

## Assessing Social-Emotional Competence of Prospective Teachers: A Gender-Based Evaluation for Holistic Teacher Development

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### ABSTRACT

Social-emotional competence (SEC) is a central component to the holistic growth of instructor candidates, which is found to impact their ability to control emotions, develop relationships, govern the classroom, and have general efficacy in their profession. The present research aimed to identify gender-specific differences in SEC amongst trainee teachers, which would help shed some light on the emotional and interpersonal preparation of all these teachers to the pedagogical profession. A convenience sampling method was used to recruit two hundred potential teachers (fifty percent male, n=100 and fifty percent female, n=100) in two privately funded institutions. It was noted through analyses that Female candidates scored substantially higher in Self-Awareness, Self-Management and Social Awareness implying that they have better emotional understanding, regulation strength and empathic sensitivity. On the contrary, a statistically significant sex difference was not revealed in the realms of Decision-Making and Relationship, which suggests that a similar level of competence in the ethical choices and their work skills was demonstrated in both genders. The aggregate SEC scores of the sample were distributed between moderate and high. These results emphasise the urgent need in special instructional intervention solutions that are directed to strengthen socio-emotional skills in male trainees, promote equal feelings development, and eventually enhance the quality of teaching professionals in the future.

**Keywords:** *Social-Emotional Competence, Prospective Teachers, Gender Differences, Holistic Development*

The concept of social-emotional competence (SEC) has reached a greater scholarly significance in recent education research, which reveals an epistemological metamorphosis that sees teaching as an emotionally subjectively charged and a relationally intense occupation. Instead of simply imparting disciplinary knowledge, teachers in more diverse and more multifaceted classroom ecologies are also supposed to manage emotions, demonstrate sympathetic responsiveness, mediate issues between people, and create psychologically safe learning spaces (Valente et al., 2019). These broadened professional requirements predetermine SEC as an inevitable part of the teacher preparedness, especially among future teachers who are going through the periods of professional identity formation (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2011).

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The conceptual basis of SEC lies in the fact that the conceptualization of adaptive emotional, cognitive, and interpersonal abilities is based on a set of paradigms of established social-emotional learning (SEL). SEC includes five domains inter-relating, including self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making that will ultimately allow persons to negotiate in a coherent and responsive manner intrapersonal and interpersonal demands (Lin et al., 2024). To individuals joining the teaching field, mastery of these areas contributes to emotional stability, positive relationship with the students, as well as positive management of the classroom situations that lead to improved teaching effectiveness (Rasuli et al., 2023).

In the context of teacher education, the concept of social-emotional competence (SEC) is getting reformulated as a critical factor of individual well-being as well as career effectiveness. Prospective teachers with strong SEC are better able to cope with occupational stressors and react adaptively to student heterogeneity, show an exemplary pro-social emotional behaviour (Mornar, 2024). Based on this, the teacher-preparation institutions are increasingly incorporating SEC-based pedagogies into their schools to realise their the long-term effects on the quality of instruction, teacher stability, and student socio-emotional performance. As a result, a deep understanding of the SEC profiles of the prospective teachers has become a major factor in formulating developmentally responsive training interventions (Ferreira, 2021).

At the same time, the issue of gender has emerged a significant socio-psychological parameter that influences the functioning of affect and the orientation towards the interpersonal. Empirical research in psychology as well as educational research has all revealed that males and females differ in areas like expressiveness of emotions, empathic responsiveness, relationalistic communication and conflict-resolution behaviour (Chaplin, 2015). All these stratified propensities have serious implications on the creation and implementation of SEC in teacher-education settings. Therefore, a gender sensitive question leads to critical information about the variability in affectivity and interpersonal competences in an applicant to the teaching career (Sulla et al., 2025).

Even though the existence of gender associated socio-emotional differences is not new, it is quite rare to find empirical studies that clearly target particular focus at future teachers. The current literature has mainly focused on school-going children or overall adults thus creating a gap in the comprehension of the gender factor in acquisition, integration and use of SEC among the pre-service teachers (Nanda et al., 2025). This theoretical blank does not permit the teacher-education programmes to come up with evidence-based, gender responsive interventions that can support divergent affective and interpersonal development possibilities (Darwish et al., 2025).

