



Measuring Teachers' Social-Emotional Competencies: A Brief Review Using the COSMIN

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Abstract: Social-emotional competencies are one of the important key factor to promote teachers' mental health and the effectiveness of social-emotional learning programs in schools. However, instruments assessing teachers' social-emotional competencies remain scarce in the literature. This paper aims to review on the conceptualizations and psychometric properties of existing measures on teachers' social-emotional competencies using the COSMIN checklist. Results showed that the most popular teachers' social-emotional competencies instrument adopted the emotional intelligence model. Recently developed teachers' social-emotional competencies instruments focused more on the CASEL framework. Among the nine COSMIN criteria, content validity and structural validity are most frequently found to be sufficient in previous studies. Discussion of key findings and recommendations for future research are presented.

Keywords: review; teachers' social-emotional competencies; instruments; measurement properties.

1 Introduction

Enhancing teachers' mental health has become a central issue in education and is a key objective for educational organizations worldwide by 2030 (OECD, 2019), especially when teaching is ranked among the most stressful occupations out of professions (Johnson et al., 2005). A meta-analysis of nine studies from eight countries across Africa, Asia, Europe, North and South America revealed that the burnout rate among teachers is 52%, even higher than that of healthcare professionals (Ozamiz-Etxebarria et al., 2023).

Globally, efforts to enhance teachers' mental health through the development of social-emotional competencies are not novel. As early as 1994, in the school mental health framework proposed by the WHO (Hendren et al., 1994), developing and training social-emotional competencies for the entire school community—including teachers, students, staffs, and leaders—was identified as a key component in fostering inner strength and preventing mental disorders. Social-emotional competencies, as defined by CASEL (Collaborative on Academic Social and Emotional Learning, 2003), involve the application of knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to understand oneself and others, express and regulate emotions, build healthy and loving relationships, make good decisions, and act ethically and responsibly—ultimately to achieve academic and social success.

Over the past decades, based on the comprehensive and robust theoretical framework of CASEL (2003), many cross-sectional, longitudinal, and intervention studies have provided strong empirical evidence for the relationship between teachers' social-emotional competencies and their mental health. Research consistently showed that providing and developing social-emotional learning (SEL) resources for teachers helps them cultivate mental health and healthy social-emotional skills, thereby better addressing the needs of students (e.g., Forcina, 2012; Ornaghi et al., 2023; Zhang et al., 2023). Social-emotional competence can positively impact teachers' mental health in multiple ways. By fostering healthy relationships, emotionally safe environments, and practical skills, social-emotional competencies act as a protective factor against mental health risks. This allows teachers to reduce burnout and stress, build positive teacher-student relationships, and effectively teach SEL skills (CASEL, 2015).

However, research on the development of assessment tools for teachers' social-emotional competencies

remains very limited. Notably, existing studies have primarily assessed teachers’ social-emotional competencies with constructs of emotional intelligence, which focus on recognizing, understanding, and regulating one’s own and others’ emotions (e.g., Abdulkader & Al Naggar, 2024; Fernández-Molina et al., 2023; Li et al., 2016; Tarman & Filiz, 2023). The scarcity of studies based on the CASEL comprehensive framework may stem from the lack of valid instruments to measure these competencies among teachers. The predominant focus on students’ social-emotional competencies while neglecting that of teachers would undermined the effectiveness of SEL programs in schools, as teachers’ SEL is the most crucial element and the key to the success of any SEL initiatives (CASEL, 2003, 2015; OECD, 2015). Therefore, selecting psychometrically sound tools is essential for advancing future research on teachers’ social-emotional competence.

2 Purpose of Research

Grounded in these theoretical and practical foundations, our study aims to provide an overview of the existing instruments used to assess teachers’ social-emotional competencies. This study aims to address these research questions:

- 1. What are the existing instruments to measure teachers’ socio-emotional competencies?
- 2. How many instruments were developed based on the CASEL framework (2003)?
- 3. How are the psychometric properties of these instruments?

