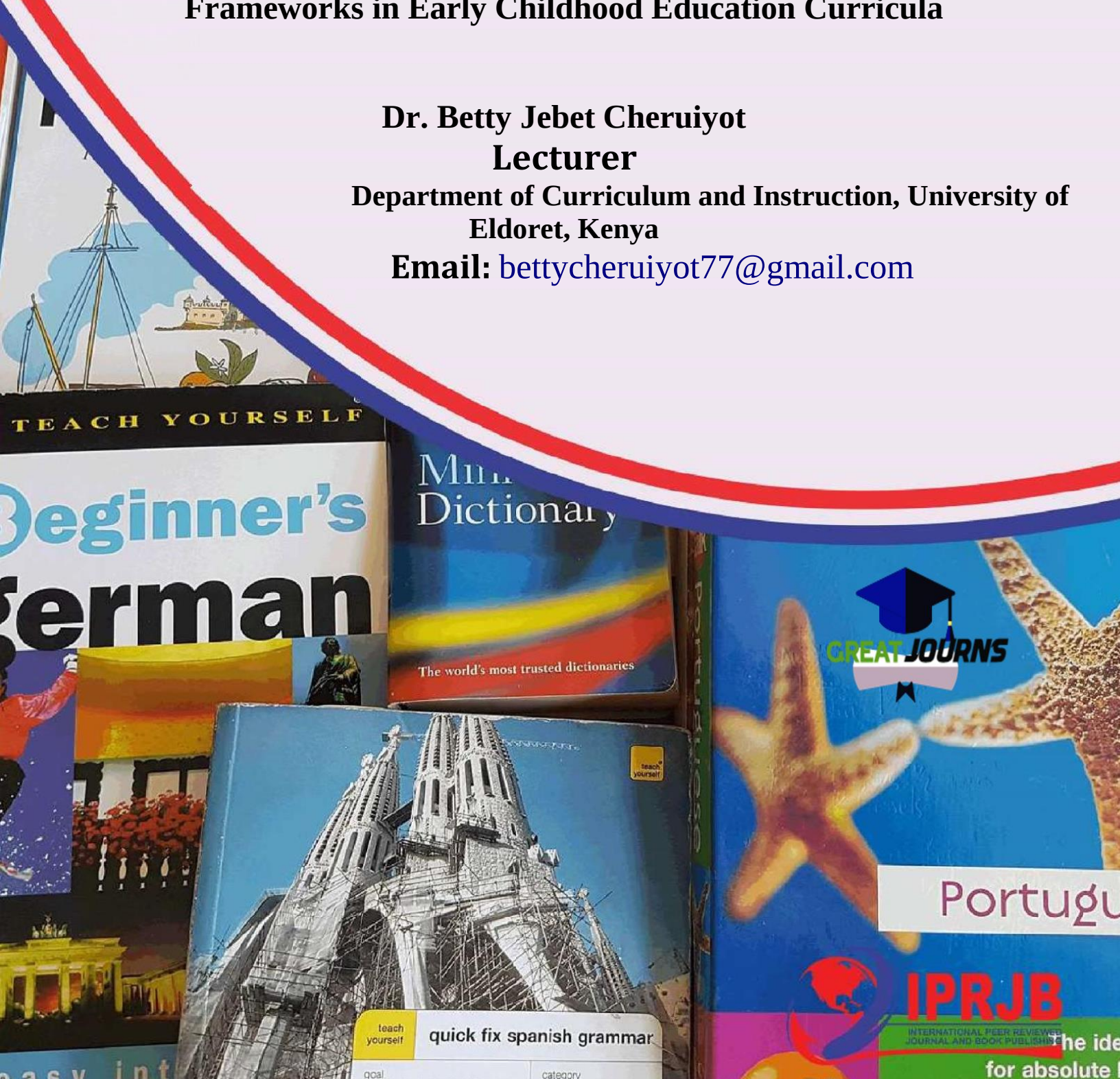
GREAT JOURNS

Journal of Education

Vol.1 No.2, June 2024

Evaluating the Integration of Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) Frameworks in Early Childhood Education Curricula

Dr. Betty Jebet Cheruiyot
Lecturer
Department of Curriculum and Instruction, University of Eldoret, Kenya
Email: bettycheruiyot77@gmail.com



