

Assessing Teachers' Needs for a Social-Emotional Learning Module for Children with Learning Disabilities

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DOI Link: <http://dx.doi.org/10.6007/IJARPED/v14-i4/27081>

Published Online: 12 December 2025

Abstract

This study investigated the challenges faced by special education teachers in implementing social-emotional learning (SEL) for children with learning disabilities, their perceived needs, and preferred features for an SEL module. A cross-sectional quantitative design was employed, involving 47 special education teachers from government schools in Bangi, Selangor. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire adapted from previous research, comprising five sections, Section A: Demographic Information, Section B: Implementation Challenges, Section C: Teachers' Needs, Section D: Module Features, and Section E: Module Content. Descriptive statistics, including mean and standard deviation, were used to analyse the quantitative data, while qualitative responses to open-ended questions were thematically analysed. Findings revealed that teachers experienced moderate to low challenges in implementing SEL ($M = 2.43$, $SD = 0.91$), particularly in integrating SEL into lesson plans, selecting appropriate teaching methods, and creating effective learning environments. Teachers expressed a high need for a structured SEL module ($M = 3.59$, $SD = 0.52$) that includes detailed lesson plans, step-by-step implementation guidelines, suggested activities, worksheets, checklists, and suitable teaching methods and techniques. Thematic analysis of qualitative responses identified five key areas for module content, recognising own emotions, recognising others' emotions, engaging in appropriate play, understanding gender-appropriate friendship boundaries, and expressing emotions in socially acceptable ways. The study highlights the importance of developing a practical, structured, and developmentally appropriate SEL module tailored to the needs of children with learning disabilities. Such a module could enhance teachers' instructional capacity, improve children's social-emotional competence, reduce behavioural difficulties, and increase engagement in teaching and learning activities. The findings provide evidence-based guidance for policymakers and curriculum developers seeking to implement effective SEL practices in special education contexts.

Keywords: Social-Emotional, Learning Disabilities, Young Children, Needs Analysis, Learning Module

Introduction

Social-emotional development is a fundamental aspect of early childhood and plays a central role in shaping children's ability to understand emotions, build relationships, make responsible decisions, and engage positively within their environment. The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) outlines five core social-emotional competencies namely, self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. These social-emotional competencies have become widely recognised as the foundational framework for social-emotional learning (SEL). Developing these skills not only supports academic engagement but also contributes to healthier peer relationships, reduced behavioural issues, and long-term mental health outcomes (Mohamed et al., 2025). In addition, children with good social-emotional skills are recognized as a good listener, concerned with emotional signals, sensitive to the other circumstances, understand, respect and accept others belief

However, for children with learning disabilities, the development of social-emotional competencies can be significantly more challenging due to cognitive, behavioural, and communication difficulties that affect how they interpret and respond to social cues (Feraco et al., 2025; Rakap et al., 2023; Narvaez et al., 2021). Learning disabilities encompass a broad range of neurological-based difficulties that interfere with the acquisition and use of academic and social skills. These challenges often manifest in emotional dysregulation, limited social understanding, heightened frustration, and difficulties maintaining peer relationships, all of which may influence children's overall wellbeing and school adjustment (Salerni & Messetti, 2025; Raposo & Francisco, 2022; Paulus et al., 2021).

The weaknesses in social-emotional domains among children with learning disabilities are well documented (Prior, 2022; Aro et al., 2022). Scholars reported children with learning disabilities struggle to recognise their own emotions (self-awareness), regulate behaviour in challenging situations (self-management), interpret the emotions of others (social awareness), communicate effectively (relationship skills), or solve interpersonal conflicts appropriately (responsible decision-making) (Cordeiro et al., 2021; Niu et al., 2022; Goodall et al., 2022). Recent research underscores that children with learning disabilities often require structured, explicit, and repeated opportunities to develop these skills, as naturalistic exposure is insufficient (Anastasiou, 2024).