It is against this context that the systematic investigation of the gender disparities within the teaching profession of potential teachers in SEC has significant theoretical and practical implications at the current time due to the growing complexity of the teaching profession. This question can support the discovery of areas where certain groups can be vulnerable to differentiated support, such as emotion regulation, relational competence, or socially responsible decisions making, to achieve optimal professional preparedness (Miralles-Cardona, 2025). The ensuing findings can inform curricular improvements, policymaking, and pedagogy that can promote equitable and comprehensive development amidst all sexes.

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Moreover, outlining the gendered fashions in SEC contributes to our understanding regarding how future educators shape their professional identities (Smith, 2021). When these individuals leave the training and become practitioners, their skill on how to handle emotions, relationships, and implementation of socially sensitive decisions becomes part of instructional practises, classroom atmosphere, and learner interactions. As a result, findings of such studies contribute to an enrichment of an overall and psychologically-based conceptualization of teacher competence (Berg et al., 2021).

The current research falls within this theoretical framework which poses the question of gender variation in Social-Emotional Competence in the future teachers. Through the strategic analysis of the SECs portraits of the selected individuals, the study would create empirically based information that would assist in informing the process of creating a nuanced, equitable and contextually savvy teacher-preparation model, thus, supporting the development of emotionally intelligent and contextually resilient educators.

### **REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE**

Social-Emotional Competence (SEC) has been thoroughly theorised in the wider social-emotional learning (SEL) concept, but it is conceptualised as a multidimensional variable comprising of emotional understanding, self-regulation, responsive empathy, and socially-responsible behaviour. The CASEL is among the foundational frameworks that hold the view that SEC is comprised of five domains related to each other social awareness, relationship skills, self-awareness, self-management, and responsible decision-making, wherein individuals can negotiate intrapersonal and interpersonal demands comprehensively and flexibly (CASEL, 2020). According to scholars, the competencies are especially important to a teacher as the professional tasks of these individuals do not limit themselves to teaching academic material: they include the ability to create a place in the classroom where children feel emotionally taken care of and relationally coherent (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009).

Empirical studies have accumulated empirical evidence that confirms the emphasis that SEC has on the effectiveness of teachers, their psychological strength, and professional wellbeing. As an example, Brackett et al., (2010) showed that educators with a more advanced SEC have a better level of emotional control, lower levels of burnout, and an increased engagement of students. Equally, Wu & Qin, 2025 established that interventions that enhance affective qualities of service teachers, such as mindfulness and scope of mindfulness-based programme interventions, significantly advance awareness of interpersonal and classroom control of pre-service teachers, enhancing their ability to be prepared to handling affective aspects of the teaching process. Results of these studies support the argument that SEC is a buffer psychological tool, which allows teachers to handle stress, dominance of positive classroom environments, and to establish contact with learners more relationally.

The area of teacher education has had research studies that have indicated a need to develop SEC in new teachers who are at a critical stage of professional identity formation. The research shows that pre-service educators who show a strong SEC portend increased ability to adapt to the classroom, sympathise with students, and have a higher ability to overcome social and emotional difficulties during practicum experiences (Magaña Figueroa & Flores, 2016). More than that, the application of SEC-based pedagogies in teacher training programmes has been associated with better interpersonal communication skills, reflection,

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and culturally responsive practice in pre-service cohorts (Hoffman, 2009). These lessons emphasize the importance of the realities of individual differences in SEC, especially gender-based ones, to make informed decisions on fair and disparate professional training.

Socio emotional functioning gender variations are an old phenomenon that has been reported in both psychological and educational factors. According to research, it has always been likely that females are more likely to reveal greater heights of emotion, emotional expressivity, and relational communication than males, who are usually less inclined to express feelings and primarily depend on task-based control (Chaplin & Aldao, 2013). These discrepancies offer a strong ground on the consideration of gender differences in SEC in the teaching sector, which is a field that requires a sophisticated interpersonal sensitivity. (Ehlert et al., 2025) also note that the impact of affective patterns associated with gender may differ based on the emotional labour, relationship-building, and coping strategies of teachers and lead to a non-uniform indication of SEC profiles shaped by the complexity and situation-specific factors.

