ACADEMIA International Journal for Social Sciences
Volume 4, Issue 5, 2025 ISSN-L (Online): 3006-6638

Teachers' Lived Experiences of Integrating Social-Emotional Learning in Inclusive Classrooms: An Interpretive Study of Elite Schools in Lahore

Dr Tahira Batool Bokhari
drtahirabatool96@gmail.com
Associate Professor, Department of Education, Government College for Women, Jhang

Dr Yaar Muhammad
Yaar.Muhammad@gcwus.edu.pk
Associate Professor, Department of Education, GC Women University, Sialkot

Dr Faisal Anis
faisal.anis@umt.edu.pk
Assistant Professor, Department of Education, School of Social Sciences and Humanities, University of Management and Technology, Lahore
Corresponding Author: * Dr Faisal Anis faisal.anis@umt.edu.pk

Received: 25-08-2025 **Revised:** 10-09-2025 **Accepted:** 27-09-2025 **Published:** 30-10-2025

ABSTRACT

This study aimed to understand the conceptualisations and pedagogical practices of social-emotional learning (SEL) among teachers in the context of the cultural specificities of classroom, institutional, and societal settings. The data were gathered through classroom observations and semi-structured interviews conducted in four elite private schools. The results indicate that teachers make Western-oriented SEL models more Pakistani-culturally specific and school-related, and in many cases, teachers do not follow their own pedagogical choices but tend to address institutional pressure. According to teachers, there are notable difficulties in implementing SEL, such as an inability to meet the needs of diverse learners, challenges in managing the root cause of exclusion, challenges in dealing with the complexities of classroom management, and an inability to differentiate SEL principles with differentiated instruction to diverse student populations. Most professional advances in this field are based on informal learning processes in the workplace and mutually shared knowledge, rather than organised professional training programs. This study sheds light on the most significant gaps in translating the ideals of inclusive education into actual situations in the classroom and highlights the need to introduce culturally responsive SEL models, provide teachers with increased levels of teacher well-being support, and ensure the increased presence of a collaborative learning process. These findings have implications for educational policy and practice in Pakistan and similar situations.

Keywords: *Social-Emotional Learning, Inclusive Education, Teacher Experiences, Classroom Management, Interpretive Research, Elite Schools, Pakistan*

INTRODUCTION

The integration of social-emotional learning in inclusive education represents one of the most significant contemporary trends in educational research and practice globally (Durlak et al., 2024; Miller et al., 2011; Rosário & Cefai, 2024). Adolescents are suitably positioned at the intersection of various expectations and the need to acquire different skills. With educational systems becoming more convinced about the necessity to offer not only academic progress but also social and emotional qualities to learners, teachers are being placed at the centre of numerous expectations and pedagogical requirements. The complexity of such convergence is even more pronounced in inclusive classes when students with different learning requirements, capabilities, and backgrounds are united, which requires a teacher to differentiate instruction without breaking up the classroom (Demink-Carthew et al., 2017).

The movement towards inclusive education has been gaining momentum in Pakistan, but the practice encounters many barriers because of inadequate infrastructure, old-fashioned policies, and insufficient teacher willingness to undertake it (Anis et al., 2025; Muhammad et al., 2025; Waqar et al., 2025). Elite schools in Lahore are a distinct setting in which resources are comparatively rich, but cultural and pedagogical issues continue to hinder the implementation of Western-based systems of education, such as SEL (Rauf & Muhammad, 2025; Rauf, Muhammad, & Yousaf, 2024; Rauf et al., 2025). These schools are key locations for understanding the adjustment, opposition, and modification of global educational trends in local settings (Rauf & Muhammad, 2024; Rauf, Muhammad, & Batool, 2024; Rauf et al., 2023).

This study applied an interpretative approach to describe the experiences and meanings of teachers in elite schools in Lahore regarding the implementation of inclusive SEL in their classrooms. Instead of attempting to quantify the results or determine the effectiveness of a program, this study highlights the lived experiences, meaning-making processes, and situated practices of teachers in complex integration. This study addresses the following central question: *How do teachers in elite schools in Lahore experience and construct meaning regarding the integration of social-emotional learning in inclusive classrooms?*

LITERATURE REVIEW

Social-Emotional Learning in Contemporary Education

Social-emotional learning has emerged as a critical framework for supporting students' holistic development, encompassing self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making (Durlak et al., 2024; Jennings & Greenberg, 2009; Rosário & Cefai, 2024). Research has shown that SEL integration has positive outcomes, such as better academic performance, increased rates of graduation, minimised behavioural issues, and improved readiness to meet workplace demands (Braun et al., 2020; Breeman et al., 2015; Calandri et al., 2025). The advantages not only belong to individual students but also improve classroom environments, teacher stress and student-teacher relationships.

Current research on SEL stresses cultural responsiveness and adaptation to context (Goforth et al., 2022; Heidelburg et al., 2024; Li et al., 2024). Research indicates that SEL programs created within Western frameworks cannot be directly transported to other cultural backgrounds with minimal or no changes (considering local values, norms, and social organisations) (Goforth et al., 2022; Heidelburg et al., 2024; Li et al., 2024). Cultural adaptation becomes particularly vital in situations where collectivist, religious, and hierarchical social species differ significantly from Western and individualistic species (Mahoney et al., 2021).