The implementation of SEL programmes have been shown to improve emotional competence, reduce behavioural problems, enhance peer relationships, and support academic learning, even more so for children with learning disabilities (Takizawa et al., 2023; Kim et al., 2022; LaBelle, 2023). However, effective SEL implementation depends heavily on teachers' knowledge, confidence, and the availability of appropriate teaching resources. Studies indicate that many special education teachers feel inadequately prepared or lack the tools necessary to address the social-emotional needs of children with learning disabilities (Hassani & Schwab, 2021). Time limitations, insufficient training, and lack of structured SEL materials further contribute to inconsistent implementation or avoidance of SEL activities in the classroom (Raisch et al., 2024; McCoy & Hanno, 2023; Hunter et al., 2022). This gap between the recognised importance of SEL and teachers' practical ability to implement it has become one of the pressing challenges in special education practice.

Furthermore, while numerous SEL programmes exist globally, many are designed for typical children and may not align with the learning profiles, behavioural challenges, or cognitive processing needs of children with learning disabilities (Almulla & Khasawneh, 2024; Hassani & Schwab, 2021). Recent research emphasises the need for adapted SEL modules that incorporate visual supports, simplified instructions, repeated practice, and activities differentiated according to children's developmental abilities (Cox et al., 2024; Wigelsworth et al., 2024). Without such specialised resources, teachers often resort to ad hoc strategies that vary widely in quality and effectiveness, resulting in inconsistent support for children who need structured guidance the most.

In Malaysia, the implementation of social-emotional learning within special education settings is still developing. Although the importance of holistic education and well-being is acknowledged at policy level, there remains a lack of standardised SEL modules tailored for children with learning disabilities in government schools. Existing materials tend to be general, do not follow a systematic instructional design, and may not be suitable for teachers with varying levels of experience. This situation places substantial responsibility on teachers to develop their own lesson plans, select activities, and determine appropriate teaching strategies to promote social-emotional development that many report feeling unprepared for, especially when handling complex behavioural needs.

Given these challenges, understanding teachers' needs, constraints, and expectations is critical for designing an SEL module that is relevant, practical, and aligned with classroom realities. Teachers are the primary implementers of SEL, and their insights into lesson planning, activity design, instructional methods, and support tools are invaluable for developing an evidence-based and user-friendly module. Yet, research specifically examining the needs of special education teachers regarding SEL resources—particularly within the Malaysian context—remains limited.

Therefore, the present study aims to address this gap by investigating the challenges faced by special education teachers in implementing social-emotional learning, their specific needs regarding SEL modules, and the preferred features that should be incorporated into a module tailored for children with learning disabilities. By identifying these factors, this study can contribute to the development of a comprehensive, practical SEL module that supports teachers in delivering high-quality instruction while fostering the social-emotional growth of children with learning disabilities.

Literature Review

Social-emotional development is widely recognised as a critical component of children's overall growth, influencing both interpersonal relationships and academic outcomes. For children with learning disabilities, social-emotional competence is even more important because they often face additional challenges in emotional regulation, social interaction, and self-awareness (Hassani & Schwab, 2021). Research found that while many social-emotional learning (SEL) interventions exist for children with disabilities, their effects can be inconsistent due to variability in programme design, implementation fidelity, and individual learner needs (Alsalamah, 2023; Daley & McCarthy, 202).

One of the core difficulties for children with learning disabilities is developing self-awareness and self-regulation (Johnson, 2023). Research indicates that children with learning disabilities often score below peers on emotional and social skills (Aydin, 2025). Khasawneh (2024) reported that children with learning difficulties had social and emotional skill scores that were under the theoretical average, suggesting persistent deficits in self-regulation, social understanding, and emotional expression. These deficits may hinder their ability to form positive relationships, manage frustration, and engage meaningfully with peers, compounding their learning challenges.

Emotional intelligence (EI) is closely linked to social-emotional development, and recent studies have shown that children with learning disabilities often display lower levels of EI compared to typically developing peers. Dallasheh and Zubeidat (2023) compared children with learning disabilities and those with intellectual disabilities and found significant differences in emotional intelligence that could impact their social adjustment and interpersonal relationships. These findings underline the need for targeted interventions that explicitly focus on building EI in special education contexts.

