

Examining the Competencies of Parents to Teach Social Emotional Learning Skills for Children

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Abstract

Social emotional learning (SEL) plays a critical role in the development of children, equipping them with the skills needed to navigate relationships, regulate emotions, and solve problems effectively. Parents, as primary educators and role models, hold significant responsibility in fostering these competencies at home. This qualitative research explores the competencies of parents to teach SEL skills to their children, examining their awareness, strategies, and challenges. Data was gathered through semi structured interviews with 20 parents from diverse backgrounds. Findings highlight key competencies, including communication, emotional intelligence, and positive reinforcement, while identifying barriers such as lack of resources and parental stress. Recommendations focus on empowering parents through training programs and community support initiatives.

Keywords

Social Emotional Learning, Parental Competencies, Emotional Intelligence

1. Introduction

Social emotional learning (SEL) encompasses the development of skills such as self-awareness, self-regulation, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making (MacFarlane & Honeck, 2023). While schools play a vital role in SEL education, parents significantly influence their children's emotional and social development from an early age (Jones & Doolittle, 2017). However, little research focuses on parents' competencies and readiness to teach these essential skills.

This study aims to bridge that gap by exploring parents' competencies, chal-

allenges, and best practices in fostering SEL at home. Understanding these aspects can help inform educational initiatives and support programs designed to empower parents in their role as SEL educators.

Despite the growing emphasis on SEL in educational settings, parental involvement remains a crucial but underexplored component. Many parents lack formal training or resources to teach SEL skills effectively, potentially limiting their children's emotional and social development (Durlak et al., 2011). This study seeks to understand the competencies parents currently possess, the challenges they face, and the strategies they employ in teaching SEL to their children.

SEL has been extensively studied in educational contexts, but research on parental involvement remains limited. Key findings from existing literature highlight the following areas:

1. Importance of Parental Influence: Parents play a pivotal role in modeling and teaching SEL skills, which significantly impact children's academic and social outcomes (Bierman et al., 2018; McCormick et al., 2016).

2. Parental Competencies: Effective SEL teaching at home requires parents to possess strong communication skills, emotional intelligence, and the ability to foster a supportive environment (Havighurst et al., 2010; Miller et al., 2018).

3. Challenges Faced by Parents: Usakli (2024), analyzed the literature on social emotional learning in his study. However, it was observed that there were rarely studies on parents and social emotional learning in these sources. Common barriers include time constraints, stress, lack of resources, and limited knowledge of SEL concepts (Elias et al., 2008; Atwell et al., 2021).

4. Effective Interventions: Parental training programs focusing on SEL have shown promising results in enhancing parents' competencies and children's social and emotional development (Zinsser et al., 2021; Darling et al., 2019; Dinallo, 2016; Elliott et al., 2022; Gravesteyn et al., 2013).

This literature underscores the need for qualitative research to delve deeper into parents' lived experiences and competencies in teaching SEL. And tables are not prescribed, although the various table text styles are provided.

2. Methodology

This qualitative study employed a phenomenological approach to explore parents' experiences and competencies in teaching SEL. Data were collected through semi structured interviews with 20 parents from diverse backgrounds, ensuring a comprehensive understanding of their perspectives. Interviews were transcribed, coded, and analyzed thematically.

Interview analysis in qualitative research involves interpreting and making sense of data collected through interviews to identify themes, patterns, and insights. This process aims to understand participants' experiences, perspectives, and social phenomena in a detailed and contextual manner (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Unlike quantitative methods, qualitative analysis focuses on non-numerical data, such as spoken words and personal narratives.

How to Conduct Interview Analysis

1. Data Transcription: Convert audio or video interview recordings into text for detailed analysis (Bird, 2005).
2. Familiarization: Read and re-read the data to gain a comprehensive understanding of the content (Smith et al., 2009).
3. Coding: Identify significant segments of the text and assign labels (codes) to capture key ideas (Miles & Huberman, 1994).
4. Thematic Analysis: Group codes into themes and patterns that provide insights (Braun & Clarke, 2006).
5. Interpretation: Analyze themes in the context of the research questions and theoretical framework (Patton, 2015).
6. Validation: Ensure the accuracy and reliability of the findings through peer review or participant validation (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

In qualitative research, ensuring validity and reliability involves adopting rigorous strategies that enhance the credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability of the findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Validity, often referred to as credibility in qualitative contexts, is achieved through techniques such as triangulation, member checking, prolonged engagement, and peer debriefing (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Triangulation involves using multiple data sources, methods, or theories to cross-check findings, while member checking allows participants to verify the accuracy of the data and interpretations.