Inclusive Education and Teacher Experiences

Inclusive education is the opposite of special education and is segmented into integrated learning environments that involve students with different learning abilities (Graham, 2020). In Pakistan, inclusive education faces a variety of problems, such as physical infrastructure constraints, insufficient teacher education, the absence of specialised equipment, and policy insecurity (Haq et al., 2025; Haq & Rafiq, 2025; Kamran & Bano, 2023). Nevertheless, studies have shown that teachers have positive attitudes towards inclusion and are willing to use inclusive practices with sufficient support and training(Anis et al., 2025; Safdar et al., 2024; Waqar et al., 2025).

The lived experiences of teachers working in inclusive classrooms show that the emotional terrain is rather complicated, as it is both enriching and burdensome for teachers. Studies have shed new light on the ways in which teachers experience traumatic experiences, behavioural difficulties, and varying

learning demands to manage their own emotional health (Muhammad & Bokhari, 2024; Saif et al., 2024; Waqar et al., 2024). These practices are firmly embedded in institutional settings, policy frames, and professional cultures that determine what can be imagined and done in classroom practice (Giddens, 1987; Muhammad et al., 2024).

SEL Integration in Inclusive Contexts

The interconnection between SEL and inclusive education is a developing field of study, and researchers are becoming increasingly aware that SEL offers key instruments for genuinely inclusive learning experiences (Llorent et al., 2024; Reicher, 2010). SEL provides students with competencies that they can use to manage social differences, learn to be empathetic towards various groups, and manage harsh social conditions. For teachers, SEL provides effective classroom management techniques, conflict follow-up, and the establishment of positive relationships with diverse learners.

Nevertheless, other studies have also indicated that there are severe difficulties in distinguishing SEL instruction and addressing the needs of various learners (Demink-Carthew et al., 2017). Teachers complain that it is challenging to differentiate SEL learning activities among students at different levels of development, culture, and ability (Mahoney et al., 2021). Specifically, literature on this subject in the Pakistani context is still scarce; a gap in the study of this area is the way teachers learn to work with SEL when teaching in inclusive classrooms.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is based on the traditions of interpretive research that focuses on human meaning-making choices and actions in a social environment (Erickson, 1986). Interpretive research, or the research can also be called a qualitative, ethnographic, or phenomenological research, aims at seeing the informal and formal meanings that actors create in their daily activity (Eisner, 2017). Instead of measuring a set number of hypotheses, interpretive research enables hypothetical understanding to emerge through the heavy involvement of participants' lived experiences and views (Erickson, 1986).

Erickson's approach to interpretive research emphasises extended fieldwork, detailed descriptions of local contexts, and the formulation of assertions based on empirical evidence (Erickson, 1986). Assertions are empirically based claims of patterns of meaning and action that are perceived to exist in the context of certain situations (Erickson, 1986). Contrary to positivist generalisations, assertions consider the situated state of knowledge and provide insights which may lead to knowledge in similar settings (Eisner, 2017).

The interpretive position that may be used in this study is that the faculty of actors is prioritised because the realities of education can be placed in social production, since the continuous interaction of teachers, students, administration, and the forces of the institution may create an educational reality (Giddens, 1987). This perspective corresponds to constructivist epistemologies, according to which knowledge is actively constructed and not passively accepted (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This study attempts to create knowledge by foregrounding teachers' lived experiences and sensemaking processes and understanding the complexity, ambiguity, and situational specificity of educational practice (Eisner, 2017).

METHODOLOGY

Interpretive Research Approach

The research design used in this study was interpretive, involving intensive fieldwork and in-depth interviews conducted in four elite schools in Lahore over four months (Erickson, 1986). The interpretive paradigm was chosen because the questions of the research dwell on the matters of meaning, choice, and situated practice instead of quantifiable results or cause-and-effect relations (Eisner, 2017). This study

aimed to understand how teachers view the process of integrating SEL in terms of their personal attitudes toward tacit knowledge, practical reasoning, and situational transitions that constitute the gist of their daily work (Erickson, 1986).

Data collection was carried out in several stages, starting with general classroom practices and school culture observation and narrowing down to particular instances of SEL implementation and inclusive practice. Classroom interactions, instructional strategies, student behaviours, and teacher responses were observed and recorded in field notes, focusing especially on instances when teachers had strategies to attend to social-emotional competencies, either explicitly or implicitly (Eisner, 2017). Semi-structured interviews with the 12 teachers were conducted to obtain information on how the teachers understood SEL, their experience of implementing SEL in an inclusive setting, their frustrations, and how they overcame those frustrations.