Specific empirical studies considered to explore the research differences between males and females with regard to SEC among groups of teacher educators have controversial, yet informative results. A number of studies indicate that female pre-service teachers are always higher in tests of emotional awareness, social understanding, and interpersonal sensitivity (Priyadarshini, 2009; “Employee Retention in Institutions of Higher Learning,” 2022). These trends can both show the influence of socialization processes, which promote the importance of expressiveness in the emotions of women and structural demands incorporated into a teacher training atmosphere which comes to terms with the generally feminine relational dispositions. On the other hand, male pre-service teachers usually possess strong abilities of using controlled decision-making, but exhibit lesser abilities in interpersonal attunement, which implies that balanced professional development should be achieved through special SEC intervention programs.

Altogether, the available literature replicates the theoretical topicality and empirical acuity of investigating gender disparity in social-emotional competence in future teachers. Although the previous research sheds light on general trends in gendered socio-emotional functioning, few studies have collected systematic research on these differences among the teacher education in the Indian context. It is necessary to fill this gap to develop evidence-based, gender-sensitive teacher education programmes to support the equitable emotional and professional development. This research paper has entered this debate by providing empirical evidence on gender-specific SEC profiles of 200 would-be teachers, which expands the academic understanding of emotional factors, which are vital in the development of a holistic teacher.

### ***Objectives***

1. To study gender differences in Social-Emotional Competence among prospective teachers of Punjab region.
2. To study gender differences in self-awareness, self-management, decision-making and Relationship, social awareness dimensions of social-emotional competence among prospective teachers of Punjab region.

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### *Delimitation of Study*

This study focuses specifically on B. Ed. students enrolled in higher education institutions within the Bathinda district of the Punjab region.

### *Hypothesis*

- There is no significant gender differences in Social-Emotional competence among prospective teachers of Punjab region.
- There is no significant difference in self-awareness, self-management, decision-making and Relationship, social awareness dimensions of social-emotional competence among prospective teachers based on gender.

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

The current research was a quantitative study with a descriptive survey research design.

### *Sampling*

A convenience sampling was used in recruitment of the 200 future teachers who were taking course in different institutions of higher learning within the Bathinda district in the Punjab region. The sample consisted of 50 percent men and 50 percent women.

### *Data collection*

The tool used to gather the data was the Cognitive Flexibility Inventory (CFI) that was constructed by Bhaskaran and Portia (2019). The inventory has four subscales, which include Self-awareness, Self-management, Decision making and Relationship, and Social Awareness. The Self-Awareness dimension assesses how an individual can perceive emotions, personal strengths and limitations, and behavioural pattern of a person accurately thus creating some level of reflective insight into inner selves and ways they lead to action. Self-Management is the ability to control the emotions, exercise self-control, and remain goal focused behaviour despite the presence of stressful situations or difficult situations; this is the element of resilience, flexibility, and psychological self-control. Decision-making and Relationship dimension is a measure of the capacity to make constructive, ethical, and contextually suitable decisions in interaction with people in constructive, cooperative as well as empathetic interaction, conflict resolution, and effective communication. Here the Social Awareness dimension under study will be the question of the possibility to recognise and understand the feelings, needs, and social signals of other people and show empathy, cultural sensitivity, and attentiveness to various social situations. Collectively, these subscales give a holistic evaluation of the social-emotional skills needed in adaptive, inclusive, and professionally responsible behaviour among the potential teachers. The researcher conducted an online survey that consisted of a questionnaire using Google Forms and gave it to pre-service teachers to gather data. Before the data collection, the participants had been informed on the objectives of the study and they were assured that it was optional since they were informed about the confidentiality of their data. The participants were also told that they had the right to refuse to participate or pull out of the study at will and any other reason.