In inclusive education settings, children with intellectual disabilities (ID) often experience social-emotional difficulties that impede their well-being. Scholars investigated the emotional well-being of children with intellectual disabilities in inclusive classrooms and found moderate levels of anxiety, social withdrawal, and low self-esteem (Pirker et al., 2025; Hofmann, 2023). These emotional vulnerabilities must be addressed within educational frameworks if inclusion is to be meaningful, not just academic. Without support, students with ID may struggle to develop a sense of belonging and cope with the social demands of school life (Gur & Bina, 2023).

Recent evidence also emphasises the role of emotional intelligence in academic performance among children with disabilities. Scholars reported that higher emotional intelligence in children with intellectual disabilities was positively associated with their academic outcomes, suggesting that social-emotional competence is not distinct from cognitive learning but rather interwoven with it (Fang et al., 2025; Van Pham, 2024). These findings support the view that SEL programmes tailored for children with learning or intellectual disabilities can contribute to more holistic educational development.

Beyond traditional instruction, technology-enabled interventions are emerging as promising supports for social-emotional development in this population. Lyu, An et al., (2024) designed AI-enabled games that adapt to the emotional and social learning needs of children with autism, providing personalised stories and scenarios to practise emotion recognition and problem-solving. While their focus is on children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD), similar adaptive technologies can be beneficial for other learning disabilities, offering engaging, scalable, and individually tailored SEL experiences.

Finally, the social-emotional competence of children with autism and intellectual disability has been studied directly, revealing important nuances. According to a parent-reported study using the Devereux Student Strengths Assessment (DESSA), children with intellectual disabilities and those with co-occurring ASD did not differ significantly in self-awareness or social awareness, but children with both ASD and ID had lower relationship skills and

optimistic thinking (Study, 2023). This suggests that interventions must consider not only the presence of cognitive disability but also whether children have overlapping neurodevelopmental conditions, as their emotional and social needs may differ in key ways.

Building on the existing body of evidence, it is clear that children with learning disabilities require structured, high-quality support to strengthen their social-emotional competencies, and that teachers play a central role in delivering such interventions. However, the literature also shows that many teachers feel insufficiently equipped, lack suitable teaching resources, or face uncertainties regarding how to implement SEL effectively with children who have diverse learning needs (Hassani & Schwab, 2021; Khasawneh, 2024). Despite growing interest in SEL, there remains a shortage of practical, context-specific modules tailored for children with learning disabilities, particularly within the Malaysian special education setting. Therefore, the purpose of the present study is to examine teachers' challenges, needs, and preferences in implementing social-emotional learning, with the aim of informing the development of a comprehensive and evidence-based SEL module suitable for children with learning disabilities. Through identifying what teachers require and what features they consider essential, this study seeks to contribute to the creation of a relevant, practical, and pedagogically sound module that supports both teaching practice and children's social-emotional development.

Methodology

This study employed a cross-sectional research design with a quantitative approach, which is well-suited for collecting data from a relatively large sample. The research was conducted in Bangi, Selangor, targeting special education teachers in government schools. Participants were selected using a simple random sampling technique, following the guidelines of Krejcie and Morgan (1970). A total of 47 teachers took part in the study. Of these, 53.2% were aged 36 years and above, 92.5% held a Bachelor's degree, and 44.7% were novice teachers with 1 to 5 years of experience in special education. Table 1 provides a detailed overview of the respondents' demographic characteristics.

Table 1
Demography Information

Code	Items	n (%)
A1	Age	
	20 to 25 years old	4 (8.5%)
	26 to 30 years old	10 (21.3%)
	31 to 35 years old	8 (17.0%)
	36 years old and above	25 (53.2%)
A2	Level of Education	
	Bachelor Degree	44 (92.5%)
	Master Degree	7 (14.9%)
A3	Teaching Experience	
	1 to 5 years	21 (44.7%)
	5 to 10 years	5 (10.6%)
	11 to 15 years	6 (12.8%)
	16 to 20 years	10 (21.3%)
	21 years and above	5 (10.6%)

Research Instrument

A questionnaire was used as the research instrument in the data collection process. The instrument was adapted from previous research by Amiruddin and Mohamed (2024). The questionnaire consisted of 30 items organised into five sections, namely, (i) Section A: Demographic Information, (ii) Section B: Challenges, (iii) Section C: Teachers' Needs, (iv) Section D: Module Features, and (v) Section E: Module Content. Section A included three items capturing respondents' demographic details, namely age, educational level, and teaching experience.