Assertion Development Following Erickson

Data analysis was carried out using the method of Assertion Development developed by Erickson (1986). The assertions were developed progressively after continual interaction with data, which represent empirical claims concerning patterns that were noticed during the experience and practice of teachers (Erickson, 2012). Every assertion was constructed in several phases: first, by identifying some pattern; then, by systematically searching for supporting evidence, being aware of alternative interpretations, and refining through dialogue reasoning of the emergent theory and the empirical data (Erickson, 2012). The assertions were validated based on meticulous empirical data, their consistency with the entirety of the data, and their appeal to the participants themselves (Erickson, 1986).

Research Context and Participants

The research was conducted in four privately owned elite schools in Lahore that were identified as inclusive and admitted students with a wide range of learning needs. These schools cater mostly to families with upper-middle and upper-class incomes, are expensive, and have internationally trained educators as well as Pakistani teachers. The four schools had recently implemented SEL frameworks, but the level of implementation across and within the schools was quite different.

The participants consisted of 12 teachers who were spread across in terms of their background, teaching experience (2 to 18 years), and subject area. Students with known special educational needs, such as learning disabilities, hyperactivity disorders, autism spectrum disorders, and emotional and behavioural difficulties, are educated in classrooms that are referred to as inclusive. The teachers volunteered to join the research when they were made aware that the focus of the research was their experiences and not an assessment of their performances (Eisner, 2017).

Findings: Assertions from Teachers' Lived Experiences

Assertion One: SEL as Culturally Mediated Practice

Teachers viewed this as the integration of Western culture into Eastern culture, where Western models were introduced and adjusted to fit Pakistani values, the Islamic perspective, and cultural principles and customs. The following is the tension explained by the teacher Nadia, who went on to state, *"As soon as the international consultant introduced the SEL curriculum, I thought that it was too Western for my mind. They insisted on children giving their views freely, even when they disagreed with adults. However, the first thing that we teach here is adab [respect]. I retained the emotion vocabulary lessons but changed all the situations to respect parents and teachers."* This assimilation was witnessed in the classroom observations. When Teacher Ayesha was teaching a lesson on SEL self-expression, she opened her prescribed poster with a picture of a child saying: "I disagree with you" to an adult, but she quickly

passed and spent only two minutes on this topic. Nevertheless, she took 20 minutes on a self-made task regarding how to express feelings with any kind of respect to the elders, with references to Urdu poems and Islamic narratives (Field note).

As an alternative to the introduction of SEL programmes based on the established requirements, teachers emphasised respect for elders, community, and emotional control as the values that Pakistani culture cherishes and reduced the emphasis on individualistic notions of independence inherent in Western SEL paradigms. Teacher Imran reported, *"students are believed to become independent and autonomous. I am unable to educate a ten-year-old boy to not be dependent on his family. This is not the culture of our country. I instil emotional consciousness in them, but never unless it comes as part of family obedience and community service."*

This process of cultural adaptation created a clash in which school administrators who were persuaded by foreign education consultants insisted on standardisation. In a meeting held with all staff, the coordinator handed out an international curriculum on lesson plan standardisation. There were looks of disapproval and head shaking (Field note). During the break, three teachers gathered in the corner, Teacher Farida went around talking to her colleagues in a whisper, telling them they would carry out their own thing once the observation had ended (Field note). These were concerns that the rest approved of, but none of them were brought up during the official meeting. As a reaction to these tensions, teachers worked within a regime of formal compliance and enjoyed pedagogical autonomy in their classrooms. This is the practice described by teacher Saima: "*The principal wants us to adhere to the SEL manual precisely because the school is spending money. But, in my classroom, I do what works. I am stating on paper that we are following the program. In a real sense, I have learned to adjust to all things."*

Assertion Two: SEL Integration as Emotional Labour

Teachers experienced the process of SEL integration as a highly emotional work that presupposes constant self-control, expression of empathy, and control over personal emotions to help students develop them. Teacher Hina explained this exhaustion as follows: *"I have to be calm and smiling and patient every day, showing the children how to control their emotions. But who checks my feelings? I had a parent yesterday yelling at me for 15 minutes about her child's work. Then, I had to go and teach a lesson on anger management. I wanted to cry."* This emotional work was more acute in inclusive classes, when teachers provided separate educational support to a variety of emotional needs simultaneously. One of the teachers, Kashif, explained that inclusive classrooms are emotionally draining: "One of my students is traumatised and has outbursts, two have ADHD and cannot sit at all, and the rest are anxiety-riddled students who cry every day. I use all my efforts to control their emotions. In the meantime, I am not supposed to feel frustration or tired."