3 Methods

Search strategy and selection criteria

We conducted a search strategy on three international databases, including APA Psycnet, PubMed, and Google Scholar. The keywords used for searching developed instruments on teachers’ social-emotional competencies are presented in Table 1. In this review, we only included studies that (1) reported on originally developed instruments or adapted versions with modifications to the items, and (2) were published in English.

Table 1. Search strategy

| Component | Keywords |
|-----------|---|
| 1 | “Validity” OR “Reliability” OR “Scale” OR “Questionnaire” |
| 2 | “Social” OR “Emotional” OR “Socio-emotional” |
| 3 | “Skills” OR “Competence” OR “Competencies” |
| 4 | “Teachers” OR “Teacher” OR “Educator” |

Quality assessment

The quality of instruments were assessed using the COSMIN checklist (Mokkink et al., 2018). The evaluated psychometric properties include (1) content validity, (2) structural validity, (3) internal consistency, (4) cross-cultural validity\ measurement invariance, (5) reliability, (6) measurement error, (7) hypotheses testing for construct validity, (8) criterion validity, and (9) responsiveness. Each criterion was rated as sufficient, insufficient, or indeterminant.

4 Results

Instrument overview

Considering the inclusion criteria, 8 studies were qualified for review. The characteristics of the selected instruments are reported in Table 2. The results showed that only 3 out of 8 instruments (Yoder, 2014; Yang et al., 2025; Lee et al., 2025) contained the five components of CASEL’s model, which are:

Table 2. Summary and quality assessment of existing scales on teachers’ social-emotional competencies.

| Instrument (Author) | Country | Number of Items | Subscales | Content validity | Structural validity | Internal consistency | Cross-cultural validity/Measurement invariance | Reliability | Measurement error | Hypothesis testing | Criterion validity | Responsiveness |
|--|----------------------------|-----------------|--|------------------|---------------------|----------------------|--|-------------|-------------------|--------------------|--------------------|----------------|
| Social and Emotional Competence for Teachers (SECTRS; Tom, 2012) | US | 25 | Teacher-student relationships; Emotional regulation; Social awareness; Interpersonal relationship. | + | - | - | ? | ? | ? | + | ? | ? |
| Educator Social and Emotional Competencies (Yoder, 2014) | US | 36 | Self-awareness; Self-management; Social awareness; Relationship skills; Responsible decision making. | + | ? | ? | ? | ? | ? | ? | ? | ? |
| Test of Regulation in and Understanding of Social Situations in Teaching (TRUST; Aldrup et al., 2020) | Germany | 15 | Emotion regulation; Relationship management. | + | + | + | - | ? | ? | + | ? | ? |
| Emotional Skills and Competence Questionnaire for Teachers (ESCO-T; Valente et al. 2023) | Portugal | 45 | Perceive and understand emotions; Express and label emotions; Manage and regulate emotions. | ? | + | + | ? | ? | ? | + | ? | ? |
| Social and Emotional Competence for Teachers (SECTRS) – validation in European context (Grazzani et al., 2024) | Italy, Latvia and Portugal | 14 | Teacher-student relationships; Emotional regulation; Social awareness; Interpersonal relationship. | ? | + | ? | - | ? | ? | ? | ? | ? |
| SocioEmotional Skills Instrument for Teachers (SEMS-IT; Saez-Delgado et al., 2024) | Chile | 19 | Cognitive management of teacher emotion; Teacher empathic concern; Teacher-student relationship; Adverse classroom climate. | + | + | ? | ? | ? | ? | ? | ? | ? |
| Transformative Social and Emotional Learning Competencies Scale (TSELCS; Yang et al., 2025) | US | 22 | Self-awareness; Self-management; Social awareness; Relationship skills; Responsible decision-making. | + | + | + | + | ? | ? | + | ? | ? |
| Multidimensional Assessment of Teacher Social-Emotional Competence (MATSEC; Lee et al., 2025) | China and Korea | 29 | Self-awareness as an educator; Emotion management; Social awareness for student well-being; Social awareness for equity and inclusion; Relationship skills; Decision-making. | + | + | + | + | ? | ? | + | ? | ? |