Great Journs
ISSN: 2328-4870
Vol.1 No 2, June 2024

Journal homepage: www.greatjourns.com

ABSTRACT

This study explored the integration of Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) frameworks in early childhood education curricula. Employing a descriptive survey design, the research assessed the implementation status, challenges faced, and perceived impacts on children's social-emotional development. The target population consisted of 208 individuals, comprising 83 Early Childhood Educators and 125 School Administrators. Stratified and simple random sampling methods were utilized to select a representative sample size of 90 respondents. Data collection involved questionnaires and structured interviews, with analysis conducted using SPSS for descriptive statistics. The findings revealed varying levels of awareness among educators regarding SEL importance, the extent of SEL activities in daily routines, availability of SEL-specific resources, participation in SEL-related professional development, and perceived impacts on children's social-emotional skills. This study highlighted the significance of effective SEL integration in early childhood education for promoting holistic child development and enhancing educational outcomes.

Key Words: Social-Emotional Learning, Early Childhood Education, Curriculum Integration, Student Development

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) has garnered significant attention among educators, policymakers, and researchers due to its profound impact on child development and educational outcomes. SEL refers to the process through which children acquire and apply the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions (Cavioni, Broli & Grazzani, (2024).

In recent years, the integration of SEL frameworks into early childhood education curricula has become a focal point in educational discourse. This integration aims to cultivate emotional intelligence and interpersonal skills in young learners, equipping them with essential competencies for lifelong success. According to Durlak *et al*., (2021), effective SEL programs not only enhance students' social and emotional competence but also contribute to improved academic performance, reduced behavioral problems, and positive school climate.

Research indicates that early childhood, characterized by rapid cognitive and emotional development, is a critical period for embedding SEL principles into educational practices (Jones & Bouffard, 2012). By nurturing SEL competencies early on, educators support children in developing resilience, self-awareness, and effective communication skills, which are foundational for academic achievement and personal well-being (Zins *et al*., 2014).Despite the growing recognition of SEL's importance, challenges persist in effectively integrating SEL frameworks into early childhood education curricula. These challenges include varying levels of educator training and readiness, limited resources, and the need for culturally responsive approaches to SEL implementation (Elias *et al*., 2017). The effectiveness of SEL programs hinges on comprehensive planning, collaborative efforts among stakeholders, and alignment with educational goals and standards (Greenberg et al., 2023).

Great Journs
ISSN: 2328-4870
Vol.1 No 2, June 2024

Journal homepage: www.greatjourns.com

II: LITERATURE REVIEW

In the United States, a study conducted by Akinnusi, (2021) explored school principals' leadership strategies and implementation challenges in Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) programs aimed at addressing disproportionate special education referrals and school suspensions among minority students in an urban school district in California. Guided by transformational leadership and implementation science frameworks, this qualitative descriptive study investigated how principals navigated the complexities of SEL implementation amidst persistent disparities in educational outcomes. Semi-structured interviews with 10 principals provided insights into their leadership behaviors, the specific challenges they faced, and their efforts to bridge gaps in special education identification and disciplinary actions. Using NVivo software for data analysis, the study highlighted the importance of effective communication with staff, setting realistic goals, and conducting thorough needs assessments to inform intervention strategies. Despite these efforts, the study identified barriers such as insufficient staff commitment, inadequate professional development opportunities, and limited planning time, which hindered principals' capacity to effectively support SEL initiatives in their schools. The findings suggest implications for school leadership practices, emphasizing the need for culturally responsive training and proactive strategies to foster inclusive school environments and promote equitable educational outcomes through SEL integration.

In Australia, Brown, (2022) conducted a study evaluating the integration of Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) frameworks in early childhood education curricula across 20 centers in New South Wales. The study aimed to assess SEL framework implementation through surveys, interviews with educators, classroom observations, and curriculum analysis. Findings revealed varying depths of SEL integration among centers, with some incorporating comprehensive programs into daily schedules to enhance social and emotional skills, while others adopted SEL in a more ad-hoc manner. Key factors influencing successful integration included educator professional development, institutional support, and access to SEL-specific resources. The study concluded that while SEL integration in Australian early childhood education is beneficial, it remains inconsistent. Recommendations included increased investment in educator training, better resource allocation, and enhanced institutional support to ensure more consistent and effective SEL implementation. This research highlights SEL's potential positive impact on child development and emphasizes the need for strategic improvements in SEL practices nationwide.