The emotional impact can be observed during classroom observations. A group of students with behavioural issues had an SEL circle time, where one of them threw a chair, almost hitting a fellow student. face flushed red, her jaw clenched, and her hands trembled. She shut her eyes, inhaled three deep breaths, and, kneeling down before the student in a level voice, said, "We need to discuss what you are feeling." Ten minutes after she sent the class away, she sat at her desk and stared blankly at the wall. When she was asked, she merely replied, "I cannot do this anymore" (Field note). Teachers indicated that they were emotionally exhausted, particularly when they interacted with students who exhibited signs of traumatic life experiences, aggressiveness, or poor management of feelings. This burden was taken by teacher Zainab, who received no questions on how she was coping: "*They invested two days in training us about SEL, after which they wanted us to work with the emotional traumas of children and, at the same time, deal with our stress, family life, work, and emotional setbacks. I am such an emotional sponge, and I have nobody to squeeze me out."* The support for teachers' emotional well-being in schools was minimal. We observed: Teacher Mehreen was sitting alone in the staff room and had not had lunch. After

one of her colleagues enquired whether she was fine, she responded, "*Three of my students cried in my class today. One concerning the divorce of parents, one concerning bullying, and one concerning exam stress. I held it together for them. Now I am empty. But next period, I will have to educate them on joy and optimism."*

Assertion Three: Classroom Management and SEL Interdependence

Based on the details provided by teachers, SEL integration was inherent in classroom management, in which social-emotional competencies were utilised as a means of creating orderly and beneficial learning settings. Such a relationship was quite direct, according to the teacher, Amir: *"To be honest, SEL allows me to control the class. I would employ the calm-down corner and emotion check-in when the students are out of control. It is more effective than screaming alone. But there are occasions when I feel like I am aiding in their emotional development, but at times I do wonder whether it is the psychology of making them obedient that I employ."* Instead of adopting SEL as an independent curriculum content, teachers integrated SEL practices into everyday classroom activities such as conflict management, and behaviour management. This was witnessed when a mathematics lesson was in progress, where two students were arguing noisily. Teacher Fahad did nothing but switch to the SEL mode, where he requested them to name their feelings and practiced resorting to strategies to calm them down. In five minutes, both students were seated and quiet. Fahad continued with the math lesson without resolving the conflict (Field note). He elaborated after the classroom, *"There is nothing like SEL that will be my best classroom management tool. I cannot afford to spend time on intense emotional labour. I must keep them for study."*

This reliance introduced confusion regarding whether teachers were preoccupied with real emotional development or mainly applied SEL practices to control classroom behaviour. According to teacher Sana, she said that she could not tell the difference between SEL and discipline: *"When I educate self-regulation, I am actually teaching them to be quiet and obey rules. This is referred to as emotional development in schools. I refer to it as classroom management using fancy terms."* This stress was a concern for teachers who were torn between opposing motives. Teacher Bilal also considered this recent event: *"Last week, one of my students became upset and interfered with the lesson. I adopted a different language: What are you feeling? What should we do about this? But that was not really my design in dealing with his feelings, but to prevent the disturbance. I was manipulative because I took advantage of his vulnerability to influence his behaviour."* This conflict played out more severely in inclusive classrooms, where children with behavioural challenges required intensive management. The student with autism kept disrupting the lesson as he made noises. Teacher Natasha has tried some strategies of SEL, such as visual emotions cards, breathing, and redirecting students into a corner with a sense. Nothing helped, and her frustration manifested. Finally, she insisted that the aide expel the student from the room. In retrospect, she thought: *"Was I taking care of him emotionally or just eliminating the management issue? I still don't know"* (Field note).

Assertion Four: Differentiation as a Persistent Challenge

Even though the idea of inclusion was accepted by teachers, they had difficulties distinguishing between SEL instruction for students of different developmental stages with different cognitive abilities and social-emotional skills. The reason is that, as teacher Rubina explained, *"I know that all the kids are different, but how do I distinguish between emotions? I deal with 40 students: some mature, some children, two with intellectual disabilities, and three with ADHD. The SEL lesson would for 'typical' children. I instruct the middle, hoping that others will be helped in some way."* Although the teachers were effective in differentiating academic content, they encountered conceptual and practical difficulties when differentiating SEL content. Teacher Samina hosted a lesson on identifying emotions related to social situations through the demonstration of pictures of complicated social scenarios. Most students actively participated. However, two students with learning disabilities stared blankly and could not

interpret the nuances, and one student with autism was focused on the irrelevant details within the photos. Samina did not change anything in the activity; she proceeded with the whole-class discussion, and these students were not engaged (Field note).

This challenge was accompanied by insufficient training on SEL differentiation and structural limitations. The challenges described by teacher Hamza are: "*The training mentioned differentiation of SEL instruction. However, they never showed us how. I am able to differentiate math and assign other groups' problems. However, what about emotional regulation? Self-awareness? What are the three versions of that make? I have no time, no support, no resources.*" In an observation of the planning period, Teacher Usman demonstrated his lesson plan, which had the same activities for all students. He confessed: "*I understand that I need to differentiate; nevertheless, I have 45 students, six subjects to prepare, and conversations with parents after school. The differentiation of SEL is theoretically significant but practically impossible. Educators observed that the institutional discourse about inclusion celebration had failed to be followed by the resources needed to implement effective differentiated SEL."* According to Teacher Amina, this gap was summarised as follows: *"The school claims that we are inclusive. There are children with disabilities in all the classes. However, the SEL curriculum is one size fits all. The child with Down syndrome was in a situation that did not allow him to repeat the reflection activity of other students. I do my best, although I typically modify academic work. I can do nothing with SEL differentiation."*

