Nigerian Teacher Educators' perception of the impact of Socio-emotional Learning (SEL) on Pre-service Teachers' Classroom Readiness

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Abstract

This study examined the perceptions of Nigerian teacher educators regarding the role of socio-emotional learning (SEL) in preparing pre-service teachers for classroom readiness. The population consisted of teacher educators from Nigerian higher education institutions actively involved in teacher preparation programs, with a sample size of 350 participants (195 males and 155 females). Guided by five research questions, the study utilized a descriptive survey research design. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire titled "Teacher Educators' Perceptions on Socio-Emotional Learning and Pre-service Teachers' Classroom Readiness" (TEP-SELCR), which was validated by experts in the field. Reliability testing was conducted using Cronbach's alpha, yielding a coefficient of 0.87, indicating excellent internal consistency. The general findings revealed that both male and female teacher educators strongly agreed on the importance of SEL in teacher education, with mean scores exceeding 3.00 across relevant items. However, significant challenges were identified, including inadequate institutional support, limited resources, and cultural resistance to adopting SEL practices. Opportunities for enhancing SEL integration included professional development programs, curriculum reform, and policy advocacy. Two key recommendations emerged: (1) the need for professional development programs targeting teacher educators, and (2) the revision of curricula to embed SEL as a core component of teacher education

programs. These efforts aim to improve pre-service teachers' classroom readiness and contribute to the overall quality of education in Nigeria.

Keywords: Classroom readiness**,** Socio-emotional Learning (SEL)**,** Pre-service Teachers, perception, Nigerian Teacher Educators,

Introduction

Teacher education is critical to shaping teaching quality and learning outcomes (Darling-Hammond, 2017). In Nigeria, teacher education programs aim to equip pre-service teachers with the knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary for effective classroom practice. However, challenges such as outdated curricula, inadequate resources, and insufficient focus on holistic preparation hinder their effectiveness (Adeyemi & Adegbite, 2021). As classrooms become more complex, there is a growing need to integrate elements beyond traditional pedagogy, such as socio-emotional learning (SEL), into teacher training programs.

Classroom readiness refers to a pre-service teacher's ability to manage students, deliver content, and create conducive learning environments (Korthagen, 2017). It encompasses technical competencies, emotional preparedness, interpersonal skills, and adaptability—qualities essential for success in modern educational settings. Teachers with high classroom readiness tend to perform better and experience less burnout (Harris & DeFlorio, 2019). Thus, fostering classroom readiness should be a central goal of teacher education programs.

Socio-emotional learning (SEL) focuses on developing interpersonal and intrapersonal competencies, including self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making (CASEL, 2023; Durlak et al., 2011). While SEL is widely applied in K-12 settings to support student well-being and academic achievement, its potential in teacher education is underexplored, particularly in Nigeria. SEL equips pre-service teachers with resilience, empathy, and communication skills, which are vital for managing diverse classrooms and promoting positive student outcomes (Brackett et al., 2019). When teacher educators' model SEL practices, they foster a culture of emotional intelligence within teacher training programs (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). Despite its recognized importance, SEL integration in Nigerian teacher education remains limited, creating a gap that warrants further exploration.

Understanding Nigerian teacher educators' perceptions of SEL's impact on pre-service teachers' classroom readiness is crucial. This understanding can inform policy reforms and guide the development of more comprehensive teacher education programs. However, several barriers hinder SEL integration in Nigeria. Many teacher educators lack training in SEL competencies, making it difficult to model or teach these skills effectively (Adegoke & Adesina, 2022). Additionally, curricula in Nigerian teacher education institutions emphasize traditional pedagogical methods, leaving little room for innovative approaches like SEL (Federal Ministry of Education, 2020). Cultural factors, such as societal norms around authority and discipline, may also create resistance to SEL's empathetic and collaborative teaching styles (Eze, 2021).

The absence of research on Nigerian teacher educators' perceptions of SEL's role in classroom readiness further complicates efforts to integrate SEL into teacher education. Teacher educators serve as gatekeepers of professional standards, influencing what and how future teachers are taught (Korthagen, 2017). If they view SEL as irrelevant or impractical, they are unlikely to prioritize its inclusion. Conversely, recognizing its value can make them advocates for SEL integration. Thus, understanding their perceptions is a critical first step toward enhancing pre-service teachers' classroom readiness through SEL-based approaches.

While SEL's importance in teacher education is globally acknowledged, its application in Nigeria faces significant obstacles. Addressing these challenges requires exploring teacher educators' perceptions, which this study aims to provide. By shedding light on their views, the study seeks to contribute insights that can inform policy decisions and improve teacher education quality in Nigeria. Specifically, the study has two objectives: first, to examine how teacher educators perceive SEL's role in preparing pre-service teachers for effective classroom practice; second, to identify barriers and facilitators influencing SEL integration into teacher education programs. These objectives guide the research questions, providing clarity and direction for the study.

Research Questions

1.   What are the perceptions of male and female Nigerian teacher educators regarding the role of SEL in preparing pre-service teachers for classroom readiness?

2.   How do male and female Nigerian teacher educators perceive the current status of SEL integration into teacher education programs?

3.   What barriers do male and female teacher educators encounter when attempting to implement SEL in their teaching practices, and are there gender-specific differences in these challenges?

4.   To what extent do male and female teacher educators believe SEL contributes to the development of essential competencies (e.g., self-awareness, relationship skills) necessary for classroom readiness among pre-service teachers?

5.   What opportunities and recommendations do male and female teacher educators propose for improving the incorporation of SEL into teacher education programs?

2.1 Theoretical Framework

At the heart of SEL lies a robust theoretical framework that emphasizes the development of interpersonal and intrapersonal competencies necessary for effective social interactions and emotional regulation. One of the most widely recognized models is the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) framework, which identifies five core competencies: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making (CASEL, 2023). These competencies serve as the building blocks for fostering holistic development in both students and educators.

