachers with high SEC are able to identify learning needs of different students. They also have duty to address the identified needs.*"

Acceptance of differences: Acceptance of differences was among the recurrent perceptions highlighted by the participants. This perception reveals the participants' belief that SEC involves teachers' acceptance of differences. That is, teachers should be open to differences and welcome differences. In the saying of Participant 16, "*SEC means teachers' acceptance of differences. Openness to differences indicates social and emotional competence of teachers. Teachers who accept differences and regard differences positive rather than negative have social and emotional competence.*"

Moreover, the participants highlighted that in addition to accepting differences, teachers should respect differences existing among students. As said by Participant 26: "*SEC*

refers to teachers' respecting differences among students. Students are different in terms of background, appearance, knowledge, literacy, family and so on. Teachers should respect all these differences."

Making appropriate decisions: Making appropriate decisions was a prominent perception of the participants. The participants conceived that the ability of teachers to make good decisions shows their SEC. In fact, the participants associated proper decision-making with SEC. As Participant 5 suggested: *"I consider that there is correlation between the ability of teachers to make good decisions shows their SEC. This association is strong. Decisions show socio-emotional character of teachers."* Similarly, in the words of Participant 10: *"SEC is teachers' ability to make decisions that are reasonable. Reason in decision-making is an indication of SEC."*

Anticipating the consequences of one's decisions: Extracted from the participants' responses, was anticipating the consequences of one's decisions. For example, Participant 3's saying was: *"In my view, SEC implies teachers' anticipation of the consequences of their decisions. Each decision has some positive or negative consequences. Anticipating these consequences shows teachers' possession of SEC."* According to this participant, in addition to making appropriate decisions, teachers should also anticipate what consequences their decisions may have. Teachers should not miss this important aspect of decision-making.

Taking the responsibility of one's decisions: The final perception extracted from the participants' words was taking the responsibility of one's decisions. This perception means that SEC goes beyond making appropriate decisions and anticipating the consequences of decisions. Teachers should also take the responsibility of their decisions. In the sayings of Participant 13: *"SEC refers to the ability and courage of teachers to take the responsibility of their decisions. What I mean is that since decisions are charged with different consequences, teachers should be courageous enough to take the responsibility of their decisions. Otherwise, they cannot claim that they have SEC."*

Concerning the second research question (i.e., What are the main components of SEC according to Iranian EFL teachers?), the following four main components were extracted combining similar themes within the axial coding step: Self-Awareness Competence (awareness of one's emotions, having a development mentality, and having a realistic sense of oneself), Self-Management Competence (management of emotions, management of behaviors, and

management of classroom), Social Awareness Competence (awareness of social relations, rapport, and acceptance of differences), and Decision-Making Competence (making appropriate decisions, anticipating the consequences of one's decisions, and taking the responsibility of one's decisions).

4. Discussion and Conclusion

The present study sought to explore Iranian EFL teachers' perceptions of social and emotional competencies (SEC) and to identify the main components underlying these perceptions. The findings derived from open coding revealed a rich and multidimensional understanding of SEC, encompassing awareness of one's emotions, having a development mentality, possessing a realistic self-image, management of emotions, management of behaviors, management of classroom, ability in social relations, rapport, acceptance of differences, making appropriate decisions, anticipating consequences, and taking responsibility for decisions. Through axial coding, these themes were organized into four overarching components: Self-Awareness Competence, Self-Management Competence, Social Awareness Competence, and Decision-Making Competence. These results demonstrate that Iranian EFL teachers conceptualize SEC as a holistic construct integrating intrapersonal, interpersonal, managerial, and ethical dimensions.

Regarding Self-Awareness Competence, participants emphasized awareness of emotions, developmental orientation, and realistic self-evaluation. This aligns closely with the theoretical foundations of emotional intelligence, which define emotional awareness as the ability to perceive and understand one's own emotional states {Salovey & Mayer, 1990}. CASEL's framework similarly defines self-awareness as recognizing emotions, thoughts, and values and understanding how they influence behavior (Casel, 2022). The teachers' emphasis on acknowledging both positive and negative emotions resonates with research indicating that emotional awareness is a prerequisite for emotional regulation and professional resilience (Schonert-Reichl, 2019). Moreover, the developmental mentality expressed by participants parallels contemporary views of teacher professionalism that stress reflective growth and adaptive expertise (Renandya & Jacobs, 2021). The finding that teachers value having a "real image of oneself" reflects conceptualizations of social competence that integrate accurate self-perception with effective interaction (Rose-

Krasnor, 1997). In EFL contexts, where identity negotiation and communicative vulnerability are common, such self-awareness becomes especially critical (Li, 2021).

Self-Management Competence emerged as another central component, including emotion regulation, behavior control, and classroom management. This result strongly corresponds with CASEL's description of self-management as the ability to regulate emotions, thoughts, and behaviors across contexts (Casel, 2022). Teachers' references to controlling anger, anxiety, and stress align with evidence showing that unmanaged negative emotions reduce teacher sensitivity and instructional quality (Koenen et al., 2018). Furthermore, emotional exhaustion has been shown to mediate the relationship between disruptive student behavior and competence beliefs (Van Den Brink et al., 2025). Thus, participants' emphasis on emotion and behavior management reflects empirical realities of classroom dynamics. The inclusion of classroom management within SEC also resonates with findings linking socio-emotional competence to effective classroom governance (Aldrup et al., 2020). In Iranian EFL contexts, classroom management is often intertwined with communicative challenges and learner anxiety, reinforcing the importance of socio-emotional regulation (Marashi & Naghibi, 2020). The present findings therefore support prior research demonstrating that teachers' SEC is integral to maintaining instructional stability and fostering positive learning environments (Collie & Perry, 2019).