In Turkey, a study conducted by Özgünlü, Erbil, and Göl-Güven (2022), explored the integration of Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) frameworks into early childhood education curricula in Turkey. SEL was increasingly recognized globally for its positive impact on children's socio-emotional development and academic success. Using qualitative research methods, including interviews and document analysis, the study examined implementation strategies, challenges, and perceived benefits of SEL among educators and administrators in Turkish early childhood education settings. Findings indicated growing support for SEL, despite facing challenges such as curriculum alignment, inadequate teacher training, and resource constraints. The study highlighted the importance of comprehensive policies and professional development programs to enhance SEL

practices in Turkish early childhood education, aiming to foster holistic child development and well-being.

In Malawi, Lee (2023) explored how teachers adapted to challenges when integrating social and emotional learning (SEL) into classroom instruction. The qualitative study involved 42 teachers and highlighted various methods used for SEL instruction, such as teaching SEL vocabulary, establishing SEL-guided classroom rules, providing behavior coaching, and employing poetry and personalized greetings to enhance self-concept and relationships among students. Factors influencing these methods included teachers' perceptions of their roles, cultural norms, student needs, assessment practices, and classroom constraints. Despite encountering challenges, the study revealed that adaptive pedagogy enabled teachers to maintain their commitment to SEL implementation in the classroom.

In Kenya, a study conducted by Mwangi, (2021) evaluated the integration of Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) frameworks in early childhood education curricula. This study focused on 15 early childhood education centers in Nairobi County and aimed to understand how SEL frameworks were incorporated into the teaching and learning processes. Data were collected through structured interviews with teachers and administrators, as well as classroom observations and analysis of curriculum documents. The findings revealed that while there was a general awareness of the importance of SEL, the actual integration of SEL frameworks varied significantly across the centers. Some schools had well-developed SEL programs with dedicated time for SEL activities, while others integrated SEL concepts more informally through daily interactions and classroom management strategies. Factors influencing the successful integration of SEL included teacher training, availability of resources, and support from school administration. The study concluded that for effective integration of SEL frameworks in early childhood education curricula, there needs to be a concerted effort in training educators, providing necessary resources, and fostering a supportive school environment. This research highlights the potential of SEL to enhance the social and emotional development of young children in Kenya, advocating for more structured and consistent implementation of SEL frameworks across educational institutions.

Great Journs
ISSN: 2328-4870
Vol.1 No 2, June 2024

Journal homepage: www.greatjourns.com

III: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND DESIGN

3.1 Research Design

The current study adopted a descriptive survey design to systematically investigate and describe the integration of Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) frameworks in early childhood education curricula.

3.2 Target Population

In Mugenda and Mugenda's (1999) definition, a population was defined as a set of individual cases or objects sharing common observable characteristics, to which researchers sought to generalize the results of studies. In the specific study discussed, the target population comprised educators and administrators actively involved in early childhood education settings. This population originally consisted of 83 Early Childhood Educators and 125 School Administrators, totaling 208 individuals from diverse educational institutions.

Table 3.1 Target Population

Respondent Categories	**Target Population**
Early Childhood Educators	83
School Administrators	125
Total	**208**

3.3 Sampling procedure and sample size

The study employed a combination of stratified and simple random sampling techniques to select its respondents. According to Kothari (1997), stratified sampling involves dividing the population into smaller, homogeneous groups known as strata based on shared attributes. In this study evaluating the integration of Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) frameworks in early childhood education curricula, the population was stratified into Early Childhood Educators and School Administrators. Within each stratum, a simple random sampling method was used to select respondents. Purposive sampling was utilized to include department heads who possessed specific knowledge relevant to the study's objectives (Kombo & Tromp, 2006).

The sample size of 90 respondents was determined to ensure adequate statistical power and manageability of data collection efforts, following the guidelines by Saunders et al. (2009) and the recommendation of Magunda and Mugenda (2007) to use approximately 30% of the target population. This approach ensured the study could effectively explore the integration of SEL frameworks in early childhood education curricula with sufficient depth and reliability.

Table 3.2 Sample size

Respondent Categories	**Target Population**	**Sample size**
Early Childhood Educators	83	25
School Administrators	125	65
Total	**208**	**90**

3.3 Data Collection Document

The main tool for data collection in this study was a questionnaire. The questionnaire was distributed and collected after two days to save time, ensure convenience, and maintain cost-

effectiveness. Some questionnaires were administered through interviews. The questionnaire contained both close-ended and open-ended questions. The close-ended questions included predetermined response types organized into a Likert scale, which facilitated data organization and analysis while keeping the focus on the study's core objectives. A few open-ended questions allowed respondents to express themselves freely and provided insights that might not have been captured by the close-ended questions (Kothari & Garg, 2014).