Reliability, or dependability, is addressed by maintaining a clear and detailed audit trail, which documents the research processes and decision-making steps (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Researchers also engage in reflexivity to continuously assess their biases and ensure transparency in the research process (Patton, 2015). By integrating these strategies, qualitative researchers can enhance the trustworthiness and rigor of their studies.

In this study, high validity and reliability were achieved through focus group interviews, approval of interview transcripts, and 80% code agreement between two different coders.

3. Findings

The analysis revealed the following key themes:

1. Awareness of SEL: Most parents were aware of the importance of SEL but lacked a comprehensive understanding of its components.
2. Key Competencies: Effective communication, active listening, and emotional intelligence were identified as essential competencies for teaching SEL at home.
3. Strategies Employed: Parents reported using storytelling, roleplaying, and open conversations to teach SEL skills.
4. Challenges Faced: Common challenges included parental stress, time constraints, and difficulty managing their own emotions.
5. Support Needs: Parents expressed a need for accessible resources, workshops, and community support to enhance their SEL teaching capabilities.

Here is a structured approach to presenting parents' opinions as codes, categories, and themes in a qualitative study on their competencies in teaching social emotional learning (SEL) skills to their children:

Theme 1: Parental Awareness of SEL

Category 1.1: Understanding the Concept of SEL

Code: Limited knowledge of SEL

Sample Sentence: "I have heard of social emotional learning, but I'm not exactly sure what it means or how to teach it to my child."

Code: Awareness of the importance of SEL

Sample Sentence: "I know it's important for my kids to learn how to manage their emotions and get along with others."

Category 1.2: Perceived Role as SEL Educators

Code: Primary educators of emotional skills

Sample Sentence: "As parents, we are their first teachers, so it's up to us to help them develop these skills."

Code: Reliance on schools for SEL development

Sample Sentence: "I think schools are better equipped to handle teaching those skills professionally."

Theme 2: Parental Competence in Teaching SEL

Category 2.1: Confidence in Teaching Emotional Skills

Code: High confidence

Sample Sentence: "I feel I'm good at teaching my children how to talk about their feelings and handle conflicts."

Code: Low confidence

Sample Sentence: "I struggle to know the right way to teach my children about emotions without overreacting to myself."

Category 2.2: Barriers to Effective Teaching

Code: Lack of time

Sample Sentence: "I want to teach my kids these skills, but there just isn't enough time in the day."

Code: Personal emotional regulation challenges

Sample Sentence: "It's hard to teach emotional control when I sometimes lose my temper."

Theme 3: Strategies for Teaching SEL

Category 3.1: Use of Conversations

Code: Open communication

Sample Sentence: "We have regular conversations where we talk about feelings and how to respond to different situations."

Category 3.2: Role Modeling

Code: Leading by example

Sample Sentence: "I always try to show my kids how to stay calm and respectful, even in stressful situations."

Category 3.3: Structured Activities

Code: Family games and storytelling

Sample Sentence: “We play games that help them learn to take turns and be patient.”

Theme 4: Support and Resources Needed

Category 4.1: Training for Parents

Code: Workshops and parenting courses

Sample Sentence: “It would be great to have workshops on how to teach these skills effectively.”

Category 4.2: Collaborative Efforts with Schools

Code: Parent teacher collaboration

Sample Sentence: “Schools and parents need to work together to reinforce these skills at home and in the classroom.”

4. Discussion

The findings highlight both strengths and gaps in parents’ competencies to teach SEL. While many parents demonstrate strong communication skills and emotional intelligence, they often struggle with stress and lack of resources. These challenges underscore the importance of providing parents with training and support to foster SEL at home effectively.

The findings of this study provide valuable insights into parents’ efficacy in teaching social-emotional learning (SEL) skills to their children. The results underscore the importance of parental involvement in fostering children’s emotional intelligence, self-regulation, empathy, and interpersonal skills. By examining various parental approaches, the study highlights both the challenges and opportunities parents encounter in this role (Bierman et al., 2018).