Assertion Five: Peer Relationships as SEL Context

Teachers found peer relations to be the most effective SEL learning environment and the most demanding part of inclusive classroom development. In lessons with students, teacher Madiha explained: *"The real SEL learning would occur among the students, not during my lessons. They are taught sympathy in assisting a classmate who is doing poorly, teamwork in group work, and conflict resolution. My role will be to generate opportunities and negotiate in the event of an eventual breakdown."* The quality of peer relationships became the key to SEL results as students were taught to build social-emotional skills when they interacted with peers, who offered them authentic practice opportunities that could not be achieved in formal instruction. Teacher Tariq put this in a certain scenario: *"I had a socially isolated, cerebrally impaired student. Nothing in my teaching could help him; one friendship helped him. His confidence changed when he was made a buddy by another student with whom he established a mutual friendship. I also see crude exclusion—students teasing one another, being rude with one another, or picking on others*."

Teachers were strategic in establishing positive peer relations, social skills, and dealing with exclusion or bullying. For instance, a student with a speech disability had the chance to participate in a team game whose rules were misunderstood during free play. The other children turn their backs on him. He stood at the edge and watched. Teacher Aliya saw this and went to the group and remarked, "Ahmed, you have got a great idea to play your game. Let's listen to him." She helped him belong, and she remained there for five minutes to make sure that he is accepted there and then gradually backed off. In retrospect, she said, "This occurs every day." (Field note).

Making inclusion an automatic affair is not happening. With previously intended inclusion strategies, teachers have seen recurring instances of social exclusion behaviours, with students with disabilities or other minority cultural backgrounds feeling sidelined. For instance, a group project was assigned, and Teacher Kamran purposely placed a high-achieving student with a student with a learning disability under ADHD. Minutes later, the high achiever grumbled: he is not doing anything correctly. Can I work alone?" Kamran kneeled beside them: it is a valuable skill to work with different people. What do you think your partner requires from you? In collaboration, he took 20 minutes to coach them. It was a project that was not completed, yet social skills were heavily exercised (Field note). According to Teacher Farah,

mediating conflicts is a necessity: *"I dedicate more time to peer conflicts than to the teaching of SEL content. Bullying, non-friendship, and relationships of friendship are the places where feelings count. I keep on meddling: What do you think she felt? What would you have done otherwise? This is exhausting, but it must be done."*

Assertion Six: Professional Learning Through Practice

The competencies for SEL integration were developed by teachers using practice-based learning rather than through training. Despite the early training in SEL offered in schools, the teachers believed that it was abstract and not related to classroom reality. Sayeda Sidra, a teacher, said, *"The two-day SEL training was fruitless. They demonstrated theories and models; however, in front of my first actual classroom crisis, I did not know what to do. It was through trial and error, failure, enquiry with others, and trying again. The actual learning took place in my classroom, not in the workshop."* The professional development session was held in a school, and the content dealt with some PowerPoint slides on illustrations that were on theoretical frameworks, conducted by an external trainer. Teachers looked bored, checking mobile phones, marking papers, and chattering with colleagues. During break, teachers would sit in groups and discuss actual classroom issues. Teacher Jameel stated, *"These trainings are alike; they are theories that we cannot apply. I am more of a learner by merely discussing with fellow employees what works."* Several participants nodded in agreement. Official education was underway, yet learning occurred on the edges.

There was a meaningful professional learning process through experimentation, observation of such experiences as peers, reflection, failures, and successes, and more, through informal mentoring relationships. Asad revealed, *"I learned mostly by observing experienced teachers. Teacher Rabia takes care of problematic students. I followed her, imitated her methods, and modified them to my approach. It is impossible to train me to know what I discovered in peer observations and informal discussions."* This was further established, "three teachers were sitting in the staff room around a table when they were discussing a student who had emotional outbursts. A teacher reported: *"Yesterday, I attempted a new calming strategy- this has not been effective. Others grinned at being made fun of and attributed their own failures."* Teacher Huma recommended a different style that she employed. They used 15 minutes to be together in an attempt to troubleshoot and share certain techniques. This was informal mentoring that offered more hands-on information than the other training sessions (Field note). Another teacher stated: "*Professional cultures of collaboration allow teachers to share hardships, practices, and provide emotional support. The teacher group is normal; teachers communicate on WhatsApp, sharing SEL challenges and resolutions. Such a group is worth more than formal training. When I struggle, I ask there. After an hour, one of my colleagues answered in terms of practical advice for the five others. We learn from each other's achievements and failures."* Schools with such cultures had more advanced SEL integration, while those where emphasis was laid on individual teacher accountability but lacked a collaborative culture left the teachers to operate alone and overwhelmed.

DISCUSSION

The assertions constructed in this interpretive study shed light on the contextually related aspects of SEL integration in inclusive classrooms in elite schools in Lahore, Pakistan. This outcome aligns with international studies that prove that implementation alters educational innovations as teachers refine worldwide models to local settings (Fullan & Mundial, 1989; Yanow, 2000; Yanow & Peregrine, 2012). Nevertheless, this study also reveals certain dynamics based on Pakistani cultural settings, elite school settings, and the structure of inclusive education in Lahore.

