

Empowering Teachers: Multicultural Social and Emotional Learning (MSEL) Among Arab Minority Teachers

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Abstract: Teachers are the professionals at the forefront in the implementation of the educational enterprise, yet it is widely known that despite being surrounded by learners, they are oftentimes isolated and lonely individuals. The plight of teachers, particularly ones who are minorities, is critical to the success of schooling. To address this problem, schools have been seeking to pay closer attention to the holistic characteristics of schooling in general and how to ameliorate teacher conditions in particular. In recent years, the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic has heightened concern for the overall well-being of teachers, for enhancing their ability to cope with stress, depression, and loneliness, and for empowering resilience. In this sense, social and emotional learning (SEL) can serve as a main component in addressing these issues. SEL of teachers plays a central role in their daily practices and functioning. This study was devised and aimed at investigating the role of SEL as it impinges on teachers using a quantitative research study. The major hypothesis of this research involving SEL is that cultural empathy is the key linking mediator between both social competence and emotional stability of teachers and their self-efficacy for learning. To verify these interactions, questionnaires were distributed and completed by 415 teachers from the Arab Muslim sector, a minority population in Israel potentially vulnerable to the above-mentioned alienating effects of teaching. Our results did show a significant interaction between social competence and cultural empathy on self-efficacy for learning. Additionally, our results also detected a significant interaction between emotional stability and cultural empathy on self-efficacy for learning. This research supports the proof of concept that the potential of SEL to foster increased achievement and equity in multicultural schools may be fulfilled provided that there is a greater effort to integrate the ideals of SEL into school practices. Finally, we discuss the importance of promoting emotional stability, social competence, and cultural empathy in schools by fostering social inclusion.

Keywords: multiculturalism, social and emotional learning (SEL), self-efficacy, cultural empathy, COVID-19 pandemic.

In recent years, schools have been seeking to pay closer attention to the holistic characteristics of schooling. Teachers and principals aim to understand the components and implementation of whole-child education, and they are striving for comprehensiveness and wholeness of education (known as *tarbiyah* in Islamic education systems) as an educational

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framework (Brifkani, 2021). Nowadays, instead of focusing on cognitive factors alone, the concept of “whole-child education” is being implemented routinely at schools, with attention also paid to noncognitive factors. Granting consideration to measures of social and emotional learning (SEL) as an integral part of school climate and culture as well as to learning and teaching processes is on the rise.

Part of the impetus for this emphasis in recent years towards a SEL-based framework is being driven by the need for greater coping and competencies required to deal with the rapid changes in educational and future career environments; students must be equipped to work in fields of expertise and disciplines that are not yet known, use technology platforms that have not yet been developed, and solve social, psychological, cultural, and educational problems that have not yet been considered. To properly prepare students for this uncertain future, educators are drawing upon the necessary skillsets involving SEL to fulfill this need. Moreover, SEL is critical not only for learners but for teachers alike. This has led to a gradual shift taking place in schools to meet these demands.

Despite these nascent shifts in educational approaches towards SEL, social, emotional, and intercultural competencies have not yet been addressed clearly in education systems across Europe (Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development [OECD], 2021). Accordingly, the purpose of this study is to, in a more in-depth and empirical manner, investigate the role of SEL using a quantitative research study. Specifically, we focus on teachers, who serve as the direct and responsible figures for spearheading addressing these issues. Thus, focusing on SEL among teachers should contribute to advancing our knowledge regarding these societal, psychological, cultural, and educational issues in schools.

Background and Review of Literature

Although different definitions have been offered for social and emotional learning (SEL), we have adopted the one suggested by the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL, 2022). That definition integrates the main mechanisms of SEL and can further be used as an applied characterization (Müller et al., 2020). SEL is thus defined as the process by which skills are acquired to identify and manage emotions, develop care and concern for others, make responsible decisions, establish positive relationships, and handle challenging situations effectively (CASEL, 2022). The five core SEL competencies are self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making: (1) Self-awareness consists of identifying emotions, having precise self-perception, diagnosing strengths, and developing self-confidence and self-efficacy; (2) Self-management includes impulse control, stress management, self-discipline, self-motivation, goal-setting, and organizational skills; (3) Social awareness includes perspective-taking, feeling empathy, appreciating diversity, and respecting others; (4) Relationship skills include communication, social engagement, relationship building, and teamwork; And (5) Responsible decision-making pertains to the ability to identify and solve problems, analyze circumstances, reflect, and take ethical responsibility. All these SEL skills play an important role in human development by supporting academic accomplishments and overall well-being, enhancing coping with stress, depression, and loneliness, and empowering resilience, which was found to be particularly important during the COVID-19 pandemic (Palmer et al., 2021).

SEL incorporates several operational variables. We focus in this paper on emotional stability and social competence and how SEL improves one’s ability to implement these factors towards improving self-efficacy for learning. Emotional stability is considered one of the main psychological features regulating resilience to stress caused by difficult life circumstances. It is defined as the ability to remain calm in stressful environments and circumstances while continuing to perform efficiently (Leone et al., 2005) and complete tasks and is associated with

higher academic achievement. Social competence corresponds to an individual's ability to enhance social behavior in line with available social information (Taborsky & Oliveira, 2012). Although interpersonal competencies are vital in all professional fields, they are especially relevant to professions, like teaching, that involve understanding human behavior. To promote excellence in any profession, social competency must be fostered. Perhaps most germane to the current study, the SEL competencies, as well as their operational variables, have wide impacts and implications on self-efficacy for learning, which is the domain to which we turn now in the context of education.

