Parents' perspectives on adolescent social emotional learning: an explorative qualitative study amongst parents of students in prevocational secondary education

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Abstract

Purpose – Worldwide, schools implement social-emotional learning programs to enhance students' social-emotional skills. Although parents play an essential role in teaching these skills, knowledge about their

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perspectives on social-emotional learning is limited. In providing insight into the perspectives of parents from adolescent students this paper adds to this knowledge.

Design/methodology/approach – An explorative qualitative study was conducted to gain insight into parents' perspectives ($N = 32$) on adolescent social-emotional learning. A broadly used professional framework for social emotional learning was used as a frame of reference in interviews with parents from diverse backgrounds. Within and across case analyses were applied to analyze the interviews.

Findings – A conceptual model of four social-emotional skills constructs considered crucial learning by parents emerged from the data: respectful behavior, cooperation, self-knowledge and self-reliance. Parents' language, interpretations and orderings of skills indicate that the model underlying these constructs differs from skills embedded in the professional framework.

Research limitations/implications – Participants were small in number and mainly female. Therefore, more research is necessary to test the model in other parent populations.

Practical implications – The social-emotional skills students in prevocational secondary education learn at home differ from those targeted in SEL programs. Engaging students' parents in SEL program implementation is indicated to align the skills taught at home and school. Preparing teachers to implement such programs requires training them on engaging parents from diverse backgrounds.

Originality/value – The study is one of the first providing insight into parents' perspectives on SEL, the social-emotional skills deemed crucial to master for adolescents, and the roles they view for themselves and school on teaching these skills.

Keywords Parents, Education, Qualitative methods, School health promotion, Adolescence, Culturally diverse populations

Paper type Research paper

1. Introduction

Social and emotional learning (SEL) matters. SEL is the process of acquiring the social-emotional skills, such as empathy, self-regulation and problem-solving, necessary for successfully contributing to and participating in different living and learning contexts (Zins and Elias, 2007). SEL is associated with child outcomes, such as psychosocial health, resilience, academic achievements and well-being. Developing social-emotional skills is a continuous and cumulative process, starting from birth in interactions with parents and other people at home (Grusec, 2011; Osher *et al.*, 2020). During this socialization process, young people become familiar with the skills, behaviors and attitudes expressed and reflected in the practices parents and others use when caring for, protecting and guiding them to participate in the community they belong to. Schools are also considered crucial contexts for SEL and acquiring the social-emotional skills needed for success in life, education and work (Eccles and Roeser, 2011; National Research Council, 2012). Adolescence is considered a sensitive period for developing the advanced social-emotional skills required for accomplishing central developmental tasks, such as a differentiated self-concept and independence (Crone, 2017). However, adult guidance and support concerning SEL remain necessary. Collaboration between parents and schools is assumed to promote positive youth development (Bronfenbrenner and Morris, 2006; Garbacz *et al.*, 2015). Teachers and parents also agree that they both have a part to play in enhancing social-emotional skills (e.g. Bridgeland *et al.*, 2013; Hill *et al.*, 2018).

Contextual, as well as personal, factors shape an individual's SEL. For instance, growing up in low-income and/or migrant families challenges developing the social-emotional skills required for success in education and work (Fletcher and Wolfe, 2016; West *et al.*, 2020). Intellectual, emotional-behavioral and learning problems similarly impede social-emotional skill development (Cook *et al.*, 2008; Goodman and Scott, 2015). Parents and teachers perceive enhancing SEL in young people with such problems as particularly demanding (Gresham, 2015). However, in collaborating with parents, schools and teachers commonly encounter challenges related to differences in their role perceptions, goals and expectations of students (Hornby and Blackwell, 2018; Garcia-Carmona *et al.*, 2020). They particularly perceive parents from poor and migrant backgrounds as hard to reach.

Over the past 30 years, a new field of research on SEL emerged. Scholars in this field develop programs and theoretical concepts to support teachers and schools in purposefully

enhancing students' SEL. Although collaboration with parents is addressed and emphasized in the SEL literature in this field, insight into whether and how to engage parents in school SEL is limited.