Section B was designed to collect data on the challenges faced by teachers in implementing social-emotional learning in the classroom and consisted of ten items. Section C focused on gathering information on teachers' needs regarding the availability of a social-emotional module to be used in special education classrooms, and consisted of nine items. Section D was designed to obtain teachers' suggestions on the components and features that should be included in the module, and comprised seven items. Sections A, B, and C were scored using a four-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = agree, and 4 = strongly agree. Section E contained one open-ended question aimed at obtaining teachers' suggestions on the topics that should be included in the module.

Prior to data collection, the questionnaire was submitted to experts for a content validity assessment. Two experts were appointed to evaluate the content of the questionnaire to ensure that the items in each section were appropriate for measuring the intended constructs. Both experts are associate professors at public universities with more than 20 years of experience in the field of education, and each holds a Doctor of Philosophy degree. The experts were given two weeks to complete the evaluation process before the content validity forms were collected. The Content Validity Index (CVI) was calculated upon receiving the completed forms. The CVI value obtained was 0.91, which exceeds the commonly accepted threshold of 0.80 for adequate content validity, indicating that the items are appropriate and sufficiently representative of the constructs measured.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data were collected online using the Google Forms platform. The link to the questionnaire was shared with the respondents via email, and they were given two weeks to complete it. The data were subsequently entered into the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) for analysis, and descriptive statistics were performed. The mean, frequency, and standard deviation for each item and construct were examined. The mean scores for the constructs were interpreted using the table proposed by Alico and Guimba (2015), as shown in Table 2.

Table 2

Interpretation of Score Mean

Mean Score	Interpretation
1.00 – 1.74	Low
1.75 – 2.49	Moderate – Low
2.50 – 3.24	Moderate – High
3.51 – 4.00	High

Result

Challenges in Implementing Social-Emotional Learning (SEL)

The findings indicate that teachers experienced moderate to low levels of challenge in implementing social-emotional learning (SEL) in the special education classroom ($M = 2.43$, $SD = 0.91$). Item-level analysis further revealed that the proportions of respondents who agreed and disagreed with the challenge statements were generally comparable, suggesting considerable variation in perceived difficulties. Table 4 summarises the respondents' level of agreement with the items measuring challenges encountered in SEL implementation.

Table 4

Challenges in the Implementation of Social-Emotional Learning

Code	Items	n (%)			
		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
B1	I find it difficult to understand the concepts related to social-emotional skills	6 (12.8%)	20 (42.6%)	20 (42.6%)	1 (2.1%)
B2	I find it challenging to prepare suitable lesson plans to foster social-emotional skills among children with learning disabilities	3 (6.4%)	19 (40.4%)	20 (42.6%)	5 (10.6%)
B3	I find it difficult to select appropriate teaching methods to foster social-emotional skills among children with learning disabilities	3 (6.4%)	19 (40.4%)	21 (44.7%)	4 (8.5%)
B4	I find it difficult to choose suitable teaching aids to support the development of social-emotional skills among children with learning disabilities	4 (8.5%)	19 (40.4%)	19 (40.4%)	5 (10.6%)
B5	I find it challenging to apply social-emotional skills when working with children with learning disabilities	2 (4.3%)	20 (42.6%)	20 (42.6%)	5 (10.6%)
B6	I do not have enough time to prepare lesson plans related to social-emotional skills for children with learning disabilities	5 (10.6%)	24 (51.1%)	14 (29.8%)	4 (8.5%)
B7	I lack the knowledge required to integrate social-emotional	5 (10.6%)	28 (59.6%)	10 (21.3%)	4 (8.5%)