Self-awareness involves recognizing one's emotions, values, and strengths while maintaining an accurate self-perception. For pre-service teachers, developing self-awareness helps them understand their emotional triggers and biases, enabling them to create more inclusive and supportive learning environments (Brackett et al., 2019). Teacher educators who model self-awareness encourage pre-service teachers to reflect critically on their practices, thereby enhancing their classroom readiness.

Self-management refers to the ability to regulate emotions, thoughts, and behaviors in different situations. This competency is particularly important for pre-service teachers, as it equips them with the skills needed to manage stress, stay organized, and maintain professionalism even in challenging circumstances (Durlak et al., 2011). Studies have shown that teachers who possess strong self-management skills are better equipped to handle disruptive behaviors and foster positive classroom climates (Harris & DeFlorio, 2019).

Social awareness involves empathizing with others, understanding diverse perspectives, and appreciating cultural differences. In multicultural classrooms, social awareness enables pre-service

teachers to build rapport with students from varied backgrounds and address issues such as bias and discrimination effectively (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). As Nigeria is a culturally diverse nation, promoting social awareness among pre-service teachers becomes even more critical for ensuring equitable education.

Effective communication, collaboration, and conflict resolution are key components of relationship skills. Pre-service teachers who develop these skills are better positioned to engage students, collaborate with colleagues, and involve parents in the educational process (Zins et al., 2004). Moreover, strong relationship skills contribute to creating a sense of belonging and community within the classroom, which enhances student motivation and achievement.

This competency focuses on making ethical and constructive choices based on consideration of personal and social consequences. Responsible decision-making empowers pre-service teachers to navigate complex classroom scenarios, such as addressing behavioral issues or managing sensitive discussions, with confidence and integrity (Eccles & Roeser, 2011).

Linking SEL to Classroom Readiness and Teacher Effectiveness

Research has consistently demonstrated the positive impact of SEL on teacher effectiveness and classroom readiness. According to Korthagen (2017), teachers who exhibit high levels of socio-emotional competence are more likely to implement evidence-based instructional strategies, manage classrooms effectively, and promote positive student outcomes. Similarly, Brackett et al. (2019) argue that SEL fosters resilience and adaptability, qualities that are essential for navigating the unpredictable nature of teaching.

Furthermore, studies conducted in African contexts highlight the relevance of SEL in addressing unique challenges faced by educators in resource-constrained settings. For instance, Eze (2021) found that Nigerian teachers who participated in SEL training reported improved classroom management skills and increased job satisfaction. These findings underscore the potential benefits of integrating SEL into teacher education programs, particularly in Nigeria where classrooms often feature large numbers of students and limited resources.

While the theoretical framework provides a solid foundation for understanding SEL, it is equally important to visualize how these concepts interconnect with teacher educators' perceptions and pre-service teachers' classroom readiness. Below is a conceptual model that illustrates these

relationships, offering a clearer picture of how SEL can be leveraged to enhance teacher preparation programs in Nigeria.

2.2 Conceptual Framework

To provide a clearer understanding of how socio-emotional learning (SEL) influences teacher educators' perceptions and pre-service teachers' classroom readiness, here is a conceptual model that illustrates the interconnections between these key elements. The framework is grounded in the CASEL competencies discussed earlier and incorporates insights from existing literature on teacher education and SEL integration.

Overview of the Conceptual Model

The conceptual framework depicts a triadic relationship among three primary components:

1. Teacher Educators' Perceptions of SEL: This represents the attitudes, beliefs, and values held by teacher educators regarding the importance and feasibility of integrating SEL into teacher preparation programs.

2. Implementation of SEL in Teacher Education Programs: This refers to the actual incorporation of SEL principles and practices into curricula, teaching methods, and assessment strategies within teacher education institutions.

3. Pre-service Teachers' Classroom Readiness: This encompasses the skills, knowledge, and dispositions that pre-service teachers acquire through their training, enabling them to effectively manage and engage students in real-world classroom settings.

These components are interconnected, with teacher educators' perceptions serving as a critical mediator influencing both the implementation of SEL and its impact on pre-service teachers' classroom readiness.

Visual Representation of the Conceptual Framework

Below is a simplified representation of the conceptual model:

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[Teacher Educators' Perceptions of SEL]

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[Implementation of SEL in Teacher Education Programs] <———> [Pre-service Teachers' Classroom Readiness]
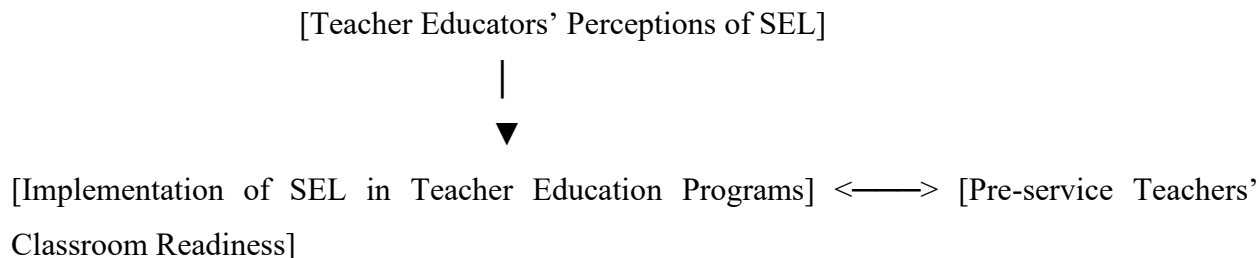
Teacher Educators' Perceptions → Implementation of SEL**:** If teacher educators perceive SEL as valuable and feasible, they are more likely to actively incorporate it into their teaching practices and advocate for its inclusion in program design.

Implementation of SEL → Pre-service Teachers' Classroom Readiness**:** Effective implementation of SEL equips pre-service teachers with essential competencies (e.g., self-awareness, relationship skills) that enhance their ability to manage classrooms, engage students, and promote positive learning environments.