2. SEL programs and frameworks

All over the world, schools implement SEL programs to enhance social-emotional skills to improve adolescents' psychosocial health, education, and work prospects (Durlak *et al.*, 2015). For guiding this implementation, several SEL frameworks targeting various social-emotional skills have been designed to support sharing conceptual models, develop a common language regarding skills development and promote collaboration amongst different ecological systems (e.g. teachers, students, school staff and parents) (Jones *et al.*, 2019). The framework developed by the collaborative for academic, social, and emotional learning (CASEL) is broadly used in SEL programs (Durlak *et al.*, 2015). This framework comprises five competency domains containing behaviors, skills, and attitudes relating to SEL: self-awareness, social awareness, self-management, relationship skills and responsible decision-making. SEL frameworks and -programs have broad theoretical foundations, being informed, for instance, by social learning theory, cognitive-behavioral theory, systems theory and development theories. What is more, they target various social-emotional skills.

Meta-analyses and evaluation studies of SEL programs showed significant positive effects on social-emotional skills, psychosocial health and academic achievement in diverse populations of children and adolescents (e.g. Durlak *et al.*, 2011; Sklad *et al.*, 2012; Taylor *et al.*, 2017). These studies did not evaluate parent engagement. Other meta-analyses found positive effects of engaging parents on student outcomes associated with programs' responsiveness to parental developmental goals (Goldberg *et al.*, 2019; Sheridan *et al.*, 2019). Students facing personal and contextual adversities, such as learning difficulties and growing up in low-income families and neighborhoods, are assumed to profit most from SEL programs (Elias and Haynes, 2008; West *et al.*, 2020). To achieve an SEL program's intended outcomes in students, a program should be implemented with fidelity, requiring teacher training (Durlak, 2016). Teachers are also assumed to tailor their lessons to meet the specific needs of their students; insight into how teachers implement programs is limited. Collaboration between parents and schools on SEL program implementation is also emphasized (Patrikakou and Weissberg, 2007; Bronfenbrenner and Morris, 2006). Fruitful parent-school collaboration is associated with shared views and responsibilities on SEL (Garbacz *et al.*, 2015).

However, the skills taught in SEL programs are also criticized for not necessarily matching the skills students growing up in poor and/or migrant families learn at home (e.g. Dinallo, 2016; Gillies, 2011). Such a mismatch is associated with unequal benefits of those programs for students growing up in disadvantaged circumstances and can put pressure on parent-school collaboration on SEL (Jagers *et al.*, 2019). Engaging these students and their parents in SEL program implementation is emphasized. Therefore, more insight is necessary into their perspectives on SEL.

2.1 Parents' perspectives on SEL during adolescence

Parents play a core role in helping their children acquire social-emotional skills. Apart from providing a safe and supportive context at home, parenting practices regarding SEL are associated with adolescents' skill development, health and well-being (Grusec, 2011; Smetana, 2017). The skills young people learn at home depend on parents' role perceptions and practices in different socialization domains (e.g. care and protection, building reciprocating relationships, control, guided learning regarding particular skills and (socio-cultural group) participation). Perceptions and practices in these domains vary depending on the socio-

culturally and -economically determined developmental views and values parents hold, as well as the goals they desire for their children. Depending on their views, values and goals, perceptions and practices of (in)adequate parenting and (in)appropriate social-emotional skills can vary (Smetana, 2017; Sorkhabi and Middaugh, 2019).

Adolescents' increasing independence and advancing skills also demand more egalitarian parent-adolescent interactions involving explanation, renegotiation and advice on (appropriate) social-emotional skills (Smetana, 2017). Insight into parents' perspectives on the social-emotional skills they perceive as crucial for adolescents to master and parental practices on teaching these skills is limited.

A few small sample qualitative studies have provided insight into the skills perceptions of adolescents' parents. For instance, in one study, parents from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds considered mastering self-regulation skills as conditional for responsible decision-making on health and behavior (Mynttinen *et al.*, 2020). For adolescents with special educational needs, parents perceived skills such as empathy, self-regulation and self-awareness as critical for maintaining positive interactions with peers (Kolb and Hanley Maxwell, 2003). Although parents in these studies perceived themselves as primarily responsible for teaching social-emotional skills, they also recognized that schools played a role. However, these studies did not provide insight into the perspectives on SEL of parents from various sociocultural backgrounds. More insight into the perspectives on SEL of these parents is necessary for collaborating with them on enhancing the social-emotional skills adolescents need.