Social Awareness Competence, encompassing social relations, rapport, and acceptance of differences, constituted another major theme. Teachers highlighted empathy, respect for diversity, and awareness of relational impact as defining elements of SEC. This corresponds with CASEL's conceptualization of social awareness as the capacity to understand and empathize with individuals from diverse backgrounds (Casel, 2022). Research in inclusive education further emphasizes the importance of teachers' socio-emotional competence in addressing learner diversity effectively (Tveitnes et al., 2025). The prominence of rapport in teachers' responses is consistent with studies indicating that strong teacher-student relationships enhance motivation and academic engagement (Dyson et al., 2023). Additionally, effective teachers in EFL contexts are often characterized by relational warmth and interpersonal sensitivity (Alzobiani, 2020). The recognition of diversity and respect for differences reflects broader educational commitments to equity and inclusion, themes central to SEL scholarship (Baskin, 2022; Black, 2022). These findings

suggest that Iranian EFL teachers view SEC not merely as internal regulation but as relational competence embedded in social interaction.

Decision-Making Competence, comprising making appropriate decisions, anticipating consequences, and assuming responsibility, represents a particularly salient contribution of this study. Participants did not restrict SEC to emotional or relational skills but extended it to ethical and reflective judgment. This mirrors CASEL's definition of responsible decision-making as making constructive choices based on ethical standards and consideration of consequences (Casel, 2022). The teachers' emphasis on anticipating outcomes aligns with theoretical perspectives that link emotional intelligence to improved problem-solving and adaptive functioning {Salovey & Mayer, 1990}. In educational leadership research, responsible decision-making has been associated with effective policy implementation and school climate improvement (Bailey & Weiner, 2022). The finding that teachers perceive responsibility-taking as integral to SEC also supports evidence that professional competence involves accountability and reflective practice (Yonson, 2025). In EFL settings, decisions related to assessment fairness, feedback, and classroom discipline carry significant emotional implications, reinforcing the importance of socio-emotional judgment (Rayani & Fatehi Rad, 2023).

The overall structure of four extracted components partially overlaps with but also slightly diverges from CASEL's five-competency model. While relationship skills were integrated within social awareness in the present findings, the participants' conceptualization remains theoretically coherent with established SEL frameworks (Casel, 2022). Similar alignment has been observed in other contexts where teachers demonstrated awareness of core SEC dimensions (Al-Matari et al., 2022; Soutter, 2023; Wright et al., 2020). However, unlike studies reporting limited conceptual clarity among educators (Jones & Cater, 2020; O'Conner et al., 2017), the Iranian EFL teachers in this study articulated relatively sophisticated and differentiated understandings of SEC. This discrepancy may reflect contextual differences, professional maturity, or the influence of evolving competency-based educational discourse (Zlatkin-Troitschanskaia et al., 2025).

Furthermore, the multidimensional perception of SEC observed here resonates with contemporary competence modeling that integrates affective, cognitive, and behavioral domains (Yang et al., 2025). As teacher competence frameworks increasingly incorporate socio-emotional

dimensions, the present findings reinforce the necessity of contextual validation. Teachers' emphasis on developmental mentality also corresponds with emerging research on teacher transformation and self-development strategies in changing educational landscapes (Utami, 2025). In addition, systemic supports and policy-level reinforcement have been identified as crucial for effective SEC implementation (Dusenbury & Weissberg, 2018; Hamilton & Doss, 2021). The teachers' awareness of SEC components suggests readiness for structured professional development initiatives.

In sum, the discussion reveals that Iranian EFL teachers conceptualize SEC as a comprehensive construct encompassing intrapersonal awareness, emotional and behavioral regulation, relational sensitivity, and ethical decision-making. These findings converge with global SEL frameworks and empirical studies while contributing culturally grounded insights to the literature. By articulating nuanced perceptions of SEC, participants demonstrate recognition of its significance for teaching effectiveness, well-being, and learner outcomes.

Despite its contributions, this study is subject to certain limitations. First, the use of convenience sampling and the relatively small sample size of 40 participants may limit the generalizability of the findings. Second, reliance on self-reported data through written interviews and reflective journals may introduce social desirability bias. Third, participants were all university-level EFL teachers holding advanced degrees, which may not represent the perceptions of teachers in other educational levels or institutional contexts. Finally, the qualitative design, while rich in depth, does not allow for statistical validation of the extracted components.

Future research may employ mixed-method or quantitative designs to validate the four-component SEC model identified in this study and develop standardized measurement instruments. Comparative studies across educational levels, institutional types, and cultural regions within Iran would enhance generalizability. Longitudinal investigations could examine how SEC evolves across career stages. Experimental research assessing the effectiveness of targeted SEC training programs for EFL teachers would also be valuable. Additionally, exploring the relationship between teachers' SEC and student academic achievement, motivation, and emotional well-being would deepen understanding of its practical impact.

From a practical perspective, teacher education programs should integrate structured SEC training modules

emphasizing self-awareness, emotion regulation, relational skills, and ethical decision-making. Professional development workshops may include reflective practices, scenario-based learning, and peer mentoring to strengthen socio-emotional capacities. Institutional policymakers should recognize SEC as a core professional competence and design supportive environments that reduce emotional exhaustion and promote well-being. Finally, ongoing reflective evaluation and collaborative dialogue among teachers can foster sustained development of SEC within EFL contexts.

Authors' Contributions

All authors significantly contributed to this study.

Declaration

In order to correct and improve the academic writing of our paper, we have used the language model ChatGPT.

Transparency Statement

Data are available for research purposes upon reasonable request to the corresponding author.

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Declaration of Interest

The authors report no conflict of interest.

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Ethical Considerations

In this study, to observe ethical considerations, participants were informed about the goals and importance of the research before the start of the interview and participated in the research with informed consent.

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