The Importance of SEL for Processes of Learning and Teaching in Schools

SEL has had positive effects on a wide range of individual and societal outcomes, including ones vital for education, such as goal setting, fulfilling one's potential, resilience, creativity, perseverance, problem-solving, caring about the welfare of others, and fruitful interpersonal interactions (OECD, 2021). SEL has been shown to enhance students' sense of belonging to their school and to improve social relationships with peers and interactions with teachers. SEL has appeared to affect academic achievement and has remained positively associated with mathematics grades (Cramer & Castro-Olivo, 2016). Interventions to improve the SEL skills of students have been effective in increasing self-reported resilience (Castro-Olivo et al., 2021). Finkelstein and Soffer-Vital (in press) have developed the MSEL model, which empirically illustrates that cultural empathy mediates the relationship between social competence and emotional stability and self-efficacy for learning. Students with better emotional stability and social competence have higher cultural empathy, which promotes self-efficacy for learning. Our focus in the current study is to ascertain whether the MSEL model is recapitulated also in a minority teacher population.

Multiculturalism and SEL in Educational Settings

In a globalized world, intercultural competence is a valuable asset for interacting with students across different cultures. Moreover, Israel is similar to many other Western countries, whereby multicultural diversity is the prevalent norm in most schools. This is the most relevant aspect of multiculturalism, as it is a socially constructed concept and pertains to the capability of effective communication in intercultural settings based on one's intercultural knowledge, skills, and attitudes (Deardorff, 2006). Intercultural competence is a transcultural approach that involves multiple, fluid affiliations interconnected with social and emotional capabilities (Müller et al., 2020).

Cultural empathy is an intercultural competence skill and a critical factor for learning (Cheraghi & Karamimehr, 2022). The term cultural empathy refers to a person's consideration of others, sensitivity to their culture, and mindfulness of their backgrounds, feelings, and beliefs (Ruben, 1976). Cultural empathy is associated with cultural intelligence (Wang et al., 2015), as both concepts highlight the relationship between mainstream society, anxiety, perceived language, and discrimination. Students with high cultural empathy understand the value of other cultures and benefit from such understanding. These students tend to be more open-minded and have fewer rigid biases toward the behaviors and social inclinations of other groups. Cultural empathy stems from an interest in and curiosity about other cultures (Bawa, 2021).

Self-efficacy refers to students' belief in their capability to organize and execute the course of action needed to accomplish a given task. The term pertains to student confidence when performing a task, an activity, or responding to a challenge. Self-efficacy beliefs regulate how people feel, think, and become motivated and, consequently, how they act and behave. If

students believe they can achieve specific outcomes, they will try to produce them. Efficacy beliefs can affect student commitment to achievement (Bandura, 1994, 1997).

To summarize, social competence and self-efficacy for learning in schools are rooted in learning-teaching processes. We believe there is a need to broaden the purview of SEL and examine its relevance to schools. We sought, therefore, to examine predictors for learning, such as cultural empathy, in the context of self-efficacy for learning.

SEL Among the Arab Muslim Society in Israel

SEL is becoming more prominent around the world (Kopelman-Robin & Tobin, 2020). Continuing this trend, we focus in this study on the Israeli context and specifically on the subsector of Arab-Muslim society. Israel is a richly multicultural society that includes multiple diverse groups, ethnically, culturally, nationally, and religiously. The Arab-Muslim population as a whole is about 20% in Israel. According to the data of the Ministry of Education in Israel, about 546 thousand children from Arab and Muslim societies completed their studies in the education system. Some research reports show gaps in educational achievements among Arab Muslim students (Haddad Haj Yahya et al., 2021); however, little is known about SEL in Arab Muslim schools, especially among Arab Muslim teachers. This is an understudied group in Israeli society that also struggles with both social and emotional challenges. Moreover, adding to the complexity and uniqueness of some of the Arab Muslim teachers' environments is that they are employed in non-Arab Muslim schools. Thus, for these teachers, there are social-emotional conflicts regarding holidays and religious fasts (such as Ramadan) that they must contend with in predominantly non-Muslim school workplaces. Moreover, as far as SEL is concerned, there are certain norms, standards, and limitations derived from the religious aspects themselves. The Arab Muslim schools provide a relatively more supportive environment, but the teachers there are still a minority in a larger majority system, which also has SEL implications.

In the last few years, especially since the embarking of COVID-19, the Ministry of Education has put a lot of effort into advancing SEL programs in the education system, mainly in Arab Muslim schools and kindergartens in Israel. The transition to distance learning that was imposed on the education system during the COVID-19 crisis created challenges in teaching in general and SEL in particular. Moreover, dilemmas regarding distance teaching arise in the context of teachers' SEL in multicultural environments and should be addressed in professional training (Finklestein & Soffer-Vital, 2022).

Moreover, the importance of SEL is becoming gradually becoming recognized and emphasized in teacher training frameworks. SEL interventions in Arab Muslim schools, perhaps where the need is most acute, are being carried out through a variety of targeted training programs and processes for promoting SEL. Special attention is given to the collaborative work shared by educational psychologists and educational teachers (Yariv & Forchner, 2020), as well as the formation of the teachers' professional identity in cultivating SEL (Kaspersky & Hami, 2021). It is manifested in advancing teachers' interpersonal communication skills, such as empathy, active listening, assertiveness, and inclusion of diverse students (Ran & Yosefsberg, 2021).