Feedback Loop**:** Pre-service teachers' improved classroom readiness can reinforce teacher educators' positive perceptions of SEL, creating a virtuous cycle of continuous improvement.

Consider the following scenario: A teacher educator who believes in the power of SEL might design a course module where pre-service teachers practice active listening and empathy-building exercises. These activities not only develop the students' interpersonal skills but also prepare them to handle conflicts or diverse perspectives in their future classrooms. As the pre-service teachers demonstrate greater confidence and competence during practicum experiences, the teacher educator gains further validation of SEL's effectiveness, strengthening their commitment to promoting it.

This dynamic interaction highlights the importance of aligning teacher educators' perceptions with practical applications of SEL in teacher education programs. By fostering a supportive environment for SEL integration, institutions can better prepare pre-service teachers for the complexities of modern. Having outlined the conceptual framework, it is now essential to delve deeper into the concept of socio-emotional learning itself.

2.3 Overview of Socio-emotional Learning (SEL)

Socio-emotional learning (SEL) is a transformative approach that focuses on developing the interpersonal and intrapersonal skills necessary for personal well-being, effective relationships, and academic success. While traditionally associated with K-12 education, SEL has increasingly been recognized as a vital component of teacher preparation programs, particularly in contexts like Nigeria, where classrooms are often characterized by diversity, resource constraints, and complex social dynamics.

What is SEL? At its core, SEL refers to the process through which individuals acquire and apply knowledge, attitudes, and skills to manage emotions, set goals, show empathy for others, maintain

positive relationships, and make responsible decisions (CASEL, 2023). The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) framework, widely regarded as the gold standard for SEL implementation, identifies five key competencies: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. These competencies form the foundation for fostering holistic development in both students and educators.

Relevance of SEL in Educational Settings

In today's rapidly changing world, traditional academic skills alone are insufficient for preparing students or teachers to navigate the complexities of modern life. Schools serve not only as places of academic instruction but also as environments where social and emotional growth occurs. For pre-service teachers, SEL provides the tools needed to create safe, supportive, and inclusive classrooms that promote student engagement and achievement (Brackett et al., 2019).

Moreover, SEL aligns closely with global trends in education reform, such as competency-based frameworks and 21st-century skills development. In Nigeria, where cultural diversity and socio-economic disparities pose unique challenges, SEL can play a crucial role in bridging gaps and promoting equity in education. By equipping teachers with the ability to understand and address the diverse needs of their students, SEL enhances the overall quality of teaching and learning.

Benefits of SEL for Teachers and Students

Research has consistently demonstrated the wide-ranging benefits of SEL for both educators and learners:

Teachers who practice SEL strategies report fewer behavioral issues and more productive classroom environments (Harris & DeFlorio, 2019). Developing socio-emotional competencies helps teachers manage stress, reduce burnout, and cultivate resilience, leading to greater job satisfaction (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). SEL fosters empathy and understanding, enabling teachers to build stronger connections with their students and respond to their needs effectively. Studies show that students exposed to SEL programs perform better academically, demonstrating improved focus, motivation, and problem-solving skills (Durlak et al., 2011). SEL reduces instances of bullying, aggression, and other negative behaviors while promoting cooperation, empathy, and respect among peers. Beyond academics, SEL prepares students for lifelong success by equipping them with essential life skills such as communication, teamwork, and adaptability.

Contextualizing SEL in the Nigerian Setting

In Nigeria, the relevance of SEL is amplified by the country's rich cultural diversity and the pressing need for equitable education. Pre-service teachers trained in SEL are better equipped to handle the challenges posed by large class sizes, limited resources, and varying student backgrounds. For example, a teacher who practices social awareness can recognize and address cultural biases, ensuring that all students feel valued and included. Similarly, self-management skills enable teachers to remain calm and composed even in high-pressure situations, thereby maintaining a conducive learning environment.

Furthermore, SEL aligns with the aspirations outlined in Nigeria's National Policy on Education, which emphasizes the importance of producing "well-rounded citizens" capable of contributing positively to national development (Federal Ministry of Education, 2020). By integrating SEL into teacher education programs, Nigeria can take significant strides toward achieving this goal. While the benefits of SEL are clear, its integration into teacher education programs remains inconsistent, especially in contexts like Nigeria.

2.4 SEL in Teacher Education

The integration of socio-emotional learning (SEL) into teacher education programs has gained significant attention worldwide as educators recognize its potential to prepare teachers for the complexities of modern classrooms. While many countries have made strides in incorporating SEL into their teacher preparation curricula, progress in Africa, particularly in Nigeria, remains uneven. This section reviews studies on SEL in teacher education globally and within African contexts, emphasizing the unique challenges and opportunities faced by Nigerian institutions.

Global Perspectives on SEL in Teacher Education

Internationally, there is growing evidence that teacher education programs that prioritize SEL lead to better-prepared educators who are more effective in managing classrooms and supporting student well-being. For instance, research conducted in the United States highlights the success of programs that train pre-service teachers in SEL competencies such as self-awareness, empathy, and conflict resolution (Brackett et al., 2019). These programs often include experiential learning activities, reflective practices, and mentorship opportunities designed to model SEL principles. Similarly, European initiatives like the "Teacher Mindfulness Project" demonstrate the value of integrating mindfulness and emotional intelligence training into teacher education, resulting in

improved teacher resilience and classroom management skills (Eccles & Roeser, 2011). Such programs underscore the importance of equipping teachers with both technical and socio-emotional competencies to meet the diverse needs of their students.