The development of cultural translation beliefs as a result of teacher involvement goes against the belief that evidence-based SEL programmes can be applied across different schools. Rather, a successful

incorporation of SEL should be built on culturally responsive models created by considering the values, social systems, and cultural customs of the area and educational practices. The implications of this finding for international educational development initiatives, which typically promote the ideals of uniform programmes without sufficient attention to culture, are critical and far-reaching.

The emotional labour introduced as SEL integration expands current studies on teachers' emotional work by elaborating on the specific requirements of SEL integration in the context of inclusive settings (Lau & Shea, 2024; Lee, 2024; Xie et al., 2022). This result implies the need for institutional support systems that help with the social-emotional well-being of teachers, such as access to counselling, teacher peer groups, and manageable workload expectations. This process of assigning teachers to offer SEL support and leaving them without it seems to be unsustainable.

The ongoing issue of differentiation in teaching SEL is interesting and has real-world applications (Demink-Carthew et al., 2017). Although academic differentiation has been extensively studied, SEL differentiation has not been theoretically developed or made practical (Dang, 2023; Mahoney et al., 2020; Waqar et al., 2025). The creation of SEL-specific frameworks, resources, and training in the specific areas of learners with differentiation is a significant step in future research and professional growth.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE AND POLICY

This study has several implications for educational practices and policies in Pakistan. First, schools that apply SEL must focus more on culturally responsive adaptation rather than standardised programme adoption. This will entail the need to invest in collaborative efforts in which the partners of the process, including teachers, cultural experts, and community members, will work on local-appropriate SEL frameworks.

Second, to meet the requirements imposed by the emotional labour of SEL implementation, schools should identify and respond to their needs by systematically attending to the well-being of teachers. These involve a sensible workload standard, availability of mental health services, guaranteed planning time, and the establishment of cooperative professional societies.

Third, pre-service and in-service teacher education should focus on SEL differentiation specifically and equip teachers with theoretical frameworks and real-life strategies for modifying SEL teaching to meet the needs of diverse learners. This involves cooperation between special and general faculty members to develop integration methods.

Fourth, schools must design the possibilities of positive peer interaction and should expressly address the problems of social hierarchy and exclusionary fashion, which destroy inclusive ideals. To ensure fully inclusive classrooms, it is important to consider the dynamics between peers and not simply work with diverse students in the same space.

Finally, practice-based learning, collaborative enquiry, and continued support should be employed as the key aspects of professional learning related to SEL integration rather than a one-time training event (Eisner, 2017). Professional learning communities in schools should also be fostered, in which teachers engage in professional development by experimenting with one another, reflecting, and supporting each other.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

This interpretive study investigates elite schools in Lahore, which limits the transferability of the results to other learning situations. Elite schools have the resources, international networks, and students who are

far different from those in typical Pakistani schools. Further studies may be conducted with SEL integration in public schools, rural schools, and schools with lower-income students to establish the influence of resource limitations and various cultural backgrounds on implementation.

In addition, in this research, the teachers' views received a higher priority, and little was done to examine the experiences of SEL integration among the students. A study of students' experiences, perceived effects, and reactions to SEL practices in inclusive classrooms would be valuable as a complementary piece of research. A special focus on the views of students with disabilities would help clarify whether SEL implementation facilitates or limits the inclusion of students with disabilities.

A longitudinal study following the effects of SEL integration among teachers over several years may provide insights into the development of these practices and the factors contributing to their maintenance and refinement. Finally, a study on the overlap between SEL integration and other pedagogical reforms in Pakistani settings would help clarify how various innovations intersect and possibly compete over time with teachers and other institutional factors.

CONCLUSION

This interpretive research shows that teachers in elite schools of Lahore find the process of SEL implementation in an inclusive classroom complex, mediated by culture, and emotional work that demands emotional labour, continual professional learning, and pedagogical adjustments. The assertions that have been formulated via rigorous interaction with the experience of teachers help to undermine the naive beliefs regarding the implementation of SEL and shed light on the contradictions between the global educational system and the local cultural environment and between the principles of inclusivity and recurrent inequities.

These pedagogic experiences offer valuable insights to help teachers facilitate more effective, culturally diverse, and sustained integration of SEL. Instead of forcing standardised programmes into schools, educational leaders should consider teachers as meaning-makers and cultural mediators whose local knowledge is central to successful innovation. To develop inclusive classrooms where all students have an opportunity to develop social-emotional skills, it is necessary to offer the frames of the curriculum as well as the institutional values that will assist teachers with the work that has multifaceted and emotionally challenging features.

This study contributes to the international literature that explores how global educational trends manifest in various settings and demonstrates the strengths of the interpretive approach to understanding the reality of educational implementation. Since the education system in Pakistan is still under development, it is essential to pay particular attention to the experiences of teachers, support them in their professional development, and respect their cultural experiences so that the potential of transformational inclusivity and responsiveness to social and emotional needs can be implemented.

REFERENCES

Anis, F., Waqar, Y., & Muhammad, Y. (2025). Understanding Pakistani elementary school teachers' attitudes toward inclusive education: Development of the teacher inclusion attitude questionnaire. *Indus Journal of Social Sciences*, *3*(1), 238–250.