Code	Items	n (%)			
		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
skills into teaching and learning activities in the special education classroom					
B8	I lack the skills required to integrate social-emotional skills into teaching and learning activities in the special education classroom	4 (8.5%)	25 (53.2%)	17 (36.2%)	1 (2.1%)
B9	I find it difficult to implement teaching and learning activities according to the prepared lesson plans	4 (8.5%)	29 (61.7%)	11 (23.4%)	3 (6.4%)
B10	I find it challenging to create an effective learning environment that supports the development of social-emotional skills among children with learning disabilities	2 (4.3%)	23 (48.9%)	18 (38.3%)	4 (8.5%)

Teachers' Needs for a Social-Emotional Learning Module

The results demonstrate a high level of need for a structured SEL module among special education teachers. The overall mean score for this construct was $M = 3.59$ and $SD = 0.52$ indicating strong agreement among respondents regarding the importance and usefulness of an SEL module in supporting children with learning disabilities. Item analysis shows that most teachers agreed or strongly agreed that they require a module that is appropriate for children with learning disabilities ($M = 3.51$, $SD = 0.55$), uses suitable teaching and learning approaches ($M = 3.53$, $SD = 0.51$), and is tailored to children' ability levels ($M = 3.53$, $SD = 0.51$). Teachers also expressed strong support for the development of an SEL module ($M = 3.62$, $SD = 0.49$) and believed that such a module would enhance children' social-emotional skills ($M = 3.66$, $SD = 0.48$), reduce behavioural problems ($M = 3.66$, $SD = 0.48$), and increase interest and engagement in learning activities. Table 5 presents the detailed distribution of responses, along with the mean and standard deviation for each item.

Table 5

Teachers' Needs for a Social-Emotional Learning Module

Code	Items	n (%)			
		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
C1	I need an appropriate learning module to help foster social-emotional skills among children with learning disabilities	-	1 (2.1%)	21 (44.7%)	25 (53.2%)
C2	I need a learning module that uses suitable teaching and learning approaches to develop social-emotional skills among children with learning disabilities	-	-	22 (46.8%)	25 (53.2%)
C3	I need a social-emotional learning module that is tailored to the ability levels of children with learning disabilities	-	-	22 (46.8%)	25 (53.2%)
C4	I support the development of a social-emotional learning module to foster social-emotional skills among children with learning disabilities	-	-	18 (38.3%)	29 (61.7%)
C5	I believe that a social-emotional learning module will help improve the social-emotional skills of children with learning disabilities	-	-	16 (34.0%)	31 (66.0%)
C6	I believe that a social-emotional learning module will help reduce behavioural problems among children with learning disabilities	-	-	16 (34.0%)	31 (66.0%)
C7	I believe that a social-emotional learning module will help increase the interest of children with learning disabilities in learning activities	-	1 (2.1%)	20 (42.6%)	26 (55.3%)
C8	I believe that a social-emotional learning module will help increase the engagement of children with learning disabilities in teaching and learning activities	-	-	18 (38.3%)	29 (61.7%)
C9	I believe that a social-emotional learning module will help children with learning disabilities adapt better within the community	-	1 (2.1%)	16 (34.0%)	30 (63.8%)

Preferred Features of a Social-Emotional Learning Module

The analysis of teachers' preferences for module features revealed strong support for several key components. A majority of respondents indicated the need for the module to include lesson plans ($M = 3.70$, $SD = 0.51$), clear teaching and learning procedures ($M = 3.66$, $SD = 0.63$), and step-by-step implementation guidelines ($M = 3.68$, $SD = 0.55$). Teachers also preferred the inclusion of suggested activities, worksheets, and checklists, as well as appropriate teaching methods and techniques. Table 6 outlines the detailed response patterns and item-level mean scores.