African Contexts: Challenges and Progress

In African settings, the implementation of SEL in teacher education faces unique challenges due to factors such as limited resources, cultural differences, and varying levels of institutional capacity. However, promising efforts are emerging across the continent. For example, a study in Kenya found that teacher educators who received SEL training reported increased confidence in addressing behavioral issues and fostering positive relationships with students (Oduol, 2022). Similarly, South African initiatives have focused on embedding SEL into pre-service teacher curricula to promote equity and inclusivity in diverse classrooms (Maree, 2020).

Despite these successes, challenges persist. Many African teacher education programs still prioritize traditional pedagogical methods over holistic approaches, leaving little room for SEL integration. Additionally, cultural norms around authority and discipline can sometimes conflict with SEL principles, requiring careful adaptation to ensure relevance and acceptance.

Nigerian Context: Gaps in SEL Integration

In Nigeria, the incorporation of SEL into teacher education programs is notably underdeveloped compared to global standards. Several key gaps hinder effective implementation. Most Nigerian teacher education curricula focus heavily on subject content and instructional strategies, with minimal emphasis on socio-emotional development (Federal Ministry of Education, 2020). As a result, pre-service teachers may lack exposure to SEL concepts and practices. Many teacher educators themselves have not been trained in SEL, making it difficult for them to effectively model or teach these competencies (Adegoke & Adesina, 2022). Without adequate preparation, they may struggle to integrate SEL into their teaching practices. Limited access to materials, technology, and professional development opportunities further complicates efforts to implement SEL programs in resource-constrained environments. Cultural attitudes toward authority and hierarchy may create resistance to adopting more collaborative and empathetic teaching styles advocated by SEL frameworks (Eze, 2021). Addressing these barriers requires culturally sensitive adaptations of SEL practices. While Nigeria's National Policy on Education emphasizes the importance of producing "well-rounded citizens," there is no explicit mention of SEL as a means

to achieve this goal (Federal Ministry of Education, 2020). Clear policy directives could help guide the integration of SEL into teacher education programs.

2.5 Classroom Readiness

Classroom readiness refers to the ability of pre-service teachers to enter the teaching profession equipped with the necessary skills, knowledge, and dispositions to create positive learning environments, deliver high-quality instruction, and address the diverse needs of their students (Korthagen, 2017). It encompasses both technical competencies, such as pedagogical content knowledge and classroom management strategies, and interpersonal skills, such as empathy, communication, and adaptability. In this section, we will explore the key components of classroom readiness and highlight the critical role that SEL plays in enhancing each of them.

Key Components of Classroom Readiness

Pedagogical skills include the ability to plan lessons, deliver content effectively, assess student learning, and use instructional strategies tailored to different learning styles. While these skills are foundational to teaching, they must be complemented by socio-emotional competencies to ensure their successful application. For example, a teacher who practices self-awareness can reflect on their teaching methods and make adjustments based on feedback, leading to improved instructional outcomes (Brackett et al., 2019).

Emotional preparedness involves the ability to regulate one's emotions, manage stress, and maintain composure in challenging situations. Teachers who possess strong emotional regulation skills are better equipped to handle disruptive behaviors, conflicts, and other classroom challenges without becoming overwhelmed (Harris & DeFlorio, 2019). SEL directly supports emotional preparedness by fostering self-management and resilience among pre-service teachers.

Effective classroom management requires not only organizational skills but also the ability to build positive relationships with students, establish clear expectations, and respond appropriately to behavioral issues. Relationship skills and social awareness—core competencies of SEL—are essential for creating a supportive and disciplined classroom environment (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). Pre-service teachers trained in SEL are more likely to develop the interpersonal skills needed to manage diverse classrooms successfully.

Cultural competence refers to the ability to understand and appreciate cultural differences while addressing the unique needs of all students. Social awareness, a key component of SEL, enables teachers to recognize and respect diversity, challenge biases, and promote inclusivity in their classrooms (CASEL, 2023). In Nigeria, where classrooms often reflect significant cultural and linguistic diversity, cultural competence is particularly important for ensuring equitable education. The ability to adapt to changing circumstances and solve problems creatively is crucial for modern educators. Responsible decision-making, another SEL competency, equips pre-service teachers with the skills needed to navigate complex classroom scenarios, such as addressing bullying, accommodating special needs, or integrating technology into lessons (Eccles & Roeser, 2011). By promoting critical thinking and ethical reasoning, SEL enhances teachers' capacity to respond effectively to emerging challenges.

How SEL Contributes to Classroom Readiness

The integration of SEL into teacher education programs can significantly enhance pre-service teachers' classroom readiness by addressing both the cognitive and affective dimensions of teaching. For instance:

Self-awareness helps teachers identify their strengths and areas for improvement, enabling them to set realistic goals and seek professional development opportunities. Self-management reduces stress and burnout, allowing teachers to remain focused and motivated even in demanding situations.

Social awareness fosters empathy and understanding, helping teachers connect with students from diverse backgrounds and address their individual needs. Relationship skills facilitate collaboration with colleagues, engagement with parents, and effective communication with students.

Responsible decision-making ensures that teachers act ethically and constructively when faced with difficult choices, promoting trust and respect within the school community.

In the Nigerian context, where classrooms often feature large numbers of students, limited resources, and varying levels of student preparedness, SEL becomes an invaluable tool for preparing pre-service teachers to meet these challenges head-on. By developing socio-emotional competencies, pre-service teachers can create inclusive, supportive, and productive learning environments that benefit both themselves and their students. While SEL has the potential to transform teacher preparation programs, its success depends largely on the role played by teacher

educators. And it is the responsibilities of teacher educators to model and teaching SEL competencies, as well as the influence of their perceptions on program design and implementation.

2.6 Teacher Educators' Role in Promoting SEL

Teacher educators serve as the cornerstone of teacher preparation programs, shaping the knowledge, skills, and dispositions of future teachers. Their role extends beyond delivering content; they are responsible for modeling professional behaviors and fostering an environment conducive to holistic development. In the context of socio-emotional learning (SEL), teacher educators play a dual role: as instructors who teach SEL principles and as role models who demonstrate these competencies in action. Understanding their responsibilities and the influence of their perceptions is essential for enhancing the integration of SEL into teacher education programs.