Note. (+): sufficient; (-): insufficient; (?): indeterminate.

self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision making. Beside that, the MATSEC scale (Lee et al., 2025) additionally include a sixth component to differentiate between social awareness for student well-being and social awareness for equity and inclusion. The SECTRS scale (Tom, 2012; Grazzani et al., 2024) was originally developed based on the CASEL framework, however, mostly half of the items were removed and grouped into 4 subscales, that correspond to only 3 components of CASEL, namely self-management, social awareness, relationship skills. The two instruments of Aldrup et al. (2020) and Valente et al. (2023) explicitly measured teachers' social-emotional competencies as emotional intelligence. Sáez-Delgado et al.'s (2024) SEMS-IT scale approached teachers' social-emotional competencies as inter- and intrapersonal skills, namely cognitive management of teacher emotion, teacher empathic concern, teacher-student relationship, and adverse classroom climate.

Quality assessment

Methodological quality of the investigated instruments were rated (Table 2). Overall, results showed that most instruments (75%, 6 out of 8) met standards for content validity and structural validity. Some studies showed sufficient evidence for internal consistencies (50%), cross-cultural validity/measurement invariance (25%), and hypotheses testing (50%). However, no found instruments showed any signs of reliability, measurement error, criterion validity, and responsiveness.

5 Discussion

Social-emotional competencies stand out as a promising factor to cultivate both teachers' mental health and the effectiveness of SEL programs in schools. However, this review showed that tools designed to assess teachers' emotional-social competencies appear to be quite scarce and have only gained significant attention in the past five years. Results reveal that scientific efforts to measure teachers' emotional-social competencies have been conducted globally, spanning from North America, South America, and Europe to East Asia.

However, the conceptualization of teachers' social-emotional competencies still varies greatly among authors, with the most utilized instrument adopting the emotional intelligence approach (Aldrup et al., 2020). The earliest tool based on CASEL framework (2003) was developed by Yoder (2014). However, this scale was only developed based on expert opinions and has not yet been supported by any empirical evidence regarding its psychometric properties. The other two tools following the CASEL model are recent studies that were just published (Yang et al., 2025; Lee et al., 2025). This may explain why prior research on teachers' emotional-social competence predominantly used the emotional intelligence model.

The COSMIN checklist provided a valuable tool to evaluate the methodology quality of previous studies on teachers' social-emotional competencies scale development and validation. This study showed that few instruments have sufficient empirical evidence to support its reliability and validity. A noticeable limitation in the existing instruments is that they have underexamined reliability, measurement error, criterion validity, and responsiveness. However, it is important to note that criterion validity is particularly difficult to assess in the context of teachers' social emotional competencies, due to its complex nature and the absence of a definitive gold standard.

Among the eight instruments, two recently developed by Yang et al. (2025) and Lee et al. (2025) distinguished themselves by being grounded in the CASEL framework and demonstrating strong psychometric properties. Moreover, these instruments were specifically tested on Asian or Asian American teachers, suggesting their potential for broader application in future research across Asian populations.

6 Conclusion

This review highlights both the promise and the challenges of measuring teachers' social-emotional competencies. While social-emotional competencies are increasingly recognized as essential for teachers' mental health and for the success of school-based SEL programs, the available instruments remain limited in number and scope. Most early measures have relied on emotional intelligence frameworks, whereas more recent developments have begun to align with the comprehensive CASEL model. The recent emergence of tools grounded in the CASEL framework suggests promising directions for future research and practice. However, the COSMIN assessment shows that only a few instruments demonstrate strong psychometric evidence. To advance the field, further studies are needed to refine these instruments and expand their validation across diverse educational settings. Establishing robust and culturally sensitive measures of teachers' social-emotional competencies will be critical for the effectiveness of SEL initiatives worldwide.

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