Table 6
Module Features

Code	Items	n (%)			
		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
D1	I need a module that includes detailed lesson plans	-	1 (2.1%)	12 (25.5%)	34 (72.3%)
D2	I need a module that clearly explains the teaching and learning procedures	1 (2.1%)	1 (2.1%)	11 (23.4%)	34 (72.3%)
D3	I need a module that provides step-by-step implementation guidelines	1 (2.1%)	-	13 (27.7%)	33 (70.2%)
D4	I need a module that offers suggested activities	-	-	14 (29.8%)	33 (70.2%)
D5	I need a module that includes checklists	-	-	16 (34.0%)	31 (66.0%)
D6	I need a module that provides worksheets	-	-	14 (29.8%)	33 (70.2%)
D7	I need a module that includes suitable teaching methods and techniques	-	-	13 (27.7%)	34 (72.3%)

Teachers' Perspectives on SEL Module Content

Analysis of the open-ended responses revealed five key themes that reflect teachers' expectations for an effective social-emotional learning (SEL) module for children with learning disabilities. The themes are, (i) Theme 1: Supporting Children to Recognise Their Own Emotions, (ii) Theme 2: Enhancing Children' Ability to Recognise Others' Emotions, (iii) Theme 3: Teaching Children How to Play Appropriately, (iv) Theme 4: Understanding Friendship Boundaries Between Boys and Girls, and (v) Theme 5: Expressing Emotions in Appropriate Ways. Overall, teachers emphasised the need for practical, structured, and developmentally appropriate content that addresses the everyday social-emotional challenges observed in the classroom.

Teachers consistently highlighted the importance of helping children with learning disabilities develop self-awareness of their emotions. Many respondents noted that children often struggle to identify feelings such as anger, sadness, frustration, or excitement, leading to behavioural or social difficulties. Therefore, teachers suggested that the module should include simple visual aids, emotion charts, stories, and hands-on activities that enable children to label and understand their emotions independently.

Another prominent theme was the need to teach children how to interpret the emotions of peers and adults. Teachers observed that many children find it challenging to read facial expressions, body language, and social cues, which in turn affects peer relationships. Suggested strategies included role-play activities, picture-based scenarios, and guided discussions to help children develop empathy and perspective-taking skills.

Teachers emphasised difficulties faced by children in engaging in appropriate and cooperative play. Challenges included conflicts during group activities, difficulties sharing materials, and lack of understanding of play rules. Respondents recommended that the SEL module include structured play lessons focusing on turn-taking, sharing, following rules, and playing safely with peers. Teachers believed that improved play skills would support social integration and reduce behavioural issues.

Several teachers suggested that the SEL module include guidance on gender-appropriate behaviour and friendship boundaries. This theme emerged from observations that some children may struggle to distinguish acceptable and unacceptable behaviours, particularly in mixed-gender settings. Teachers recommended clear teaching materials on “do’s and don’ts” of friendships to ensure children can interact respectfully and safely.

Teachers expressed a strong need to teach children appropriate strategies for emotional expression, particularly during moments of frustration or conflict. Respondents emphasised that many children tend to express emotions through crying, shouting, withdrawing, or exhibiting challenging behaviours. Suggested content included calming strategies, communication techniques, problem-solving steps, and anger management activities tailored to the cognitive level of children with learning disabilities.

The qualitative findings show that teachers are seeking practical, easy-to-implement, and structured SEL content focused on everyday challenges faced by children with learning disabilities. They want the module to strengthen emotional literacy, improve peer interactions, reduce behavioural incidents, teach social rules explicitly, and support emotional expression and self-regulation. These themes align strongly with the quantitative findings, which showed high levels of support for the development of an SEL module and a strong perceived need for structured guidance, teaching procedures, and clear activity plans.

Discussion

The findings of this study provide important insights into the challenges faced by special education teachers in implementing social-emotional learning (SEL) for children with learning disabilities, as well as their needs and expectations for a structured SEL module. Although respondents reported moderate to low levels of challenge, the relatively even distribution of

agreement and disagreement across items suggests that difficulties remain, particularly in translating SEL theory into consistent classroom practice. These results resonate with broader concerns documented in recent literature about the real-world implementation of SEL programmes (OECD, 2025).