Modeling SEL Competencies

One of the most powerful ways teacher educators promote SEL is through modeling. Pre-service teachers often learn by observing their mentors, making it crucial for teacher educators to exemplify the very competencies they aim to instill. For instance:

● **Self-awareness:** By reflecting openly on their own strengths and weaknesses, teacher educators demonstrate the importance of self-reflection and continuous improvement.

● **Self-management:** Managing stress effectively and maintaining professionalism under pressure shows pre-service teachers how to handle challenges in their future classrooms.

● **Social awareness:** Recognizing and valuing diversity among students and colleagues fosters inclusivity and respect within the learning community.

● **Relationship skills:** Building positive relationships with pre-service teachers and other stakeholders highlights the significance of collaboration and communication.

● **Responsible decision-making:** Addressing ethical dilemmas transparently teaches pre-service teachers the importance of integrity and accountability.

Through consistent modeling, teacher educators create a culture of emotional intelligence that permeates the entire program, influencing both the explicit curriculum and the hidden curriculum.

Teaching SEL Principles

Beyond modeling, teacher educators must actively incorporate SEL principles into their instructional practices. This involves designing courses and activities that explicitly address socio-emotional competencies while aligning with broader educational goals. For example: Including reflective exercises that encourage pre-service teachers to explore their emotions and biases. Facilitating group discussions and collaborative projects to develop relationship skills and social awareness. Providing opportunities for pre-service teachers to practice mindfulness and stress management techniques. Integrating case studies or simulations that require responsible decision-making in complex classroom scenarios. By embedding SEL into the fabric of teacher education programs, teacher educators ensure that pre-service teachers receive consistent exposure to these critical competencies.

Influence of Perceptions on Program Design and Implementation

The success of SEL integration depends heavily on teacher educators' perceptions of its value and feasibility. Those who view SEL as integral to teacher preparation are more likely to prioritize it in their teaching practices and advocate for its inclusion in program design. Conversely, educators who perceive SEL as irrelevant or impractical may overlook or resist its implementation, undermining its potential impact.

Research suggests that teacher educators' attitudes toward SEL are shaped by several factors, including their own training, institutional support, and cultural beliefs (Adegoke & Adesina, 2022). For example, a teacher educator who has undergone SEL training is more likely to recognize its benefits and feel confident in teaching these competencies. Similarly, institutions that provide resources and incentives for SEL integration foster a supportive environment for innovation and change.

In the Nigerian context, cultural norms around authority and discipline may influence teacher educators' willingness to adopt SEL practices. Some may view traditional methods as more appropriate or effective, creating resistance to new approaches. Addressing these perceptions requires culturally sensitive strategies, such as involving local stakeholders in curriculum development and emphasizing the alignment between SEL and Nigeria's National Policy on Education (Federal Ministry of Education, 2020).

By empowering teacher educators to embrace and promote SEL, institutions can significantly improve the classroom readiness of pre-service teachers and contribute to the overall quality of

education in Nigeria. While teacher educators play a pivotal role in promoting SEL, several challenges hinder its successful implementation in teacher education programs.

2.7 Challenges in Implementing SEL in Teacher Education

Despite the recognized importance of socio-emotional learning (SEL) in enhancing pre-service teachers' classroom readiness, its implementation in teacher education programs faces several significant challenges. These barriers are multifaceted and stem from institutional, cultural, and resource-related factors. Addressing these challenges is critical to ensuring that SEL can be effectively integrated into teacher preparation programs, particularly in contexts like Nigeria.

One of the most pressing challenges is the insufficient training of teacher educators in SEL competencies. Many teacher educators themselves have not received formal instruction in SEL principles or practices, making it difficult for them to model or teach these skills effectively (Adegoke & Adesina, 2022). Without adequate preparation, teacher educators may struggle to incorporate SEL into their teaching methods, leading to inconsistent or superficial implementation. Professional development programs targeting teacher educators could help bridge this gap by equipping them with the knowledge and tools needed to promote SEL in their classrooms.

Another significant challenge lies in the structure of existing teacher education curricula. In many Nigerian institutions, the curriculum focuses heavily on traditional pedagogical content and subject-specific knowledge, leaving little room for innovative approaches like SEL (Federal Ministry of Education, 2020). This emphasis on technical competencies often marginalizes socio-emotional development, despite its critical role in preparing teachers for real-world classrooms. To address this issue, curriculum reforms are necessary to ensure that SEL is embedded as a core component of teacher education programs, rather than treated as an optional add-on. Resource limitations pose another major obstacle to implementing SEL in teacher education. Many Nigerian institutions lack access to materials, technology, and financial resources required to support comprehensive SEL initiatives (Oduol, 2022). For example, experiential learning activities, such as role-playing exercises or mindfulness workshops, require time, space, and specialized facilitation—all of which may be scarce in under-resourced settings. Additionally, the absence of standardized assessment tools for measuring SEL outcomes further complicates efforts to evaluate program effectiveness.

Cultural norms and values can also impede the adoption of SEL practices in certain contexts. In Nigeria, traditional attitudes toward authority and discipline may conflict with the collaborative, empathetic approach advocated by SEL frameworks (Eze, 2021). For instance, some stakeholders may view strict hierarchical relationships between teachers and students as more appropriate or effective than the egalitarian models promoted by SEL. Overcoming these cultural barriers requires careful adaptation of SEL practices to align with local customs while preserving their core principles. Engaging community leaders and parents in discussions about the benefits of SEL can help build broader acceptance and support. At the systemic level, the absence of clear policies supporting SEL integration represents a significant barrier. While Nigeria's National Policy on Education emphasizes the importance of producing "well-rounded citizens," it does not explicitly mention SEL as a means to achieve this goal (Federal Ministry of Education, 2020). Without explicit policy directives, institutions may prioritize other areas deemed more urgent or relevant, leaving SEL initiatives underfunded or overlooked. Advocacy efforts aimed at incorporating SEL into national education policies could provide much-needed guidance and resources for its implementation.