2.2 SEL program implementation and current study

Collaboration between parents and schools in SEL programs is particularly emphasized for students growing up in low-income and/or migrant families (Jagers *et al.*, 2019). As parents' perceptions of skills may differ from the principles, values and goals guiding SEL programs, such differences might threaten, particularly, the opportunities of students in growing up in poor or disadvantaged circumstances for profiting from SEL school programs. Therefore, collaboration with parents of these students is advisable for implementing SEL programs in today's diverse and inclusive schools. Establishing such collaboration requires a deeper insight into parents' perceptions of adolescents' social-emotional skills, their role in teaching these skills and the parenting practices they use at home.

The current study is part of a larger project on implementing and evaluating an evidence-based Dutch secondary education universal classroom-based SEL program, Skills4Life (S4L). For this project, the program was adapted to the learning abilities of students with additional educational needs in prevocational education (see 3.1 Participants for more information). An evaluation study of the adapted S4L program showed no effects on outcomes in the full student population and adverse effects in a subgroup of students from migrant families (Van de Sande *et al.*, 2022). To better understand these outcomes and to inform the implementation of the adapted S4L program, we conducted a qualitative study exploring parents' perspectives on SEL. We interviewed parents of relevant students aiming to provide insight into 1. Parents' perceptions of the social-emotional skills deemed crucial to master for adolescents; 2. The roles parents perceive for themselves and schools in teaching these skills; 3. The practices parents perceive adequate for teaching social-emotional skills at home and possible differences between parents from different backgrounds.

3. Methods

In 2017, we conducted in-depth interviews with 32 parents regarding their perspectives on adolescent SEL. Parents were interviewed once, at a time and place convenient to them, which helped them to feel confident and relaxed, and encouraged them to express their thoughts, opinions, and experiences.

Teachers and researchers invited parents to participate in the study during parent-teacher conferences at four different schools in the urban western part of the Netherlands. Researchers also used their social networks to recruit parents. The parents were not personally known by the researchers. If parents were willing to participate, they either received written information from the teacher or were orally informed about the purpose of the study by the researchers. Every interview started by informing parents of the study procedures and confidentiality and explaining the study's aim of gaining insight into parents' perspectives on SEL. Parents were offered a gift voucher of EU 20 for participating.

3.1 Participants

The parents in our study had at least one child in grade 9 or 10 (aged 14–18 years) in the least selective track in Dutch prevocational secondary education, i.e. the Practical Education track (PrE, known in Dutch as Praktijkschool). The PrE track trains students for work. Two percent of secondary education students in the Netherlands are in the PrE track (Central Bureau Statistics, 2022). All students in this track have additional educational needs, associated with IQs varying from 60 to 90 (measured in IQ tests with a mean of 100), severe learning problems (three years delay in reading and mathematics) and/or emotional-behavioral difficulties. Students from low-income and migrant families are overrepresented in this track (Koopman *et al.*, 2015).

Purposeful (emergent) sampling was applied to reach maximum variation in gender, socio-cultural background, family composition and education level (see Table 1). Throughout the study, we interviewed 32 parents. Data saturation was agreed upon by the research team when, in the last three interviews with parents, no new themes, patterns or ideas emerged (Guest *et al.*, 2006).

3.2 Data collection and interview topics

The first two authors (MS and EP) discussed the objectives and methodology of the study in close collaboration with the Skills4Life research group. This group consisted of experts in qualitative research on low-income and migrant family backgrounds, parenting and parent education, and SEL program development and research. Although the research group members were all white and Dutch, they were all parents. One of the interviewers/coders is raised in a low-income and -educated family and knows that background well. Therefore, it can be assumed that the background differences between them and the parents they interviewed did not affect the quality and analysis of the data.

A semi-structured interview protocol (see Appendix) was developed to discuss in the interviews with parents their perceptions of: (1) the social-emotional skills necessary for adolescents to master; (2) the roles and responsibilities of parents and schools in teaching these skills; and (3) the skills teaching practices they considered adequate at home.