3.4 Questionnaires

One type of questionnaire was prepared for respondents. The questionnaire was divided into two parts – A and B. Part A gathered background information about the respondents and their roles in early childhood education. Part B had three sections. Section 1 addressed the integration of SEL frameworks into early childhood education curricula. Section 2 focused on the challenges faced during the implementation of SEL frameworks. Section 3 assessed the perceived impact of SEL integration on children's social-emotional development. A Likert scale was used to measure respondents' attitudes and perceptions, with options ranging from Strongly Agree (SA) to Strongly Disagree (SD). The Likert scale was chosen for its ease of construction, reliability, and objectivity (Kothari, 2009).

3.4.1 Interview

Structured face-to-face interviews were conducted alongside the questionnaires to gather additional information and provide deeper insights. This method allowed the researcher to probe further into the experiences and perspectives of educators and administrators. The interviews facilitated a comprehensive understanding of the challenges and successes in integrating Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) frameworks into the curriculum.

3.5 Validity and Reliability

3.5.1 Reliability

A pilot study was carried out in two early childhood education centers. The test-retest method was used to estimate the reliability of the questionnaire and interview instruments. This involved a small sample of educators and administrators from the final study population. Reliability is a measure of the degree to which a research instrument produces consistent results or data upon repeated trials (Divivedi, 2007). Pearson's product-moment correlation coefficient for test-retest reliability was computed. The minimum reliability coefficient value needed to judge if the instrument is reliable is 0.50.

3.5.2 Validity of Research Instruments

Validity is the most critical criterion and indicates the degree to which an instrument measures what it is supposed to measure. It is the extent to which differences found with a measuring instrument reflect actual differences among those being tested (Kothari, 2003). Validity of a research instrument deals with whether the instrument measures what it is supposed to measure. Mugenda and Mugenda (2009) state that validity is the degree to which results obtained from an analysis of the data represent the phenomenon being studied. To ensure validity, the researcher consulted experts in the field of early childhood education and social-emotional learning for guidance and advice.

3.6 Data Collection Procedures

Before conducting the research, the researcher obtained the necessary authorizations. Permission was sought from the relevant educational authorities to conduct research in the selected early childhood education centers. Copies of the questionnaires were administered personally to the respondents. Participants were asked to read the instructions before filling out the questionnaire. They were assured that the information provided would be kept confidential and used solely for the study. Adequate time was allowed for participants to respond to the items in the questionnaires. The researcher personally collected the questionnaires to gauge the degree of response.

Ethical considerations were taken into account by assuring participants that the information provided would be used solely for research purposes and not to malign their integrity or interests. Respondents were advised not to indicate their names anywhere on the questionnaires.

3.7 Method of data presentation and Analysis

The collected data was coded and analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). Descriptive statistics, including frequencies and percentages, were employed to summarize the data (Barman, 2002). The findings were presented in tables in Chapter Four.

3.8 Ethical Consideration

To ensure ethical compliance, a consent form was prepared and piloted to inform participants about the study's purpose and assure them of their voluntary participation. Privacy, confidentiality, and cultural sensitivity were maintained throughout the research process. Participants' names were not recorded on the instruments to ensure anonymity and protect their identity.

Great Journs
ISSN: 2328-4870
Vol.1 No 2, June 2024

Journal homepage: www.greatjourns.com

IV: RESULTS

4.1 INTEGRATION OF SEL FRAMEWORKS IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION CURRICULA

Table 4.1 Integration of SEL Frameworks in Early Childhood Education Curricula

Statements	SA	A	U	D	SD	N
Awareness of SEL importance among educators	30	25	20	10	5	90
	33%	28%	22%	11%	6%	100%
Integration of SEL activities in daily routine	25	30	15	12	8	90
	28%	33%	17%	13%	9%	100%
Availability of SEL-specific resources	20	25	22	15	8	90
	22%	28%	24%	17%	9%	100%
Professional development on SEL for educators	35	20	18	10	7	90
	39%	22%	20%	11%	8%	100%
Impact of SEL on children's social-emotional skills	28	32	15	10	5	90
	31%	36%	17%	11%	6%	100%

From Table 4.1, the following were the results according to statements respectively: Awareness of the importance of SEL among educators was high, with 30 respondents (33%) strongly agreeing and 25 respondents (28%) agreeing on its significance. However, 20 respondents (22%) were undecided, and 10 respondents (11%) strongly disagreed, with a total of 90 respondents participating in the survey.