Braun, S., Schonert-Reichl, K., & Roeser, R. (2020). Effects of teachers' emotion regulation, burnout, and life satisfaction on student well-being. *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology*, *69*, 101151. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.appdev.2020.101151

Breeman, L., Wubbels, T., Lier, P., Verhulst, F., Ende, J., Maras, A., Hopman, J., & Tick, N. (2015). Teacher characteristics, social classroom relationships, and children's social, emotional, and

behavioral classroom adjustment in special education. *Journal of school psychology*, *53*(1), 87–103. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jsp.2014.11.005

Calandri, E., Mastrokoukou, S., Marchisio, C., Monchietto, A., & Graziano, F. (2025). Teacher emotional competence for inclusive education: A systematic review. *Behavioral Sciences*, *15*(3). https://doi.org/10.3390/bs15030359

Creswell, J. W., & Creswell, J. D. (2018). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (Fifth edition. ed.). Sage.

Dang, H. (2023). A study of the theoretical framework, influencing factors and interventions for social and emotional learning in preschool children. *Lecture Notes in Education Psychology and Public Media*. https://doi.org/10.54254/2753-7048/2/2022469

Demink-Carthew, J., Olofson, M. W., Legeros, L., Netcoh, S., & Hennessey, S. (2017). An analysis of approaches to goal setting in middle grades personalized learning environments. *RMLE Online*, *40*(10), 1–11.

Durlak, J. A., Domitrovich, C. E., Mahoney, J. L., Elias, M. J., & Shriver, T. P. (2024). *Handbook of social and emotional learning*. Guilford Publications.

Eisner, E. W. (2017). *The enlightened eye: Qualitative inquiry and the enhancement of educational practice*. Teachers College Press.

Erickson, F. (1986). Qualitative methods in research on teaching. In C. Wittrock (Ed.), *Handbook of research on teaching* (pp. 119–161). Macmillan.

Erickson, F. (2012). Qualitative research methods for science education. In B. J. Fraser, K. G. Tobin, & C. J. McRobbie (Eds.), *Second International Handbook of Science Education* (pp. 1451–1469). Springer.

Fullan, M., & Mundial, B. (1989). *Implementing educational change: What we know*. Education and Employment Division, Population and Human Resources Department.

Giddens, A. (1987). *Social theory and modern sociology*. Stanford University Press.

Goforth, A., Nichols, L., Sun, J., Violante, A., Brooke, E., Kusumaningsih, S., Howlett, R., Hogenson, D., & Graham, N. (2022). Cultural adaptation of an educator social–emotional learning program to support indigenous students. *School Psychology Review*, *53*(4), 365–381. https://doi.org/10.1080/2372966x.2022.2144091

Graham, L. J. (2020). Inclusive education in the 21st century. In *Inclusive Education for the 21st Century* (pp. 3–26). Routledge.

Haq, M. A. U., Afzaal, A., & Ateeq-Ur-Rehman, M. (2025). Exploring the role of parental barriers in hindering inclusive education in south Punjab, Pakistan. *ACADEMIA International Journal for Social Sciences*, *4*(2), 2269–2277. https://doi.org/10.63056/acad.004.02.0329

Haq, M. A. U., & Rafiq, N. (2025). Analysis of the institutional barriers to inclusive education for diverse student needs in Pakistan. *The Critical Review of Social Sciences Studies*, *3*(2), 372–382. https://doi.org/10.59075/mrppnk90

Heidelburg, K., Sipior, C., King, J. a., Brito, M. C., & Fredrick, S. (2024). A systematic review of cultural adaptations to social emotional learning interventions for preK-12th grade black students. *School psychology*, *40*(2), 121–132. https://doi.org/10.1037/spq0000676

Jennings, P. A., & Greenberg, M. T. (2009). The prosocial classroom: Teacher social and emotional competence in relation to student and classroom outcomes. *Review of Educational Research*, *79*(1), 491–525.

Kamran, M., & Bano, N. (2023). A systematic review of literature on inclusive education with special emphasis on children with disability in Pakistan. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, *29*, 1078–1096. https://doi.org/10.1080/13603116.2023.2256321

Lau, W. S., & Shea, M. (2024). Empowering english learners in the classroom through culturally responsive social-emotional teaching practices. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, *45*, 2880–2897. https://doi.org/10.1080/01434632.2022.2078337

Lee, J. (2024). The role of teachers' social and emotional competence in implementing social and emotional learning (SEL) curriculum in Malawi. *School Psychology International*, *45*(6), 681–698. https://doi.org/10.1177/01430343241247221

Li, A., Miller, F., & Williams, S. (2024). Cultural adaptations to social-emotional learning programs: A systematic review. *School psychology*, *40*(2), 108–120. https://doi.org/10.1037/spq0000649

Llorent, V., Núñez-Flores, M., & Kaakinen, M. (2024). Inclusive education by teachers to the development of the social and emotional competencies of their students in secondary education. *Learning and Instruction*. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.learninstruc.2024.101892