Hypotheses

Given the predicament of the Arab Muslim teachers as described above, we focused our study to delineate the underlying SEL factors that mediate optimal teaching and learning aptitudes, particularly amongst this vulnerable minority teaching population in Israel. We assume that these underlying SEL factors will also be applicable upon extrapolation to other

minority populations in other countries. To determine the critical SEL factors we decided to test the following hypotheses:

H₁: Important teacher skills of social efficacy (i.e., competence) are positively associated with self-efficacy for learning.

H₂: The teacher competencies of social competence and emotional stability are both positively associated with cultural empathy.

H₃: Social efficacy is positively associated with emotional stability.

H₄: Combining the above propositions, we suggest that the key competency of cultural empathy mediates the linkage between social competence and self-efficacy for learning as well as between emotional stability and self-efficacy for learning.

Methodology

Ethical approval for this quantitative research was obtained from the Board of Ethics of Ono Academic College in Israel and was conducted by the human subjects guidelines of national research committees as well as the APA Ethics Code Standards. To provide insight into the role of SEL among Arab Muslim teachers, we included a random sample of teachers ($n = 415$), and their participation was voluntary. The form of recruitment was that K–12 Arab Muslim teachers across Israel were contacted and recruited through social media platforms to complete the electronic questionnaire. To participate, a teacher had to teach any subject matter at an elementary, junior, or high school in Israel. The participants were contacted, located, and recruited via social media platforms, such as Facebook, Instagram, and LinkedIn, and then by mailing lists that they gave us. The criteria for selecting the participants were: (a) male or female teachers in service; (b) Limiting the sample to teachers who, by this point in the school year, had been teaching for at least six months.

Participants

The participants in the study were Arab Muslim teachers teaching in elementary and junior and high schools from all three big regions in Israel: 75% came from the southern region, 15% from the central region, and 10% from the north. In total, 415 teachers participated in this quantitative study. Overall, 500 questionnaires were sent to the teachers; however, only 450 participants responded to the questionnaires, and 8% of the questionnaires were not fully completed and therefore were excluded from the study. The study includes only the 415 participants who completed the whole questionnaire. All participants completed all sections of the questionnaires. Teacher seniority ranged from one to 40 years ($M = 14.12$, $SD = 8.39$). Most participants were women (72%), and the majority were subject teachers (52%) or homeroom teachers (40%). The vast majority of participants reported having no disability (95%). Most were standard classroom teachers (subject/homeroom) who did not hold a management position (72%). As far as their education is concerned, about half of the teachers held a bachelor's degree (55%), and 43% also possessed a master's degree. Among the participants, 93% expressed a high degree of belonging and commitment to the school in which they teach. Years of employment ranged from one to 32 years ($M = 9.46$, $SD = 8.52$).

Instruments and Procedures

We used a single questionnaire with online sub-questionnaires in four blocks, as detailed below. Except for the demographic block (item #1 below), the presentation order of the blocks

was randomized, and all statements within these blocks were randomized to prevent order effects.

A Demographic Questionnaire

Information was collected about gender, age, study discipline, academic degree, country of birth, disabilities, sense of belonging and commitment to the school in which they teach, position in their school (subject teacher/homeroom teacher), years of employment, and whether or not (yes or no) they were active in participation in SEL (Social Emotional Learning) activities or workshops for teachers in school. Activities related to SEL is considered to help them build social skills and relationships with their peers and others, such as expression through art, creating a vision board, promoting positive self-talk.

The Multicultural Personality Questionnaire (MPQ)

A 91-item (Van der Zee & Van Oudenhoven, 2000), five-factor questionnaire instrument asking participants to reply to questions about personal descriptors by using the phrase “To what extent do the following statements apply to you?” Each item is rated on a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (totally not applicable) to 5 (completely applicable). The reliability and validity of the 91-item version of the MPQ have been extensively tested and confirmed (e.g., Van der Zee & Van Oudenhoven, 2000). The MPQ was translated into Hebrew and validated by Lacher Edenburg (2019), $\alpha = 0.83$. The content validity checks of the MPQ, combining expert item evaluation and focus group discussions, were translated into Hebrew. This evaluation indicated that no items needed rewording. From among the measures of the MPQ, we examined cultural empathy and emotional stability as detailed below.

Cultural empathy (18 items; $\alpha = 0.89$): Cronbach’s alpha was 0.88 in our content validity checks. Sample items for this factor are: “finds it hard to empathize with others,” “enjoys other people’s stories,” and “can voice other people’s thoughts.”

Emotional stability (20 items; $\alpha = 0.88$): Cronbach’s alpha was 0.77 in our content validity checks. Sample items for this factor are: “considers problems solvable,” “suffers from conflicts with others,” and “is not easily hurt.”

The Social Competence Questionnaire

A 19-item self-report instrument (Valkenburg & Peter, 2008) that measures social competence in four dimensions: initiation of (offline) relationships or interactions, supportiveness, assertiveness, and ability to self-disclose. The four dimensions distinguished in advance were empirically verified in exploratory factor analysis. A second-order confirmatory factor analysis was used to test whether one general social competence factor explained the four hypothesized subscales of our social competence measure. The questions examined how participants interacted with others over the previous six months. Participants evaluated their management of the situations below over the past six months.