One key takeaway is the significant positive impact of parental modeling on children’s social-emotional development. Parents who demonstrate effective communication, emotional regulation, and problem-solving skills provide a powerful template for their children to emulate (McCormick et al., 2016). This finding aligns with previous research that emphasizes the importance of social learning in the development of SEL competencies.

However, the study also reveals several barriers that hinder parents’ ability to effectively teach SEL skills. These challenges include a lack of time, insufficient knowledge about SEL principles, and limited access to resources and support systems. As Havighurst et al., (2010) indicated parents often express a desire to contribute more meaningfully to their children’s SEL development but face practical constraints that undermine their efforts. Addressing these barriers is crucial for maximizing parental efficacy in this domain.

Another noteworthy finding is the influence of parental self-efficacy on the outcomes of SEL instruction. Parents who feel confident in their ability to guide their children’s social-emotional development tend to adopt more proactive and consistent teaching strategies. This suggests that interventions aimed at boosting parental confidence and competence in SEL education can have a significant impact

(Gravesteyn et al., 2013). Workshops, training programs, and access to user-friendly SEL resources may help empower parents to take a more active role.

The study's implications extend to educators and policymakers as well. Schools can play a vital role in supporting parents by offering workshops and sharing SEL best practices. Collaborative efforts between schools and families can create a more holistic approach to SEL education, ensuring consistency between home and school environments. Furthermore, policymakers should consider initiatives that increase public awareness of SEL's importance and provide accessible resources for parents (Atwell et al., 2021).

Future research should explore the long-term effects of parental involvement in SEL education and examine how different family dynamics and cultural contexts influence outcomes. Understanding these factors can help develop tailored interventions that address diverse parental needs and circumstances.

In conclusion, this study underscores the essential role parents play in teaching social-emotional learning skills to their children. While challenges exist, targeted support and collaborative efforts can enhance parental efficacy, leading to positive outcomes for children's social and emotional development.

5. Conclusion

Parents play a pivotal and indispensable role in fostering the development of social and emotional learning (SEL) skills in children. It is imperative to acknowledge the diverse competencies and various challenges that parents face when it comes to imparting these essential skills. By demonstrating a nuanced understanding of the intricate landscape of parental experiences, educators and policymakers can strategically craft and implement targeted interventions that aim to equip parents with the necessary tools and support to effectively promote SEL competencies in their children.

Recognizing the multifaceted nature of parents' roles in nurturing SEL skills is instrumental in establishing a collaborative partnership between all stakeholders involved in a child's holistic development. By actively engaging with the realities and contexts that shape parental engagement with SEL, it becomes possible to tailor interventions that resonate with parents' needs, aspirations, and constraints. Through such tailored approaches, parents can be empowered as informed and resourceful educators who are well-equipped to navigate the complexities of helping their children thrive emotionally and socially.

Moreover, acknowledging and addressing the specific competencies and challenges that parents encounter within the realm of SEL underscores a commitment to inclusivity and equity in educational initiatives. By fostering a culture of understanding and support around parents' roles as SEL educators, we can spur a positive ripple effect that extends beyond individual families and into broader communities. Thus, by amplifying parents' capacities and addressing their obstacles in promoting SEL skills, we foster a more nurturing and empowering environment for children to develop into resilient, socially adept, and emotionally intelligent indi-

viduals.

In essence, by delving into the nuances of parental experiences and aligning interventions accordingly, educators and policymakers can lay a robust foundation for collective action in advancing SEL competencies among children, paving the way for a more harmonious and supportive educational landscape.

6. Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. Parental Training Programs: Develop workshops and online courses to educate parents on SEL concepts and effective teaching strategies.
2. Resource Development: Create accessible materials, including guides, videos, and activity sheets, to support parents in teaching SEL.
3. Community Support Initiatives: Establish support groups where parents can share experiences and learn from one another.
4. Stress Management Resources: Provide resources and strategies to help parents manage stress and regulate their own emotions.
5. Collaborative Efforts: Encourage collaboration between schools and parents to create a consistent SEL environment for children.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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