While there is growing recognition of the importance of socio-emotional learning (SEL) in teacher education globally, little research has been conducted specifically on how Nigerian teacher educators perceive the role of SEL in preparing pre-service teachers for classroom readiness. This gap limits our understanding of the attitudes and beliefs influencing SEL integration in Nigerian contexts (Adegoke & Adesina, 2022). The current study seeks to explore these perceptions systematically, providing valuable insights into the challenges and opportunities for promoting SEL in teacher education programs.

Existing studies often overlook gender-specific differences in the way male and female teacher educators' approach SEL implementation. Given the unique roles and experiences of men and women in educational settings, it is crucial to examine whether their perceptions and practices related to SEL differ significantly. By investigating these variations, the study aims to highlight potential disparities and inform more inclusive strategies for integrating SEL into teacher education programs (Eze, 2021).

Most SEL frameworks, such as those developed by CASEL, originate from Western contexts and may not fully account for cultural nuances present in African countries like Nigeria. There is

limited research on how these frameworks can be adapted to align with local values, norms, and practices while maintaining their effectiveness (Oduol, 2022). This study explores the cultural relevance of SEL in Nigerian teacher education, offering recommendations for culturally sensitive adaptations that enhance its applicability. Despite the acknowledged benefits of SEL, its implementation in resource-constrained environments, such as many Nigerian teacher education institutions, remains challenging. Few studies have examined the specific barriers and facilitators affecting SEL integration in such settings, including issues related to curriculum design, teacher educator training, and institutional support (Federal Ministry of Education, 2020). By identifying these factors, the study provides actionable insights for policymakers and practitioners seeking to overcome obstacles and promote successful SEL adoption. By addressing these gaps, the study contributes to a deeper understanding of the role of socio-emotional learning in enhancing pre-service teachers' classroom readiness within the Nigerian context.

Research Methodology

This study employed a descriptive survey research design to evaluate the perceptions of Nigerian teacher educators regarding the impact of socio-emotional learning (SEL) on pre-service teachers' classroom readiness. The descriptive survey method was deemed appropriate as it allows for the systematic collection and analysis of data to explore participants' attitudes, experiences, and perceptions concerning the research topic.

The target population consisted of teacher educators in Nigerian higher education institutions who are actively involved in teacher preparation programs. These individuals were selected due to their professional roles and extensive experience in shaping the competencies of pre-service teachers. A purposive sampling technique was utilized to select teacher educators from various universities and colleges of education across Nigeria. Participants were chosen based on their involvement in teaching or designing curricula that incorporate SEL principles. A total of 350 teacher educators participated in the study, comprising 195 males and 155 females, ensuring balanced gender representation.

Data Collection Instrument

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire titled **"Teacher Educators' Perceptions on Socio-Emotional Learning and Pre-service Teachers' Classroom Readiness (TEP-SELCR)."** This questionnaire was developed by the researchers and validated by experts in the fields of teacher

education, socio-emotional learning, and curriculum development. Feedback from these experts was incorporated into the final version of the instrument to ensure its validity and reliability. The questionnaire consisted of 25 items grouped into five sections based on the research questions: Section A: Importance of SEL in Teacher Education. Section B: Current Status of SEL Integration in Programmes. Section C: Challenges in Implementing SEL. Section D: Opportunities for Enhancing SEL Integration

Section E: Gender-Specific Differences in Perceptions. Responses were measured using a 4-point Likert scale, with options ranging from Strongly Agree (SA) to Strongly Disagree (SD). This scale allowed participants to express their level of agreement or disagreement with each statement clearly.

Data Collection Process

The questionnaires were distributed during a national conference on teacher education reform, which brought together teacher educators from various institutions across Nigeria. This setting provided a unique opportunity to engage participants who have direct experience with SEL integration in educational settings. Two trained research assistants facilitated the distribution and collection of the questionnaires to ensure a high response rate and the completeness of returned instruments. Additionally, an online version of the questionnaire was made available to accommodate those unable to attend the conference physically, thereby maximizing participation.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations were strictly observed throughout the study:

● Informed Consent: Participants were informed about the purpose of the study, and their consent was obtained before administering the questionnaire.

● Voluntary Participation: Participation in the study was entirely voluntary, and respondents were assured that they could withdraw at any time without any consequences.

● Confidentiality: The anonymity and confidentiality of participants were guaranteed, and all data were used strictly for research purposes.

● Non-Maleficence: Steps were taken to ensure that no harm; physical, emotional, or otherwise would come to participants as a result of their involvement in the study.

Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed using descriptive statistics to address the research questions. The analysis included calculating the mean and standard deviation to summarize participants' responses. Items with a mean score of 3.00 or higher were considered acceptable, indicating agreement or positive perception, while those with a mean score below 3.00 were deemed unacceptable or negatively perceived.

The reliability of the research instrument was established using Cronbach's alpha, which yielded a coefficient of 0.87, indicating excellent internal consistency. This high reliability ensures that the questionnaire effectively measures the constructs under investigation.