- Initiation ($\alpha = 0.86$). e.g., start a conversation with someone you do not know very well.
- Supportiveness ($\alpha = 0.83$). e.g., listen carefully to someone who tells you about a problem they are experiencing.
- Self-disclosure ($\alpha = 0.83$). e.g., express your feelings to someone else.
- Assertiveness ($\alpha = 0.86$). e.g., stand up for your rights when someone wrongs you.

The Self-Efficacy for Learning Questionnaire

This questionnaire is based on models by Bandura (1986), Schunck (1990), and Pintrich and De Groot (1990). We examined the self-efficacy for learning variables using 24 statements. The questionnaire distinguishes between three dimensions of self-efficacy for learning required for effective functioning: (a) academic learning, (b) online learning in a computer environment, and (c) learning alone or in teams. The questionnaire was validated by three expert readers, who confirmed that it addressed self-efficacy for learning and distinguished between the three dimensions of self-efficacy examined ($\alpha = 0.93$).

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using IBM SPSS version 21. First, we examined the reliability of the questionnaires using Cronbach's alpha. The Kolmogorov-Smirnov test (Goodman, 1954). was used to examine the normal distribution of the main variables. For summarization and analysis of the data, we used frequency distributions for categorical variables and means and SDs for quantitative variables. Pearson correlation (Pearson, 1895) was used to analyze the relations among the main research variables. To examine the relations between the socio-demographic variables and the main research variables, we used Pearson/Spearman correlation analysis (Spearman, 1987). Hierarchical linear regression analysis (Bryk & Raudenbush, 1992; Galton, 1886) was performed to predict SEL. Socio-demographic variables were used in the first step of the model, followed by the other independent variables. Baron and Kenny's (1986) regression model was used for mediation analysis. We used a two-way ANOVA to examine the effect of the interaction between social efficacy and cultural empathy on SEL. Where relevant the statistical test employed is indicated in relation to the corresponding research parameters being measured in the results section.

Results

Demographics of the Teacher Study Population

The final study population consisted of 415 teachers from the Arab-Muslim sector. The average age was 37.85 years ($SD = 8.51$), with an age range of 21 to 60 years. The average teacher seniority was 14.12 years ($SD = 8.39$), with a range of 1 to 40 years. The table below presents the socio-economic background features of the participants. Similar to the distribution in the general population, most of the sample population comprised women (about 72%), with their main roles as subject teachers (53%) or homeroom teachers (40%). Most of the teachers held regular jobs (about 94%) and were not in management positions (about 72%). As far as their education is concerned, about half the sample has a bachelor's degree (55%), and 43% have a master's degree. Most of the participants expressed a sense of belonging and commitment to the educational institution in which they work, to a large or very large degree (about 93%).

Hypothesis analysis

In the first stage, the Pearson correlation was tested to examine the relationships among the main research variables (see Table 1) that incorporated the major competencies of SEL, namely: social efficacy, emotional stability, cultural empathy, and self-efficacy for learning.

Table 1*Pearson Correlations Among the Main Research Variables*

Variables	1	2	3	4
1. Social efficacy	---			
2. Emotional stability	**44.	---		
3. Cultural empathy	**58.	**42.	---	
4. Self-efficacy for learning	**57.	**44.	**59.	---

Note. $p < .05^*$, $p < .01^{**}$, (N = 415)

The data presented in the table indicates that social efficacy was found to have a significant positive association with self-efficacy for learning ($r = 0.57$, $p < .01$), such that the higher the social efficacy, the higher the self-efficacy for learning. Moreover, emotional stability was found to have a significant positive association with self-efficacy for learning ($r = 0.44$, $p < .01$), such that the higher the emotional stability, the higher the self-efficacy for learning. These findings indicate that the hypothesis (H1) of the study—there was a positive correlation between the high levels of social efficacy and self-efficacy for learning - was supported. This hypothesis was examined bidirectionally so that it is also the case that the higher self-efficacy for learning also leads to increased measures of the SEL competency of social efficacy. Furthermore, it can be seen that social efficacy was found to have a significant positive correlation with cultural empathy ($r = 0.58$, $p < .01$), thus the higher the level of social efficacy, the higher the degree of cultural empathy amongst these teachers. Moreover, emotional stability was also found to have a significant positive correlation with cultural empathy ($r = 0.42$, $p < .01$), hence the higher measure of emotional stability, the greater the degree of cultural empathy was observed. These findings indicate that hypothesis 2 (H2) of the study—that the higher the social efficacy and emotional stability, the greater the cultural empathy - was confirmed. This hypothesis was examined bidirectionally as well so that it can be said that the higher the cultural empathy, the higher the emotional stability, and the higher the social efficacy. Moreover, a significant positive correlation was found between social efficacy and cultural empathy ($r = 0.44$, $p < .01$), so the higher the social efficacy, the higher the emotional stability. These findings indicate that the third hypothesis (H3) of the study—that the higher the social efficacy, the higher the emotional stability - was confirmed.