We used the five CASEL competence domains to formulate subtopics for the semi-structured interviews. Aiming to get insight into parents' skills perceptions and to avoid them clinging to the rather abstract and unfamiliar definitions of CASEL, a list of nine skills was derived from this framework (see Table 2). We operationalized these skills to make them more accessible to parents' educational and family backgrounds, considering their vocabulary. Besides these operationalizations, socialization theory and literature on parenting were used as resources to provide insight into parents' perspectives on SEL (e.g. Grusec 2011; Smetena, 2017).

All interviews were conducted in Dutch. After the first few interviews, the operationalizations of the skills were slightly adapted to match the parents' vocabulary; for example, *Knowing your strengths and weaknesses* was changed to *Knowing what you are good at and are not good at*. Interviewers used descriptions of skills in Dutch, English and the most common languages of migrant parents in the Netherlands, i.e. Moroccan and Turkish.

	Gender		Family background *		Education level **		Family composition	
	Female	Male	Native Dutch	Migrant	Low	High	2-Parents	1-Parent
1	X			X	X			X
2	X		X		X		X	
3	X		X			X	X	
4	X		X			X	X	
5		X		X	X			X
6	X			X	X		X	
7		X		X	X		X	
8	X	X	X		X		X	
9		X		X	X			X
10	X			X	X			X
11	X		X		X			X
12	X		X		X		X	
13	X		X		X			X
14	X		X		X			X
15	X		X		X		X	
16	X			X		X		X
17	X		X			X	X	
18	X		X		X			X
19	X		X		X		X	
20	X		X		X		X	
21	X			X	X		X	
22	X		X			X		X
23	X			X	X		X	
24		X		X	X		X	
25	X			X		X	X	
26	X		X			X	X	
27	X		X		X		X	
28	X		X		X		X	
29	X	X		X	X		X	
30	X			X	X		X	
31	X	X		X	X		X	
32	X			X	X		X	
Total	29	7	17	15	25	7	22	10

Table 1. Background characteristics of the parents included in the study

Note(s): * Migrant parents had various backgrounds, e.g. Cape Verdean, Moroccan, Polish, Turkish
** Highly educated parents had graduated from college, and lower-educated parents had high school, vocational, or primary education levels
Source(s): Authors' own creation/work

Depending on parents' preferences, interviews were conducted by telephone, at home, or at school. The interviews lasted 30–45 min. All interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim into Dutch by E.P., and numbered to ensure confidentiality.

3.3 Data analyses

As the purpose of our study was explorative, data collection and analyses were performed simultaneously and iteratively (Galetta, 2013). Preliminary findings were discussed in the research group three times: after the 10th, the 22nd and the last interview. All interviews were entered into a data processing program for qualitative research, Atlas.ti 7, and inductively coded (open coding followed by axial coding) by E.P. and M.S. We performed within-case analyses to identify main perceptions of skills, roles and practices used at home. Additionally, these researchers conducted cross-case analyses to elicit commonalities and differences

CASEL competence domain	Social-emotional skills comprised in each domain *	List of operationalized social-emotional skills (used in the interviews)
Self-awareness	- Recognizing own emotions - Knowledge of strengths and weaknesses - Self-efficacy	- Knowing what you are good at and are not good at
Social awareness	- Empathy - Perspective-taking - Appreciating diversity - Understand social norms	- Knowing and understanding others' feelings and thoughts - Respecting others' feelings and thoughts
Self-management	- Self-regulation - Goal-setting - Perseverance	- Managing difficult situations and emotions - Speaking-up for yourself
Relationship skills	- Communication - Cooperation - Managing peer pressure - Social problem solving - Help seeking	- Getting along with others - Cooperating with others
Responsible decision making	- Considering relevant factors and consequences of actions - Taking responsibility for decisions	- Taking other(s) interests into account in decisions - Making and sticking to agreements

Note(s): * We used the descriptions from the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) (2003) for reasons of accessibility and comprehensibility for parents.
Source(s): Authors' own creation/work

Table 2. Competence domains and skills described in CASEL's SEL framework and the operationalizations used in the interviews

related to dimensions such as ethnic background (Dutch vs migrant), family composition (single-parent vs two-parent families) and parents' education level (low vs high). By combining within-case with cross-case analyses, we were able to give meaning to parents' perspectives on SEL based on identified patterns of contextualized ideas, perceptions, and experiences of individual parents and commonalities between parents (Ayres *et al.*, 2003).