Table 1: Mean and Standard Deviation of Male and Female Teacher Educators' Perceptions of the Importance of SEL in Teacher Education

S/N	ITEM STATEMENT	Male Lecturers			Female Lecturers		
		$\bar{X}$	SD	REM	$\bar{X}$	SD	REM
1	SEL is essential for preparing pre-service teachers to manage diverse classroom environments.	3.85	0.82	Accept	3.92	0.78	Accept
2	SEL competencies (e.g., self-awareness, self-management) are critical for emotional preparedness.	3.78	0.75	Accept	3.81	0.71	Accept
3	Integrating SEL improves pre-service teachers' ability to build positive relationships.	3.69	0.68	Accept	3.74	0.65	Accept
4	SEL helps pre-service teachers develop resilience to handle classroom challenges.	3.72	0.70	Accept	3.79	0.67	Accept
5	SEL is as important as pedagogical skills in ensuring classroom readiness.	3.65	0.73	Accept	3.71	0.69	Accept
	Sum Average	**3.74**	**0.74**	**Accept**	**3.79**	**0.70**	**Accept**

In Table 1, both male and female teacher educators strongly agree on the importance of SEL in teacher education, as all mean scores exceed the threshold of 2.50. The low standard deviations indicate consistent perceptions.

Table 2: Mean and Standard Deviation of Male and Female Teacher Educators' Perceptions of the Current Status of SEL Integration

S/N	ITEM STATEMENT	Male Lecturers			Female Lecturers		
		X̄	SD	REM	X̄	SD	REM
6	SEL principles are currently integrated into the curriculum of my teacher education program.	2.89	0.65	Accept	2.95	0.61	Accept
7	Teacher educators in my institution actively model SEL competencies in their teaching practices.	2.78	0.70	Accept	2.84	0.68	Accept
8	There is adequate institutional support for the implementation of SEL in teacher education.	2.45	0.58	Reject	2.50	0.55	Accept
9	Pre-service teachers in my institution receive training on SEL competencies.	2.67	0.62	Accept	2.73	0.59	Accept
10	SEL is explicitly included in the assessment criteria for pre-service teachers.	2.34	0.60	Reject	2.40	0.57	Reject
	Sum Average	**2.63**	**0.63**	**Accept**	**2.68**	**0.60**	**Accept**

In Table 2, both groups acknowledge some level of SEL integration, but the lower means for Items 8 and 10 suggest a lack of institutional support and explicit inclusion in assessment criteria. Female educators slightly outperform males in perceiving SEL integration.

Table 3: Mean and Standard Deviation of Male and Female Teacher Educators' Perceptions of Challenges in Implementing SEL

S/N	ITEM STATEMENT	Male Lecturers			Female Lecturers		
		X̄	SD	REM	X̄	SD	REM
11	Lack of training for teacher educators hinders the effective integration of SEL.	3.55	0.72	Accept	3.60	0.70	Accept
12	Limited resources (e.g., materials, funding) are a major barrier to implementing SEL.	3.67	0.75	Accept	3.72	0.73	Accept
13	The current curriculum structure leaves little room for incorporating SEL principles.	3.49	0.68	Accept	3.54	0.65	Accept
14	Cultural norms and values in Nigeria sometimes conflict with the principles of SEL.	3.22	0.61	Accept	3.28	0.59	Accept
15	There is resistance among teacher educators to adopt SEL practices due to traditional methods.	3.10	0.58	Accept	3.15	0.56	Accept
	Sum Average	**3.41**	**0.67**	**Accept**	**3.46**	**0.65**	**Accept**

In Table 3, both groups identify significant challenges, with resource limitations and lack of training being the most prominent. Cultural norms and resistance to change also pose notable barriers.

Table 4: Mean and Standard Deviation of Male and Female Teacher Educators' Perceptions of Opportunities for Enhancing SEL Integration

S/N	ITEM STATEMENT	Male Lecturers			Female Lecturers		
		X̄	SD	REM	X̄	SD	REM

S/N	ITEM STATEMENT	Male Lecturers	Female Lecturers				
16	Providing professional development programs for teacher educators would improve SEL integration.	3.80	0.78	Accept	3.85	0.75	Accept
17	Revising the teacher education curriculum to include SEL as a core component is necessary.	3.75	0.74	Accept	3.79	0.71	Accept
18	Collaboration with international organizations could enhance SEL implementation.	3.60	0.70	Accept	3.65	0.68	Accept
19	Developing culturally adapted SEL frameworks would make SEL more relevant in Nigeria.	3.72	0.73	Accept	3.78	0.70	Accept
20	Policymakers should prioritize SEL in national education policies to support its integration.	3.68	0.71	Accept	3.73	0.69	Accept
	Sum Average	**3.71**	**0.73**	**Accept**	**3.76**	**0.71**	**Accept**

In Table 4, both groups strongly agree on the opportunities for enhancing SEL integration, particularly through professional development, curriculum revision, and policy support.

Table 5: Mean and Standard Deviation of Male and Female Teacher Educators' Gender-Specific Perceptions of SEL

S/N	ITEM STATEMENT	Male Lecturers			Female Lecturers		
		$\bar{X}$	SD	REM	$\bar{X}$	SD	REM
21	Female teacher educators are more likely than males to value the role of SEL in classroom readiness.	3.10	0.58	Accept	3.25	0.55	Accept

S/N	ITEM STATEMENT	Male Lecturers	Female Lecturers				
22	Male teacher educators face more challenges in adopting SEL practices due to cultural expectations.	2.95	0.60	Accept	3.05	0.57	Accept
23	Female teacher educators are more effective at modeling SEL competencies such as empathy.	3.20	0.62	Accept	3.35	0.59	Accept
24	Male and female teacher educators have similar perceptions of the importance of SEL.	3.05	0.55	Accept	3.10	0.53	Accept
25	Gender-specific training programs would help address differences in how SEL is perceived.	3.15	0.60	Accept	3.20	0.58	Accept
	Sum Average	**3.09**	**0.59**	**Accept**	**3.19**	**0.56**	**Accept**

In Table 5, both groups acknowledge gender-specific differences, with females slightly more likely to value and model SEL competencies. Gender-specific training is seen as a potential solution.

Discussion of the Study

This study explores the perceptions of Nigerian teacher educators regarding the role of socio-emotional learning (SEL) in preparing pre-service teachers for classroom readiness. The findings provide valuable insights into how male and female teacher educators perceive the importance, current status, challenges, opportunities, and gender-specific differences related to SEL integration in teacher education programs.