Important concerning the aims of educational goals, cultural empathy amongst the minority teachers was found to have a significant positive correlation with self-efficacy for learning ($r = 0.59$, $p < .01$), so the higher the cultural empathy, the higher the self-efficacy for learning. The hypothesis was examined bidirectionally so that it can be said that the higher the self-efficacy for learning, the higher the cultural empathy. The role of cultural empathy has a further mediating role between the SEL factors of social competence and emotional stability as they are linked to self-efficacy for learning, however, this will be discussed separately below with the supporting data.

Beyond the major SEL factors and their mutual interactions with self-efficacy for learning, other additional parameters were observed to influence the SEL factors themselves. Teacher age, for example, was found to have a significant positive (weak) correlation with emotional stability, cultural empathy, and self-efficacy for learning. Increased ages of the teachers were associated with higher levels of emotional stability, cultural empathy, and self-efficacy for learning. Teacher seniority was found to have significant positive (weak) correlations with cultural empathy and self-efficacy for learning. Higher seniority was associated with higher levels of cultural empathy and social efficacy. Participation in social-emotional activities in the educational institution was found to have significant positive (but weak) correlations with emotional stability, cultural empathy, and social efficacy. Greater participation in social-emotional activities in the educational institution was associated with a higher level of emotional stability, cultural empathy, and social efficacy.

Finally, the sense of commitment and belonging to the educational institution was found to have significant positive (moderate) correlations with emotional stability, cultural empathy, social efficacy, and self-efficacy for learning. A higher sense of commitment and belonging to the educational institution was associated with a higher level of emotional stability, cultural empathy, social efficacy, and self-efficacy for learning.

Participation in Social-Emotional Activities Before and After the COVID-19 Pandemic in the Course of Work

Significant differences were detected in the level of social efficacy between those teachers who participated in social-emotional activities before and after the pandemic in the course of their work compared to those who did not partake in such activities. No differences were found, however, in the levels of emotional stability, cultural empathy, or self-efficacy for learning. Levels of teacher educational background, religiosity, gender, and any disability, were also not found to correlate with any of the main research variables.

Predictive model

To predict self-efficacy for learning, we conducted a hierarchical linear regression model. For the first step, background demographic variables were found to be associated with self-efficacy for learning when the simple-effects analysis was entered into the model: these included age and sense of belonging to the place of work. For the second step, the SEL-related predictors of social efficacy, emotional stability, and cultural empathy were entered into the model (see Table 2).

The regression model for predicting self-efficacy for learning was found to be significant ($F(5, 415) = 58.91, p < .01$), where the predictor variables add 46% to the explained variance of self-efficacy for learning (see Table 2 above). Analysis of the first step of the regression coefficients shows the background variables of age and sense of belonging made a unique, significant contribution to predicting self-efficacy for learning. Specifically, teachers' increased age is associated with higher self-efficacy for learning. Similarly, a higher sense of belonging to the place of work is also associated with higher self-efficacy for learning. Together, these predictors add 12% to the explained variance of self-efficacy for learning.

In the second step, the SEL predictors of social efficacy, emotional stability, and cultural empathy all made a unique, significant contribution to predicting self-efficacy for learning. Higher social efficacy, higher emotional stability, and higher cultural empathy were associated with higher self-efficacy for learning. These predictors add 34% (to a total 46%, see Table 2) to the explained variance of self-efficacy for learning.

Table 2

Regression Coefficient for Predicting Self-Efficacy for Learning According to the Background Variables and the Main Research Variables

Predictors	Coefficients		<i>B</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>R</i> ²
	β	<i>SE</i>			
<u>Step 1</u>					
Age	0.09	0.01	0.01	*1.91	0.12
Sense of belonging	0.32	0.02	0.17	**6.40	
<u>Step 2</u>					
Social efficacy	0.28	0.02	0.15	**5.51	0.46
Emotional stability	0.14	0.03	0.10	**3.21	
Cultural empathy	0.33	0.03	0.20	**6.54	

Note. $p < .01$ **

Mediation Analysis

To examine hypothesis (H₄) in which cultural empathy mediates the association between social efficacy and emotional stability and the prediction of self-efficacy for learning, a model was employed based on the Baron and Kenny (1986) conditions for determining whether mediation is present. This model involves the manifestation of a reduction in the strength of the association between the independent variable and the dependent variable when a mediating variable is present, implying partial mediation by the mediating variable. Alternatively, a strengthening of the association between the independent variable and the dependent variable is observed when the mediating variable is present, implying full mediation by the mediating variable (see Table 3).

Table 3

Regression Coefficient for Predicting Self-Efficacy for Learning According to Social Efficacy and Cultural Empathy

Predictors	Coefficients		<i>B</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>R</i> ²
	β	<i>SE</i>			
<u>Step 1</u>					
Social efficacy	0.57	0.02	0.32	**13.09	0.32
<u>Step 2</u>					
Social efficacy	0.34	0.02	0.19	**7.00	0.43
Cultural empathy	0.38	0.03	0.24	**7.80	

Note. $p < .01$ **

The regression model for predicting self-efficacy for learning was found to be significant ($F(2, 415) = 130.92, p < .01$), where these predictors add 43% to the explained variance of self-efficacy for learning. It can be observed that in the second step, there is a reduction in the strength of the association between social efficacy and self-efficacy for learning when the mediating variable, cultural empathy, is present. This data indicates that cultural empathy partially mediates the association between social efficacy and self-efficacy for learning (see Table 4).