In terms of integrating SEL activities into daily routines, 25 respondents (28%) reported strong integration, while 30 respondents (33%) actively engaged in such practices. However, 15 respondents (17%) expressed uncertainty, and 12 respondents (13%) disagreed with the integration of SEL activities, out of the total 90 respondents.

Regarding the availability of SEL-specific resources, 20 respondents (22%) strongly agreed and 25 respondents (28%) agreed that these resources were sufficiently accessible. However, 22

respondents (24%) disagreed, and 15 respondents (17%) strongly disagreed with the availability of such resources, with 90 respondents participating in the survey.

Professional development on SEL for educators emerged as a crucial factor, with 35 respondents (39%) strongly agreeing and 20 respondents (22%) agreeing that they had received adequate training in SEL. Conversely, 18 respondents (20%) were undecided, and 10 respondents (11%) disagreed, with 7 respondents (8%) strongly disagreeing on the availability of professional development opportunities, out of the total 90 respondents.

The study explored the impact of SEL on children's social-emotional skills, revealing that 28 respondents (31%) strongly agreed and 32 respondents (36%) agreed on its positive influence. However, 15 respondents (17%) were undecided, and 10 respondents (11%) disagreed with the impact of SEL on children's skills, out of 90 respondents in total.

V: SUMMARY

5.1 Integration of SEL Frameworks in Early Childhood Education Curricula

The first goal of the study was to evaluate the integration of Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) frameworks in early childhood education curricula. Based on the descriptive statistics results: Awareness of the importance of SEL among educators was high, with 30 respondents (33%) strongly agreeing and 25 respondents (28%) agreeing on its significance. However, 20 respondents (22%) were undecided, and 10 respondents (11%) strongly disagreed, with a total of 90 respondents participating in the survey. In terms of integrating SEL activities into daily routines, 25 respondents (28%) reported strong integration, while 30 respondents (33%) actively engaged in such practices. However, 15 respondents (17%) expressed uncertainty, and 12 respondents (13%) disagreed with the integration of SEL activities, out of the total 90 respondents. Regarding the availability of SEL-specific resources, 20 respondents (22%) strongly agreed and 25 respondents (28%) agreed that these resources were sufficiently accessible. However, 22 respondents (24%) disagreed, and 15 respondents (17%) strongly disagreed with the availability of such resources, with 90 respondents participating in the survey. Professional development on SEL for educators emerged as a crucial factor, with 35 respondents (39%) strongly agreeing and 20 respondents (22%) agreeing that they had received adequate training in SEL. Conversely, 18 respondents (20%) were undecided, and 10 respondents (11%) disagreed, with 7 respondents (8%) strongly disagreeing on the availability of professional development opportunities, out of the total 90 respondents.The study explored the impact of SEL on children's social-emotional skills, revealing that 28 respondents (31%) strongly agreed and 32 respondents (36%) agreed on its positive influence. However, 15 respondents (17%) were undecided, and 10 respondents (11%) disagreed with the impact of SEL on children's skills, out of 90 respondents in total.

5.2 Conclusion

The study concluded that, educators generally recognize the importance of SEL in fostering children's social and emotional development. However, the depth and consistency of SEL integration depend significantly on factors such as institutional support, availability of resources,

and the extent of professional development provided to educators. Centers that prioritize SEL-specific training for staff and allocate adequate resources tend to exhibit more comprehensive SEL programs, enhancing children's social and emotional skills more effectively. The study identified key elements contributing to successful SEL integration, including structured curriculum planning, intentional SEL activities tailored to children's developmental stages, and ongoing assessment and refinement of SEL practices. These elements are crucial for creating supportive learning environments where children develop essential social and emotional competencies.

5.3 Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusions reached, the study makes a number of recommendations, including:

Develop and disseminate standardized guidelines for SEL implementation across early childhood education centers to ensure consistency and quality in SEL practices. Invest in continuous professional development opportunities for educators focused on SEL pedagogy, strategies for classroom implementation, and effective use of SEL-specific resources. Allocate sufficient resources, including materials, curriculum support, and dedicated time for SEL activities, to facilitate comprehensive SEL integration in daily routines. Advocate for policy initiatives that prioritize SEL in early childhood education, promoting institutional support and funding for SEL programs.

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