### *Statistical analysis*

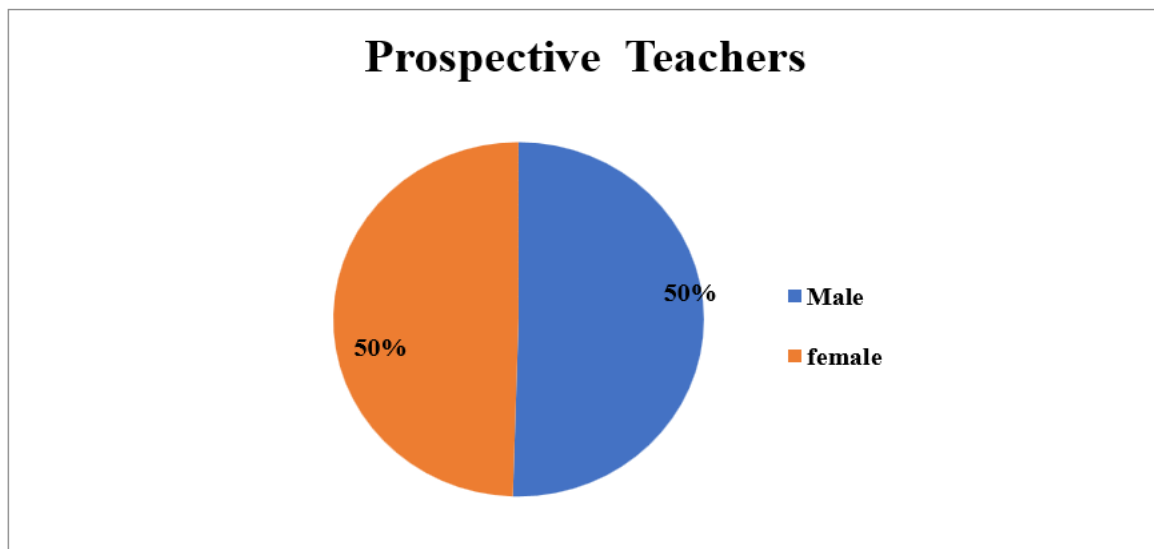
The data were analyzed under the descriptive statistics approach such as means and standard deviations and inferential analysis that comprised of independent -tests, to determine group differences.

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**ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF DATA**

*Table 4.1 Gender wise Distribution of sample for cognitive flexibility among pre-service teacher*

Course	Male	female	Total
B. Ed	100	100	200

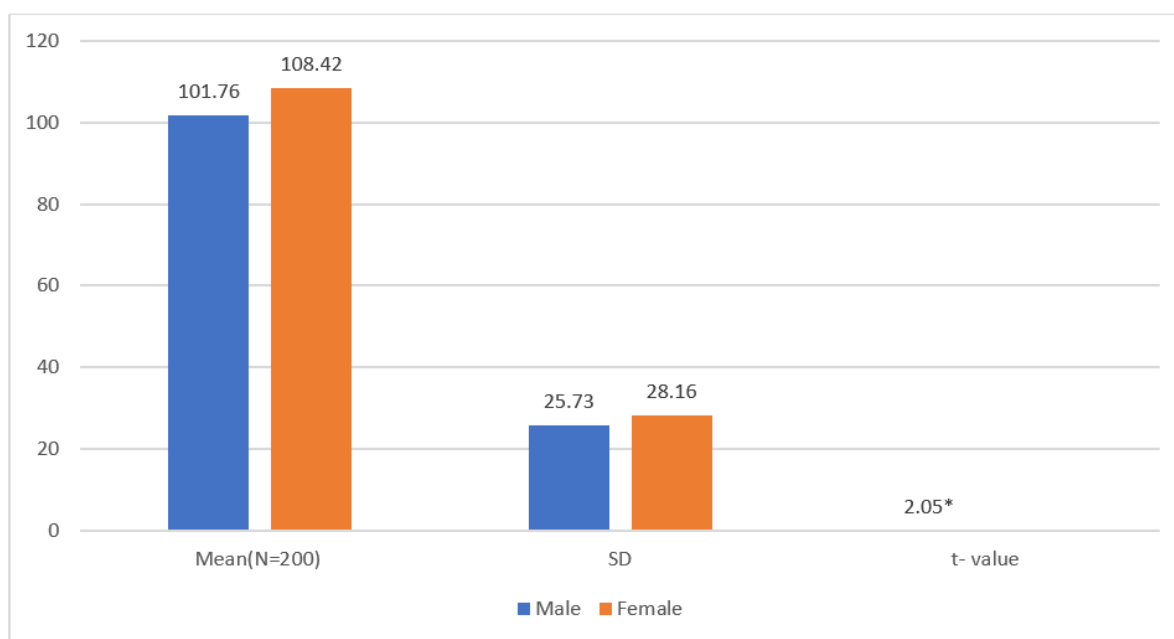


*Figure:1*

*Table 4.2 Gender Wise Mean Differences in Social-Emotional Competence among prospective teachers (N=101)*