Table 4

Regression Coefficient for Predicting Self-Efficacy for Learning According to Emotional Stability and Cultural Empathy

Predictors	Coefficients		<i>B</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>R</i> ²
	β	<i>SE</i>			
<u>Step 1</u>					
Emotional stability	0.44	0.03	0.30	**9.26	0.19
<u>Step 2</u>					
Emotional stability	0.23	0.03	0.16	**5.18	0.39
Cultural empathy	0.49	0.03	0.30	**10.69	

Note. $p < .01$ **

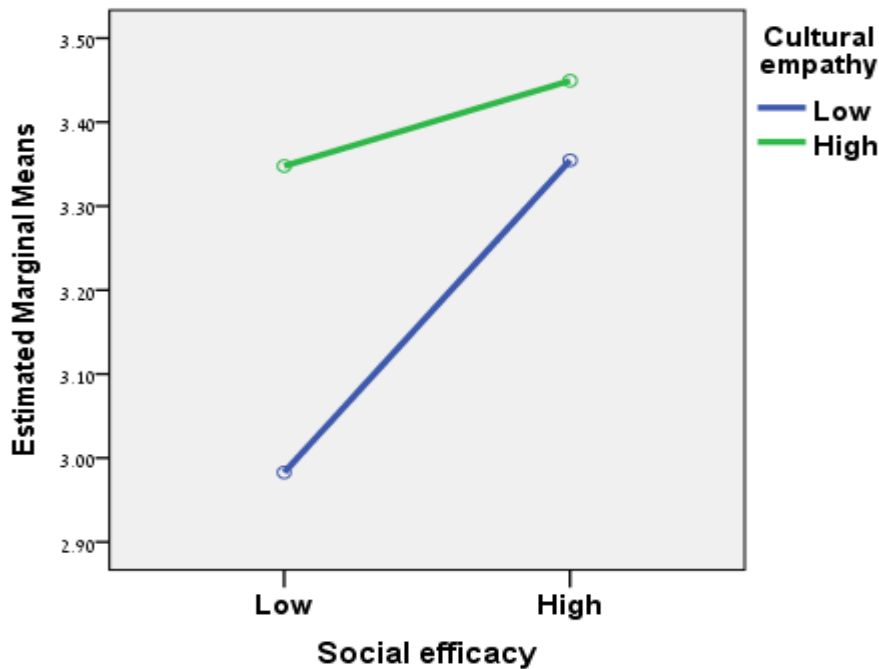
The regression model for predicting self-efficacy for learning was found to be significant ($F(2, 415) = 113.89, p < .01$), where these predictors add 39% to the explained variance of self-efficacy for learning. It can be observed that in the second step, similarly, as was observed for social efficacy (Table 3) there is also a reduction in the strength of the association between emotional stability and self-efficacy for learning when the mediating variable, cultural empathy, exists (Table 4). This data indicates that cultural empathy also partially mediates the association between emotional stability and self-efficacy for learning.

Interaction Analysis Between SEL Variables and Self-Efficacy for Learning

To examine the effect of the interaction between social efficacy and cultural empathy on self-efficacy for learning, a bidirectional variance analysis was conducted. For purposes of the analysis, the research sample was divided into two groups (low/high social efficacy/cultural empathy) based on the median value (social efficacy 3.94, cultural empathy 3.83). The findings are shown in the table below. In the bidirectional variance analysis, a significant effect of social efficacy on self-efficacy for learning was found ($F(1, 415) = 45.99, p < 0.01$). Higher social efficacy was associated with higher self-efficacy for learning. Moreover, a significant effect of cultural empathy on self-efficacy for learning was found ($F(1, 415) = 43.36, p < 0.01$). Higher cultural empathy was associated with higher self-efficacy for learning. A significant interaction was found between social efficacy and cultural empathy in their effect on self-efficacy for learning ($F(1, 415) = 14.98, p < 0.01$); the gap in self-efficacy for learning between those teachers with low social efficacy and those with high social efficacy was greater when cultural empathy was low relative to when cultural empathy was high. The data is illustrated in the figure below (see Figure 1).

Figure 1

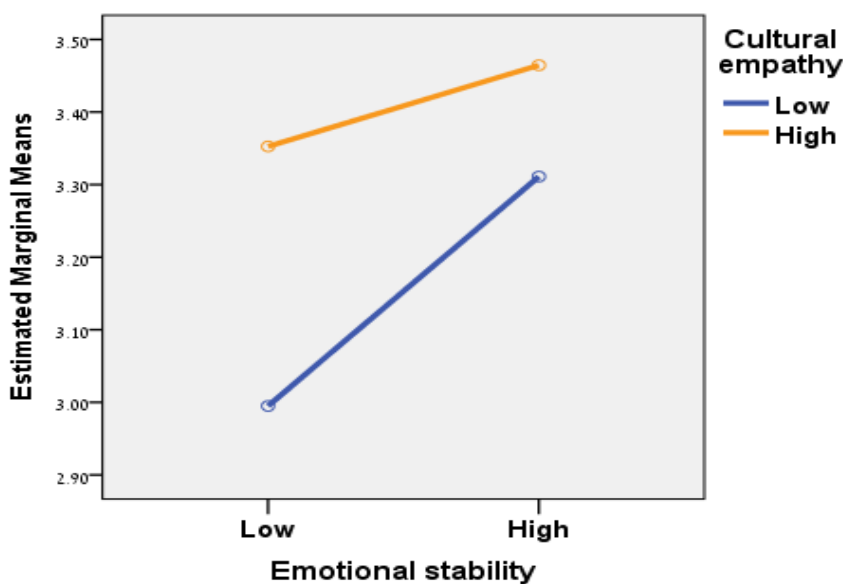
Effect of Interaction Between Social Efficacy and Cultural Empathy on Self-Efficacy for Learning