Mahoney, J., Weissberg, R., Greenberg, M., Dusenbury, L., Jagers, R., Niemi, K., Schlinger, M., Schlund, J., Shriver, T., Vanausdal, K., & Yoder, N. (2020). Systemic social and emotional learning: Promoting educational success for all preschool to high school students. *The American psychologist*, *76*(7), 1128–1142. https://doi.org/10.1037/amp0000701

Mahoney, J. L., Weissberg, R. P., Greenberg, M. T., Dusenbury, L., Jagers, R. J., Niemi, K., Schlinger, M., Schlund, J., Shriver, T. P., & Vanausdal, K. (2021). Systemic social and emotional learning: Promoting educational success for all preschool to high school students. *American Psychologist*, *76*(7), 1128.

Miller, L. D., Laye-Gindhu, A., Bennett, J. L., Liu, Y., Gold, S., March, J. S., Olson, B. F., & Waechtler, V. E. (2011). An effectiveness study of a culturally enriched school-based cbt anxiety prevention program. *Journal of Clinical Child & Adolescent Psychology*, *40*(4), 618–629.

Muhammad, Y., & Bokhari, T. B. A., Faisal. (2024). Inclusive education in Pakistani schools: Theoretical perspectives, challenges and opportunities. *Pakistan Journal of Law, Analysis and Wisdom*, *3*(3), 135–145.

Muhammad, Y., Waqar, Y., & Anis, F. (2024). Constructing disability and special education: A critical discourse analysis of the Punjab special education policy 2020. *International Journal of Social Science and Entrepreneurship*, *4*(2), 400–416.

Muhammad, Y., Yousaf, A., & Masood, S. (2025). Citizenship without inclusion: Examining the experiences of university students with disabilities in pakistan's higher education system. *Dialogue Social Science Review (DSSR)*, *3*(6), 984–993.

Rauf, A., & Muhammad, Y. (2024). Examining the concepts of citizenship duties and responsibilities in elite school curriculum in Pakistan: An analysis of citizenship education related textbooks. *Journal of Interdisciplinary Educational Studies*, *4*(2), 1–15.

Rauf, A., & Muhammad, Y. (2025). Cultivating detached elites: National identity and citizenship in elite school textbooks in Pakistan. *Journal of Interdisciplinary Educational Studies*, *5*(1), 1–23.

Rauf, A., Muhammad, Y., & Batool, S. B. (2024). Human rights in pakistani elite school history textbooks: Constructions, constraints, and conceptions. *Pakistan Journal of Law, Analysis and Wisdom*, *3*(4), 48–62.

Rauf, A., Muhammad, Y., & Waqar, Y. (2023). Developing responsible elites: A qualitative content analysis of history textbooks of elite schools in Pakistan. *Journal of Educational Research & Social Sciences Review*, *3*(2), 95–104.

Rauf, A., Muhammad, Y., & Yousaf, A. (2024). Centering marginalized voices: Examining political and social rights in pakistani elite school textbooks. *International Journal of Social Science & Entrepreneurship*, *4*(2), 255–274.

Rauf, A., Waqar, Y., Aslam, M., & Muhammad, Y. (2025). Rethinking instructional leadership in pakistan's elite schools: A call for indigenous leadership models. *Journal for Social Science Archives*, *3*(1), 517–531.

Reicher, H. (2010). Building inclusive education on social and emotional learning: Challenges and perspectives – a review. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, *14*, 213–246. https://doi.org/10.1080/13603110802504218

Rosário, P., & Cefai, C. (2024). *The case of social emotional learning: Evidence-based practices*. Frontiers Media.

Safdar, S., Waqar, Y., Anis, F., & Muhammad, Y. (2024). Empowering teachers through reflective practice: A pathway to inclusive classrooms in Pakistan. *Research Journal for Societal Issues*, *6*(3), 75–86.

Saif, S., Safdar, S., Anis, F., & Muhammad, Y. (2024). Embracing diversity: The case for differentiated instruction in pakistan's inclusive classrooms. *Pakistan Journal of Law, Analysis and Wisdom*, *3*(7), 151–163.

Waqar, Y., Rashid, S., Anis, F., & Muhammad, Y. (2024). Inclusive education and mental health: Addressing the psychological needs of students in Pakistani schools. *Research Journal for Societal Issues*, *6*(3), 46–60.

Waqar, Y., Urooj, T., Anis, F., & Muhammad, Y. (2025). Pedagogical, professional, and resource concerns: Understanding pre-service teachers' preparedness for inclusive education implementation. *Research Journal of Psychology*, *3*(1), 211–222.

Xie, S., Wu, D., & Li, H. (2022). The relationship between Chinese teachers' emotional labor, teaching efficacy, and young children's social-emotional development and learning. *Sustainability*. https://doi.org/10.3390/su14042205

Yanow, D. (2000). *Conducting interpretive policy analysis*. Sage Publications, Inc.

Yanow, D., & Peregrine, S. S. (2012). *Interpretive research design: Concepts and processes*. Routledge.