In Table 1, the results indicate that both male and female teacher educators strongly agree on the importance of SEL in teacher education, with mean scores exceeding 3.00 across all items in this section. This consensus aligns with the views of Brackett et al. (2019)**,** who argue that SEL fosters resilience and adaptability—qualities essential for navigating unpredictable teaching scenarios. Similarly, Harris & DeFlorio (2019**)** emphasize that SEL enhances classroom management by equipping teachers with emotional regulation skills.

The high agreement on the statement "SEL is essential for preparing pre-service teachers to manage diverse classroom environments" resonates with Eze (2021**),** who notes the importance of SEL in addressing cultural diversity in Nigerian classrooms. Furthermore, the shared belief that SEL is as important as pedagogical skills underscores the growing recognition that technical competencies alone are insufficient for effective teaching, a point echoed by Korthagen (2017). In Table 2, while there is acknowledgment of some SEL integration, the results reveal significant gaps, particularly in institutional support and explicit inclusion in assessment criteria. This finding corroborates Adegoke & Adesina (2022**),** who note that many Nigerian teacher educators lack formal training in SEL, limiting their ability to model or teach these competencies effectively. The rigid focus on traditional pedagogy in curricula, highlighted by Federal Ministry of Education (2020**),** further explains why SEL remains marginalized despite its recognized importance. The lower scores for institutional support and explicit inclusion in assessment criteria suggest that systemic changes are needed to embed SEL more firmly into teacher education programs. Without such reforms, efforts to integrate SEL may remain superficial or inconsistent.

In Table 3, both male and female teacher educators identify significant challenges in implementing SEL, with resource limitations and lack of training being the most prominent barriers. These findings align closely with Adegoke & Adesina (2022**),** who stress the need for professional development programs targeting teacher educators. The challenge posed by the rigid curriculum structure echoes Federal Ministry of Education (2020), which critiques the outdated nature of Nigerian teacher education curricula.

Cultural norms and resistance to change also emerge as notable obstacles. This finding resonates with Eze (2021**),** who argues that traditional attitudes toward authority and discipline may create barriers to adopting more empathetic and collaborative teaching styles advocated by SEL frameworks. Addressing these cultural barriers requires culturally sensitive adaptations, as suggested by Oduol (2022)**.**

In Table 4, the result indicates that, strong agreement exists among participants regarding opportunities for enhancing SEL integration, particularly through professional development, curriculum revision, and policy advocacy. This consensus aligns with **Adeyemi & Adegbite (2021),** who advocate for reforming outdated curricula to incorporate holistic approaches. The

emphasis on culturally adapted frameworks reflects **Oduol (2022)** 's call for aligning SEL with local values and practices.

The suggestion that policymakers prioritize SEL in national policies supports **Federal Ministry of Education (2020),** which emphasizes the need for explicit directives to guide SEL integration. Both groups also recognize the value of collaboration with international organizations, highlighting the potential benefits of global partnerships.

In Table 5, the result indicates that female teacher educators tend to place greater value on SEL and are perceived as more effective at modeling competencies like empathy. This finding aligns with **Eze (2021),** who suggests that cultural expectations may influence how male and female educators approach SEL. Despite minor differences, both groups share similar perceptions of SEL's importance, indicating a shared commitment to enhancing classroom readiness through SEL-based approaches.

The acknowledgment of gender-specific challenges supports the need for tailored training programs, echoing **Adegoke & Adesina (2022),** who recommend inclusive strategies for integrating SEL. By addressing these disparities, institutions can ensure that both male and female teacher educators are equipped to promote SEL effectively.

Conclusion

This study explored the perceptions of Nigerian teacher educators regarding the role of socio-emotional learning (SEL) in preparing pre-service teachers for classroom readiness. The findings revealed strong agreement among male and female teacher educators on the importance of SEL, yet highlighted significant challenges in its implementation, such as insufficient training, outdated curricula, resource limitations, and cultural resistance. Despite these barriers, opportunities exist for enhancing SEL integration through professional development programs, curriculum reform, policy advocacy, and culturally adapted frameworks. By addressing these gaps, institutions can better prepare pre-service teachers to meet the complexities of modern classrooms.

Recommendations

1. University authority should provide comprehensive professional development programs for teacher educators to equip them with the knowledge and skills necessary to model and teach SEL competencies effectively.

2.   Nigerian University Commission (NUC) through its relevant authorities should revise existing teacher education curricula to integrate SEL as a core component, ensuring it is not treated as an optional add-on but rather embedded into instructional strategies and assessment criteria.

3.   Relevant authority should advocate for the explicit inclusion of SEL in Nigeria's National Policy on Education to provide clear guidance and resources for its implementation across all levels of teacher education.

4.   The Federal Ministry of Education, through its relevant agencies should develop SEL frameworks that align with local values, norms, and practices while maintaining their effectiveness. Engage community leaders and stakeholders in discussions about the benefits of SEL to foster broader acceptance.

5.   Government should **allocate** sufficient resources, including materials, technology, and financial support, to facilitate the implementation of SEL initiatives in teacher education programs, particularly in under-resourced settings.

6.   Relevant University authorities should design gender-specific training programs to address differences in how male and female teacher educators perceive and implement SEL, ensuring inclusivity and equity in program design.

Suggestions for Future Work

1.   Longitudinal studies may be conducted to assess the long-term impact of SEL integration on pre-service teachers' classroom readiness and teaching effectiveness after they enter the profession.

2.   Researchers could conduct comparative analyses between Nigerian teacher education programs and those in other African countries or regions to identify best practices and potential models for SEL implementation.

3.   Researchers could investigate the perspectives of pre-service teachers themselves regarding the relevance and effectiveness of SEL in their preparation for classroom practice, providing additional insights into its perceived value.

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