To examine the effect of the interaction between emotional stability and cultural empathy on self-efficacy for learning, a bidirectional variance analysis was conducted. For purposes of the analysis, the research sample was divided into two groups (low/high emotional stability/cultural empathy) based on the median value (social efficacy 3.65, cultural empathy 3.83). The findings are shown in the table below.

Figure 2

Effect of Interaction Between Emotional Stability and Cultural Empathy on Self-Efficacy for Learning



In the bidirectional variance analysis, a significant effect of emotional stability on self-efficacy for learning was found ($F(1) = 39.11, p < 0.01$). Higher emotional stability was associated with higher self-efficacy for learning. Moreover, a significant effect of cultural empathy on self-efficacy for learning was found ($F(1, 415) = 55.78, p < 0.01$). Higher cultural empathy was thus associated with higher self-efficacy for learning.

A significant interaction was detected between emotional stability and cultural empathy in their effect on self-efficacy for learning ($F(1, 415) = 8.90, p < 0.01$): the gap in self-efficacy for learning between those with low emotional stability and those with high emotional stability was greater when cultural empathy was low relative to when it was high. The data is illustrated in the figure below (see Figure 2).

Discussion

In this study, we investigated specific SEL competencies involving social and emotional aspects that are most determinate in enhancing self-efficacy for learning amongst a minority teacher population, namely Muslim Arab teachers living in Israel. Social-emotional competencies predict career success and support the individual teacher and collective well-being. SEL enhances school climate and culture, as an SEL-based school environment promotes healthy relationships between teachers and students and among teachers themselves. SEL also engenders a strong sense of belonging, contributing to the teacher and student's overall well-being and student academic success (Durlak, 2016).

Our research sheds light on promoting SEL in minority teachers' vocational activities and overall well-being. Education systems are moving toward a more holistic development of students as well as teachers, advancing their cognitive skills as well as their psychological well-being and social relations in the school environment (OECD, 2021). Finkelstein and Soffer-Vital (in press) have found an empirical model in which students with high social competence have high emotional stability. Social competence is positively associated with emotional stability. Social competence and emotional stability are positively associated with high self-efficacy for learning and cultural empathy, such that students with higher social competence and emotional stability have higher self-efficacy for learning and cultural empathy. In the present study, it was found that the lower the teachers' level of cultural empathy, the greater the gap in self-efficacy for learning between those teachers possessing low social competence and those with high social competence (Figure 1). A similar pattern was also observed in emotional stability and self-efficacy for learning also mediated by cultural empathy (Figure 2) These data were corroborated by the linear regression models for the same SEL parameters (see Tables 3 and 4) which indicated that the mediation by cultural empathy was partial. Thus, the evidence in our study points to cultural empathy as a key SEL teacher trait that links other SEL variables to self-efficacy for learning in minority teachers.

Previous studies have found that social competence and cultural empathy are SEL competencies that are positively associated with self-efficacy (Sallquist et al., 2009). Notably, much of the previous research on SEL was based on student populations, in contrast to the current study which focuses on teachers and SEL. We assume that it is safe to extrapolate that the basic SEL principles and premises found in students are similarly operational in teacher populations as well. Self-efficacy for learning contributes entirely to the modification of students' (as well as teachers') general adjustment levels (Sallquist et al., 2009). Self-efficacy for learning contributes entirely to the modification of teachers' general adjustment levels. Moreover, self-efficacy for learning contributes to both students' and teachers' ability to navigate challenging situations without experiencing anxiety or confusion. We found a significant effect of cultural empathy on self-efficacy for learning; higher cultural empathy is associated with higher self-efficacy for learning.

Our results indicate the importance of intercultural competence and SEL in diversified schools, which mirrors the experience of the Muslim-Arab teachers we examined in Israeli schools. The importance of these results is highlighted by other research findings indicating that students in diverse schools face particular demands and burdens and often struggle with stress, distress, instability, mental health problems, and adjustment difficulties. Cultural empathy encompasses important teacher qualities such as tolerance, emotional stability, social inventiveness, and flexibility, all considered multicultural personality characteristics. Students as well as teachers who feel safe in their cultural, ethnic, and other identities and are eager to accept diversity in their personal lives tend to try and learn about other cultures and to interact with people from different cultural backgrounds (Cheraghi & Karamimehr, 2022). Cultural empathy is critical for students in schools because it empowers the various skills of learning (OECD, 2021). Cultural empathy endorses learning together effectively in groups of students from varying ethnic backgrounds. In multicultural groups, students must understand the biases in their worldviews and pursue awareness of alternative worldviews. As mentioned above, all of these SEL aspects involving cultural empathy apply to teachers in a similar vein as they apply to students.

