

MEASURING WHAT MATTERS: EDUCATORS' SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL COMPETENCIES

Merav Esther Hemi^{1,2}, & Ronen Kasperski^{2,1}

¹*SEL-C Simulation Center, Shaanan Academic Religious Teachers' College (Israel)*

²*Department for Inclusive Education, Gordon Academic college for Education (Israel)*

Abstract

Teachers' social-emotional competencies (SEL) play a central role in shaping instructional quality, classroom climate, and educators' professional well-being. Despite growing recognition of their importance, valid and profession-specific tools for assessing educators' SEL remain limited. The EduSEL questionnaire was originally developed to address this gap through a domain-specific, practice-anchored assessment of educators' social-emotional competencies. Empirical use of EduSEL across multiple studies demonstrated its sensitivity to developmental differences among preservice, novice, and experienced educators, as well as its relevance for SEL-focused professional learning. At the same time, accumulated evidence highlighted conceptual and psychometric limitations, including partial alignment with the CASEL framework, redundancy across items, and constraints on external validity. These insights motivated the development of a refined instrument: EduSEL-R. EduSEL-R was developed through a systematic, multi-stage validation process comprising expert content review, expansion and refinement of behavioral items, and large-scale exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses. Across four studies (N = 1,683), results supported a robust four-factor structure – self-management, ethical problem solving, self- and social awareness, and relationship skills – with high internal consistency and improved construct validity. By tracing the conceptual and empirical progression from EduSEL to EduSEL-R, this paper illustrates how iterative measurement development can strengthen the assessment of educators' SEL and enhance its usefulness for research, professional development, and policy.

Keywords: *Social-emotional learning, educators, assessment, questionnaire development, validity.*

1. Introduction

Social-emotional learning (SEL) has been widely recognized as a critical foundation for effective teaching, positive classroom climates, and educators' professional well-being (American Psychological Association, 2020). A growing body of research demonstrates that educators' social-emotional competencies are associated with heightened performance (Cipriano et al., 2023), job satisfaction and commitment (Pan, 2023) and overall well-being (NEA, 2021). Despite this consensus, systematic assessment of educators' SEL remains underdeveloped. Most existing SEL instruments were designed for children, adolescents, or general adult populations and do not adequately capture the professional, relational, and ethical demands of educational practice. As a result, educational systems lack valid tools for identifying educators' SEL profiles, monitoring professional development, or evaluating SEL-oriented interventions.

In response to this gap, the Educators' Social-Emotional Learning questionnaire (EduSEL) was developed as a domain-specific assessment grounded in everyday educational interactions (Hemi & Kasperski, 2023). Initial validation studies demonstrated promising psychometric properties and sensitivity to developmental differences across career stages (Kasperski, 2023). However, accumulated empirical use also revealed conceptual and structural limitations, motivating the development of a refined instrument: EduSEL-R.

2. Design objectives

The refinement of EduSEL into EduSEL-R was guided by the need to strengthen theoretical alignment with contemporary SEL frameworks, particularly the CASEL model (CASEL, 2020), while

preserving the profession-specific focus that distinguishes educator-centered assessment from general SEL measures (such as Zych et al., 2018).

In addition, methodological standards for questionnaire development emphasize the importance of convergent validity, structural validity, and reliability when refining existing instruments (Cohen, 2013; Fornell & Larcker, 1981). These considerations informed a multi-stage validation process combining expert review, exploratory factor analysis (EFA), and confirmatory factor analysis (CFA).

3. Methods

Convergent validity was examined by comparing EduSEL with the Social and Emotional Competencies Questionnaire (SEC-Q), a validated SEL measure designed for adolescents and young adults (Zych et al., 2018; Figueroa-Varela & Rodriguez Vera, 2023). Although the SEC-Q is not profession-specific, it provides an established benchmark for examining shared SEL constructs across contexts.

Exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses were conducted following established psychometric guidelines. Model fit was evaluated using multiple indices, including the Comparative Fit Index (CFI) and Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA), applying recommended cutoff criteria. Reliability and convergent validity were assessed using composite reliability and average variance extracted.

4. Findings

4.1. Exploratory factor analysis

An exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was conducted on the expanded version of the EduSEL questionnaire using a sample of 363 educators. Principal axis factoring with oblique rotation was applied. Initial analyses suggested a multi-factor solution; following the removal of items with low or cross loadings and guided by theoretical considerations, a four-factor structure was retained.

The final EFA solution yielded four factors – self-management, ethical problem solving, self- and social awareness, and relationship skills – which together accounted for 49.4% of the total variance. All retained items loaded at or above the accepted threshold on their respective factors. The factors were moderately to strongly correlated, indicating related but distinct dimensions of educators' social-emotional competencies.

4.2. Confirmatory factor analysis

The four-factor structure identified in the EFA was subsequently tested using confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) with an independent sample of 1,320 educators. For each factor, the five items with the highest factor loadings were selected, resulting in a refined 20-item version of the EduSEL-R questionnaire. The CFA indicated an adequate fit of the four-factor model to the data, $\chi^2(153) = 447$, $\chi^2/df = 2.9$, CFI = .97, TLI = .97, RMSEA = .038 (90% CI [.034, .042]), and SRMR = .029. Standardized factor loadings were statistically significant and ranged from moderate to high across all factors.

4.3. Reliability and convergent validity

The overall EduSEL-R scale demonstrated high internal consistency (Cronbach's $\alpha = .92$). Reliability coefficients for the four subscales were also satisfactory, with all values exceeding accepted thresholds. Composite reliability indices were above .70 for all factors. Convergent validity was supported by significant correlations between EduSEL-R scores and scores on a validated SEL questionnaire administered concurrently. Average variance extracted (AVE) values were generally acceptable, although discriminant validity indices indicated substantial correlations among factors.

5. Discussion

The findings support a four-factor structure of educators' social-emotional competencies comprising self-management, ethical problem solving, self- and social awareness, and relationship skills. This structure aligns broadly with the CASEL framework while reflecting adaptations specific to professional educational practice (CASEL, 2020).

The empirical integration of self- and social awareness into a single factor suggests that, for educators, reflective awareness of one's own emotions and sensitivity to others' perspectives function as an interconnected competency. In the context of teaching, self-reflection and perspective-taking are enacted simultaneously within ongoing interpersonal interactions, rather than as distinct processes (Jones & Bouffard, 2012).

The emergence of ethical problem solving as a distinct factor highlights the centrality of moral judgment and relational decision-making in educators' work. Competencies such as assertiveness, probing, persuasion, and conflict management clustered together, underscoring that educators' social-emotional functioning is closely tied to navigating value-laden and relationally complex situations.

In comparison with the original EduSEL instrument, EduSEL-R represents a substantive refinement. The revised questionnaire demonstrates closer theoretical alignment with contemporary SEL frameworks, reduced item redundancy, and improved robustness through validation on substantially larger samples. These refinements strengthen the instrument's capacity to assess educators' SEL in a manner that is both theoretically coherent and empirically grounded.

Finally, the strong correlations among factors suggest that educators' SEL competencies are dynamically interrelated. This pattern reflects the integrated nature of social-emotional enactment in educational practice, where regulation, judgment, and relationship-building co-occur within the same professional interactions.

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