One of the central difficulties identified by teachers concerns their limited knowledge and skills in integrating SEL into their pedagogical practice. This echoes findings in recent reviews of teacher emotional competence in inclusive settings, which emphasise that many educators lack sufficient training or support to deliver SEL effectively (Mansour, 2024). Without clear guidance, teachers in this study expressed that they often relied on ad hoc strategies rather than structured, evidence-based plans an approach that risks inconsistency and reduced impact.

Another significant barrier was time pressure. Teachers reported that they do not have enough time to design SEL lesson plans or integrate SEL within existing curricular demands. This is in line with widespread evidence: a recent survey reported that limited instructional time is one of the most commonly cited obstacles to SEL implementation, especially in schools with already full curricula. Such constraints can compromise both the fidelity and sustainability of SEL practices, making it more difficult for teachers to embed SEL in meaningful ways.

Despite these challenges, the study found strong support among teachers for the development of a dedicated SEL module. Teachers believed that a well-structured module could enhance children' social-emotional skills, reduce behavioural problems, boost engagement, and support better adjustment in broader settings. These perceptions align with empirical research showing that when SEL programmes are acceptable, feasible, and perceived as appropriate by teachers, their implementation and outcomes tend to improve.

The qualitative findings further nuance these needs by highlighting five content areas teachers deem most necessary: recognising one's own emotions, understanding others' emotions, engaging in appropriate play, managing gender-appropriate friendship dynamics, and expressing emotions appropriately. These areas correspond well with documented intervention targets in SEL research for special education contexts. For example, a systematic review of SEL interventions for students with special educational needs noted that many effective programmes focus on emotional awareness, social interaction, and self-regulation. Teachers' emphasis on these domains suggests that any module developed should not only be theoretically grounded but also practically adapted to the lived emotional and social realities of learners with disabilities.

Taken together, the quantitative and qualitative findings affirm the urgent need for a tailored SEL module that is both evidence-based and context-sensitive. Such a module should include ready-to-use lesson plans, clear procedures, implementation guidelines, and assessment tools, features strongly endorsed by teachers in this study. Moreover, for successful implementation, developers should prioritise professional development and support mechanisms to build teachers' competence and confidence in delivering SEL continuously. This aligns with prior calls in both research and practice to co-design SEL curricula in partnership with educators, ensuring relevance, fidelity, and sustainability.

This study provides novel insights into the challenges teachers face in implementing social-emotional learning (SEL) for children with learning disabilities, a largely underexplored area in special education. By combining quantitative and qualitative evidence, it identifies key difficulties in lesson planning, teaching methods, and integrating SEL into daily activities, while capturing teachers' needs for structured, developmentally appropriate SEL modules. The findings inform curriculum design, professional development, and policy by highlighting practical features such as detailed lesson plans, step-by-step guidelines, and suggested activities to enhance teaching effectiveness, emotional literacy, and peer interactions. The study's novelty lies in its focus on special education contexts and its actionable, teacher-informed recommendations, offering both theoretical and practical value to the social science and education communities.

Conclusion

This study provides valuable insights into the challenges faced by special education teachers in implementing social-emotional learning (SEL) for children with learning disabilities and their needs for a structured SEL module. The findings indicate that while teachers experience moderate to low challenges in delivering SEL, there are notable gaps in knowledge, skills, and resources that hinder consistent and effective implementation. Teachers expressed a strong need for a dedicated module that offers practical guidance, structured lesson plans, step-by-step implementation strategies, suitable teaching methods, worksheets, and assessment tools. Qualitative findings further emphasised that teachers require module content that helps children recognise their own and others' emotions, engage in appropriate play, navigate gender-appropriate friendships, and express emotions in socially acceptable ways. These insights demonstrate that teachers value resources that are both developmentally appropriate and tailored to the specific needs of children with learning disabilities. Overall, the study underscores the importance of developing a comprehensive SEL module that responds directly to teachers' identified challenges and needs. Such a module has the potential to enhance teachers' instructional capacity, promote children's social-emotional competence, reduce behavioural difficulties, and improve engagement and adaptation within classroom and community settings. By bridging the gap between theory and practice, the proposed module could serve as a practical and effective tool to support holistic development in special education contexts.

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