Gender	Mean (N=200)	SD	t- value
Male	101.76	25.73	2.05*
Female	108.42	28.16	

\* Significant at 0.05 level



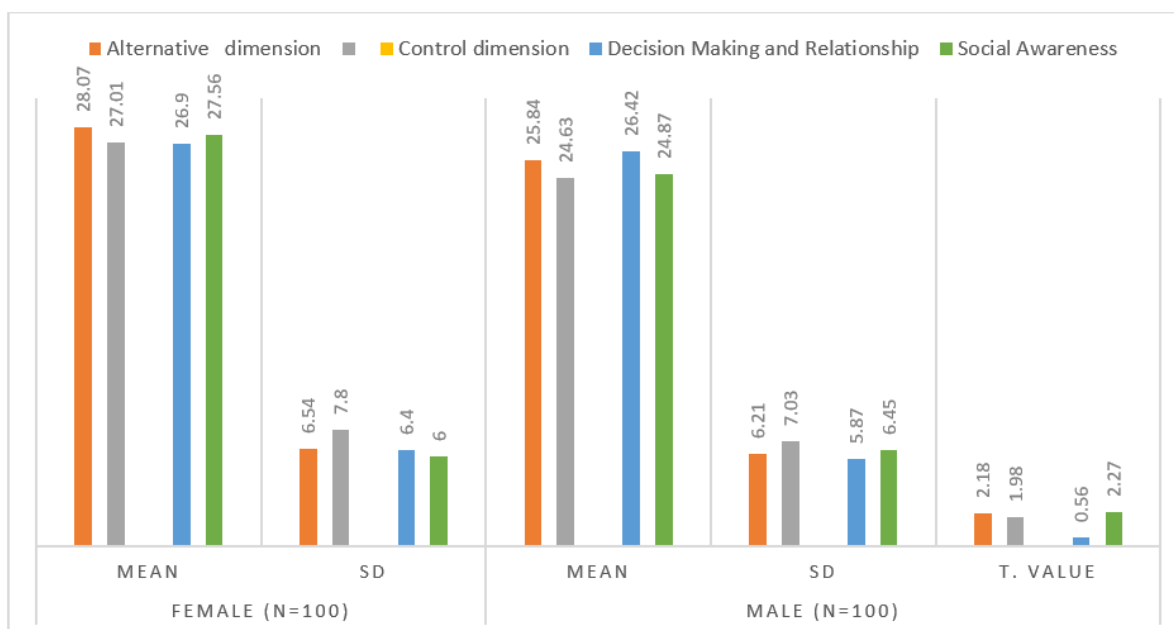
*Figure: 2*

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**Table: 4.3 Mean Differences in Social-Emotional Competence dimensions among prospective Teacher**

Social-emotional competence dimensions	Female (N=100)		Male (N=100)		t. value
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
Alternative dimension	28.07	6.54	25.84	6.21	2.18*
Control dimension	27.01	7.80	24.63	7.03	1.98*
Decision Making and Relationship	26.90	6.40	26.42	5.87	0.56 (NS)
Social Awareness	27.56	6	24.87	6.45	2.27*

\*Significant at 0.05 level, <sup>NS</sup> means no significant difference



**Figure: 3**

### DISCUSSION AND FINDINGS

The descriptive and inferential statistical analyses were performed in order to examine the degree of social-emotional competence (SEC) in both male and female potential teachers. The major aim was to evaluate the overall SEC of potential teachers and to test the possibility of gender differences in its essence dimensions. The findings showed that most of the individuals exhibited the moderate level of SEC which pointed out that the individuals have the necessary emotional and interpersonal competencies but there is need to enhance the competencies to achieve professional excellence. In addition, female potential teachers rated higher on overall SEC scores than their male counterparts, which implies the lesser emotional control, higher empathy, lower reflective capacity, and lower sensitivity to social cues.