The results section includes illustrations of parents' interpretations and constructions of social-emotional skills in their own words (italicized). In addition, we included quotes that reflect parents' reasoning and arguments about the interrelations between skills, their beliefs and perceptions regarding skill development, and the values and goals desired for their children.

4. Findings

All parents seemed engaged and interested in the interviews, which was expressed in their enthusiasm to share their thoughts, opinions and expertise on SEL and detailed explanations of crucial social-emotional skills.

In the following, we first set out the social-emotional skills parents perceived necessary for adolescents to learn. After that, we report on parents' role perceptions in teaching social-emotional skills, the practices they considered adequate for teaching skills at home, and we touch upon differences in perspectives related to parents' backgrounds. The numbers between brackets in this section indicate the homogeneity vs heterogeneity in parents' perspectives.

4.1 A conceptual model of four social-emotional skills constructs

Parents associated social-emotional skills across all domains in the CASEL framework with the skills they perceived as relevant for adolescents to master. However, a conceptual model

of four interrelated social-emotional skills constructs that differed from the CASEL framework inductively emerged from our data analyses, i.e. (1) respectful behavior, (2) cooperation skills, (3) self-knowledge and (4) self-reliance. Parents indicated an order (from 1–4) in which the development and teaching of skills should occur during adolescence.

4.1.1 Respectful behavior. According to all parents (32), respectful behavior was first and most important for their children to master. They considered this a self-contained construct of skills. They attributed their perceptions of respectful behavior to the skills and values they learned from their parents, such as trustworthiness, fairness and helping others. Half of the parents (16) interpreted respectful behavior in terms of appropriate manners, such as talking politely. The other parents used more general qualities, such as showing respect for other religions, cultures and opinions. The following quote illustrates how a parent associated respectful behavior with *being open-minded*:

> I want my children to be open-minded, non-judgmental, and respectful of others' opinions. I want them to appreciate others for who they are. [. . .] Even if you do not agree with someone or experience their behavior as annoying or odd [. . .]. (Interview 3)

4.1.2 Collaboration skills. Most parents (22) perceived respectful behavior as crucial for establishing positive relationships and collaboration with people from different backgrounds. They particularly emphasized learning *cooperation skills*, as *today's society revolves around teamwork*. Parents associated these skills with adolescents future work prospects. They argued that cooperating in complex situations and contexts required additional skills, such as *taking others' perspectives into account* and r*esisting peer pressure*. Parents believed adolescents need these skills to *resolve conflicts* and *adjust to situations beyond their control* at home, school and work. According to parents, mastering *cooperation skills* was a prerequisite for developing other skills during adolescence. The following quote illustrates the order in which parents thought skills should be developed:

> To cooperate with other people, you need not only respectful behavior but also self-knowledge. When you have self-knowledge, you can learn to speak up for yourself and to set boundaries. All these skills are necessary for establishing successful interactions with other people. (Interview 13)

4.1.3 Self-knowledge skills. Half of the parents (16) emphasized the need for adolescents to *know who they are* and *what they are good at and not good at*. According to parents, *accepting yourself as you are, self-confidence* and *creating a realistic self-image* precede developing *realistic goal setting* and *understanding the consequences of behavior*. *Setting realistic goals* and *understanding the consequences of behavior*, in particular, were associated with future work prospects. Parents also linked the skills relating to self-knowledge with the development of more general personal qualities, as the following quote demonstrates:

> It is essential for me that my children know what they want and who they are. . . .. We try to raise all four of our children as individual persons. They are all unique people in their own way, with different talents [. . .]. I just want them to discover what they like to do and what talents they have. (Interview 3)

4.1.4 Self-reliance skills. A majority of parents (22) believed that adolescents need self-reliance skills in order to develop independence. According to them, self-reliance comprises skills such as *speaking up for yourself, setting boundaries, sticking to your opinion* and *self-control*. Most of these parents (19) linked these skills to *resisting peer pressure* and *resolving conflicts* in interactions with peers and adults. However, the following quote shows how a parent couple related their perception of certain skills – in this case, *speaking up for yourself* and *respectful behavior* – to justify the disrespectful behavior of their child toward a teacher:

> One day, she [daughter] called me from school and said: if you don't come here right now, I will to start throwing tables through the classroom. [. . .] The teacher did not show respect by neglecting her

> request [not using an aerosol in the classroom because of her allergies]. I thought: she [daughter] is correct. Teachers need to respect students too. That is what I mean by mutual respect. (Interview 15)

4.2 Beliefs regarding the responsibilities and roles of parents and schools concerning SEL

All the parents (32) in our study perceived teaching social-emotional skills during adolescence as primarily their task and responsibility. This perception was grounded in their belief that *parents know best what skills their children need*. However, almost all parents (28) viewed a supplemental role for schools, particularly in teaching *cooperation skills* that are difficult to teach at home, i.e. *getting along with people from different backgrounds*. Teaching skills related to acquiring internships and work were also explicitly labeled the responsibility of schools. A few parents (3) suggested their children might feel more comfortable discussing skills related to specific subjects, such as substance use or intimate relationships, with peers and teachers. Despite their awareness of adolescents' needs, some parents (5) felt embarrassed to discuss such issues with their children, as the following quote indicates:

> I cannot talk about this [intimate relationship] with her. [. . .] We do not talk about this in our culture before you are married [. . .] As they would bully her because she has never had this [intimate relationship] [. . .] if it makes her feel uncomfortable, I would allow her to talk to the teacher [. . .]. (Interview 32)

A majority of the parents (22) wanted schools to inform them about SEL at school. They emphasized the absolute necessity of aligning the social-emotional skills taught at school to those learned at home to prevent their children from *getting confused about the proper skills*. Some of them even suggested that parents, teachers and students should learn social-emotional skills together. Parents wanted to collaborate with schools on SEL. One of them said:

> During adolescence, your children need to become more independent. [. . .]Therefore, schools must pay attention to and develop partnerships with parents. [. . .] Maybe this sounds peculiar, but, you know, what I mean is that we have to collaborate. (Interview 11)

Figure 1 represents a conceptual model of the four interrelated social-emotional skills constructs parents perceived as crucial for adolescents to learn; as far as we know, this is one of the first models reflecting parents' perceptions of these skills.

4.3 Parenting practices relating to enhancing social-emotional skills

Some parents (8) considered providing a safe and caring environment at home conditional for enhancing social-emotional skills during adolescence. Except from one, parents also emphasized that they tried to teach skills that enhanced adolescents' independence by using several practices. *Talking* about the social-emotional skills they considered most appropriate in situations was the practice parents (30) preferred and tried to use. In addition, most parents (24) tried to *monitor* their children's whereabouts – which had become more difficult as adolescents spend more time outside the family. Based on this monitoring, parents attempted to *coach* their children by *giving advice* (15)*, explaining a situation* (16) and *referring to their responsibilities* (5). Besides this, a few parents (3) used everyday situations and television programs to discuss (in)appropriate skills. A few parents (4) also purposely tried to be role models regarding social-emotional skills. Overall, they were satisfied with the practices they used. However, some parents (10) also struggled with balancing between *interfering or not interfering in their children's problems*. They indicated that they lacked the support they had had from other parents when their children were still in primary education. Despite the general agreement in parents' perspectives on SEL, we also identified differences.