Another major finding of the present study found significant differences in levels of social efficacy between teachers who participated in social-emotional activities before and after the pandemic in the course of their work compared to those who did not participate in such activities. The implementation of SEL interventions has been discussed in the SEL literature (Durlak, 2016). We have found here that SEL intervention affects social competence. For example, a sense of commitment and belonging to the educational institution was found to be significantly positively associated with emotional stability, cultural empathy, social efficacy, and self-efficacy for learning. Thus, personal, and interpersonal awareness and competence may contribute to success in navigating new and challenging academic, social, and emotional terrain. These findings corroborate previous studies that showed that a sense of belonging to teachers is of great importance to their self-efficacy for learning (Andrews et al., 2021; Holloway-Friesen, 2021).

Moreover, regarding specific SEL competencies, our current study found that a sense of belonging contributed significantly to not only the prediction of self-efficacy for learning, but in addition social stability, cultural empathy, and social competence. Teachers may experience concerns and anxiety related to the tension between demands placed on their teaching and family obligations while balancing work and family demands. Competencies involving SEL, therefore, promote improved mental health coping strategies, contributing to the prevention of the buildup of mental health issues in teachers. Thus, it has been proposed that SEL may lower levels of educator and teacher burnout, self-judgment, and dropout (for example, Durlak, 2015). These phenomena are particularly exacerbated in minority teacher populations, especially ones under frequent suspicion and stress as is the case for Muslim Arab teachers in Israel amidst the contextual backdrop of the Arab-Israeli political/cultural conflict permeating the Israeli society.

Conclusion

There was a significant interaction between the SEL competencies of social competence and cultural empathy on self-efficacy for learning; there was also a significant interaction between emotional stability and cultural empathy on self-efficacy for learning. The common mediating variable is the cultural empathy of teachers which appears to be critical for self-efficacy for learning. The potential of SEL to foster increased achievement and equity in multicultural education may not be fulfilled unless there is a greater effort to put the ideals of SEL into everyday practice in schools. This paper sheds light on the vital importance of

promoting emotional stability, social competence, and especially cultural empathy (due to its mediating role) in schools using cultivating social inclusion. Cultural empathy promotes intercultural dialogue in the classroom and at school and narrows the social exclusion of students at school (Amara & Merei, 2008; Barake, 2013). While these social and emotional competencies are malleable (Schonert-Reichl, 2019), teachers can be empowered by SEL formal training. Pedagogy based on emotional stability and cultural empathy may promote social resilience and the preservation of the cultural heritage of both teachers and students. Further studies are needed to delineate the role of schools as key components for social mobility while providing a sense of belonging to minority groups, both students and teachers alike. These studies will expand our knowledge regarding the experience of social inclusion and belonging for promoting inter-generational mobility and further diversity in the economic sphere and society at large.

Theoretical and Practical Implications

Our research clarifies and hones numerous facets of the conceptualization and operationalization of social-emotional competencies involved with SEL. As schools become increasingly diverse and provide education for students and working environments for teachers from different cultural backgrounds, SEL, and its associated social and emotional competencies may provide critical tools and skillsets for the welfare of both teachers and students. This is especially relevant to how these actors interact through teaching and learning processes. Teachers and students from diverse cultural backgrounds, minority ones in particular, face unique challenges; there is therefore a crucial need to develop and design appropriate SEL teacher training to benefit both elements of the educational enterprise. While it is sure the case that indeed all teachers may benefit from SEL, minority teachers whose cultural backgrounds differ from most others in their environment may have particularly accentuated challenges and a greater need for SEL. Given the key and critical mediating role of cultural empathy in linking social efficacy and emotional stability to self-efficacy of learning, it accentuates the importance of not only SEL training in minority teacher populations but also promoting such interactions between minority teachers and majority students in the first place. It is suggested that the greater exposure between the cultures of minority teachers (here it was Muslim Arabs) and the majority culture (Jewish Israelis), the more chance the SEL competency of cultural empathy may be fostered and developed both in teachers and students alike. Thus, the contribution of our study is the empirically measured significance of cultural empathy, social competence, and emotional stability on self-efficacy for learning in minority teachers. Scaling up SEL implementation requires teacher training (Elias, 2019) and affects the readiness to implement school-based social-emotional learning interventions (Wanless & Domitrovich, 2015).

Limitations and Future Research Directions

Our research illuminates the importance of SEL in building self-efficacy for learning in schools in Israel. Israel is a multicultural country, including, aside from Arab Muslims, Arab Christians, Druze, Bedouin, and Jews as the major populations. Our research sample was limited to only Arab Muslim teachers in elementary, junior, and high school in Israel, to focus on the unique challenges of this specific group. Although this study's results provide insights related to Arab-Muslim teachers in Israel, the sample size could potentially be enlarged and/or expanded to other cultures and religions from different countries in the world. Only a limited number of studies have evaluated the impact of SEL interventions in schools (e.g., Castro-Olivo & Merrell, 2012; Durlak, 2015; Vincent & Tobin, 2010). Our research targeted teachers' perceptions, and further research also supports the need for multiple SEL interventions to

improve teacher wellness. We suggest that in future research there should be a focus on SEL intervention as part of learning and teaching processes by including SEL in school policies and practices and examining the effects on students and teachers of such an intervention therein.

Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

Ethics Approval

This research includes a non-interventional study (anonymous questionnaires), approved by Ono Academic College Central Research Ethics Committee, reference 202124ono.

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