When the differences between male and female perspectives of four dimensions of SEC, namely, self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and decision-making and relationship skills, were considered, the evaluation showed that the female future teachers scored higher on self-awareness, self-management, and social awareness. These results indicate a higher level of knowing your emotions, behaviour control and having a sense of

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social environments in the female participants. Nevertheless, the gender difference in the dimension of decision-making skills and relationship skills did not prove any statistically significant difference, which means that male and female future teachers are equally competent in making responsible decision and sustaining interpersonal relationships. Thus, the hypothesis according to which there would be no statistically significant gender differences on the overall level of SEC among potential teachers was rejected and the hypothesis according to which there would be no statistically significant gender differences across the dimensions of SEC was partially accepted considering that only one of the dimensions including decision making and relationship skills did not have significant gender variation. To a large extent, these results are consistent with earlier research stating the greater emotional and interpersonal competencies levels in female learners, as well as the need to consider domain-specific parallels as well as pinpoint the necessity of specific SEC interventions, especially in the case of male future teachers (Feraco & Meneghetti, 2023).

### ***Educational Implications***

The study is grounded in a systematic statistical evaluation of findings, which revealed that male prospective teachers demonstrated comparatively lower levels of social-emotional competence than their female counterparts. In light of these results, the following educational implications are proposed to strengthen SEC among male prospective teachers and to promote holistic emotional development for all trainees.

Teacher education institutions should incorporate structured Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) modules and mindfulness-based interventions—such as guided reflection, emotional regulation exercises, yoga, and meditation—into the curriculum. These practices have been shown to enhance emotional regulation, empathy, and stress management among learners (Jennings et al., 2017). Such interventions may be particularly beneficial for male pre-service teachers, who demonstrated comparatively lower SEC scores, by strengthening their emotional awareness, adaptive coping, and interpersonal sensitivity.

Reflective journals, peer dialogue circles, case-based discussions, and collaborative learning tasks should be systematically integrated into coursework to foster greater self-awareness and social understanding. Collaborative environments encourage male pre-service teachers to articulate emotions, understand diverse perspectives, and refine interpersonal skills through shared experiences (Brackett et al., 2010). Structured peer interactions and facilitated reflection can effectively bridge gender disparities in SEC by nurturing higher emotional adaptability and relational competence.

Establishing mentorship programs wherein male pre-service teachers receive guidance from experienced educators can support the development of relationship management, professional empathy, and ethical decision-making. Participation in community service initiatives and experiential learning projects further strengthens social awareness and interpersonal responsibility (Yin et al., 2019). Such authentic, real-world engagements provide opportunities for male pre-service teachers to practice and internalize essential SEC skills, thereby promoting their holistic emotional growth and professional maturity.

To ensure sustainable and equitable enhancement of SEC, teacher education curricula should embed dedicated training components that emphasize emotional balance, interpersonal competence, and resilience-building. Such integration will prepare prospective teachers—

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particularly males—to become empathetic, reflective, and emotionally competent educators capable of creating positive and inclusive learning environments.

### CONCLUSION & FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

The study revealed a clear gender-based variation in social-emotional competence among prospective teachers, with females demonstrating comparatively higher proficiency in emotional regulation, empathy, self-awareness, and social understanding. This enhanced competence among female participants suggests a stronger foundation for holistic personal and professional development. However, the findings are geographically limited to a specific region, indicating the need for future research to broaden its scope by incorporating larger and more diverse samples across institutions and educational contexts. Such expansion would provide a more comprehensive understanding of how social-emotional competence manifests across different demographic and institutional settings.

The study also highlights the importance of embedding structured Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) interventions within teacher education programs. Integrating mindfulness-based activities, reflective practices, peer collaboration, and mentorship initiatives can strengthen emotional adaptability and interpersonal effectiveness, particularly among male prospective teachers who exhibited comparatively lower competence. Future investigations may further benefit from including in-service teachers and employing mixed-method approaches—such as interviews or focus groups—to gain deeper insights into the lived experiences, challenges, and developmental trajectories related to social-emotional competence in teacher education.

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### **Conflict of Interest**

The authors declared no conflict of interest.

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