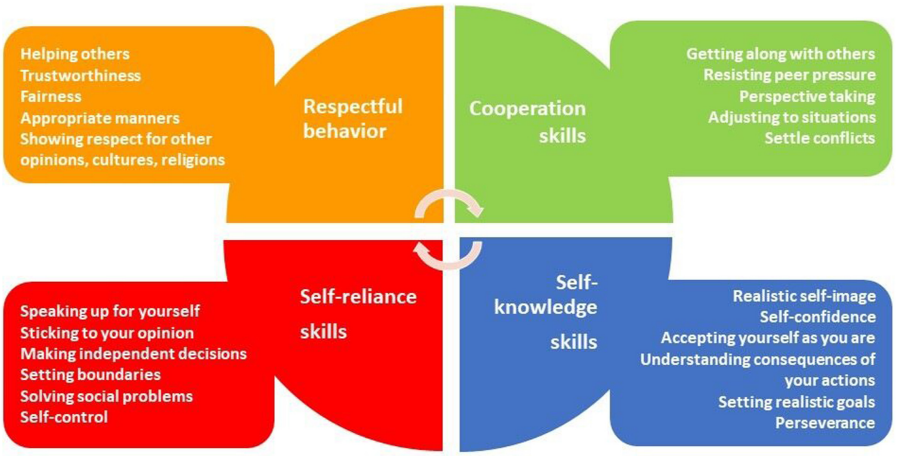

Figure 1.
Conceptual model of four complementary adolescent social-emotional constructs, as perceived by parents by parents, and the skills associated with these constructs

Source(s): Author's own creation/work

4.4 Differences in parents' perspectives on SEL

Parental beliefs, values and goals concerning child development seemed to differ between high- (7) vs low-educated (25) parents and/or migrant (15) vs Dutch (17) parents. Their interpretations of social-emotional skills and the practices they preferred to teach these skills express these differences. However, the sample sizes were small Therefore, the findings related to parental backgrounds should be interpreted with prudence. All highly educated parents (7) associated *respectful behavior* with *being open-minded towards people from different backgrounds*. These parents preferred to *discuss* the most appropriate skills in a particular context. Lower-educated parents (18) mainly associated respectful behavior with appropriate manners; they *talked* to adolescents by instructing them on the skills they wanted them to master. A few Dutch parents (2) perceived respectful behavior to be mutual. They expected such behavior of their children in response to respectful behavior from others. Most migrant parents (10) expected unconditional respectful behavior from their children. Some of them related these expectations to their experience of raising children in a context that *always blames people of color for causing problems*. A few low-educated migrant parents (4), believing schools were primarily responsible for academic learning, regarded teaching social-emotional skills as their domain in which *schools should not interfere*. Although these parents questioned the role of schools in teaching skills, they demanded to be informed about the disrespectful behavior of their children at school. One of them said:

> You know, I am not sure what school can do to teach these skills to students. I expect the school to inform me about my daughter's problems at school. That is what school can do. [. . .]. (Interview 9)

Parents also varied in their expectations regarding adolescents' self-reliance skills. The migrant parents (15) believed that adolescents should *manage their problems with others by themselves*. According to lower-educated Dutch parents (12), adolescents need room for *exploring the skills that feel comfortable for them*. A few of these parents (4) tried to start a conversation when they noticed *something was bothering* their child. Others purposely tried not to intervene in skills learning, believing adolescents needed *room for experimentation*. Highly educated Dutch parents expected their children to *talk about their feelings and problems and not keep up appearances*.

5. Discussion

Worldwide, schools implement SEL programs designed to enhance social-emotional skills, aiming to improve adolescents' life and health prospects [2]. However, knowledge about parents' perspectives on SEL is limited. To provide insight into parents' perspectives on adolescent SEL, we conducted an exploratory qualitative study.

5.1 Conceptual model of four social-emotional skills constructs

The first significant proceed of our study is the conceptual model of four complementary skills constructs that emerged from our analyses of the interviews with parents, i.e. *respectful behavior, cooperation skills, self-knowledge skills* and *self-reliance skills* (see Figure 1). The parents were believed that mastering social-emotional skills was essential for adolescents' future work prospects. This finding is consistent with the conviction of parents in studies that did not report on their socio-cultural background (Kolb and Hanley-Maxwell, 2003; Mynttinen *et al.*, 2020).

At first sight, the skills in the conceptual model seem to coincide with the competence domains described in the CASEL framework, i.e. self-awareness, social awareness, self-management, relationship skills and responsible decision-making. However, the parents language, their interpretations of and interrelations articulated between skills, and views on the order in which adolescents develop these skills reflect differences between their skills perceptions and professional skills descriptions embedded in the CASEL framework. According to Jukes *et al.* (2021), such potential subtle differences between skills taught at home and school indicate that awareness is necessary for communication with parents on social-emotional skills.

5.2 Parental perceptions of social-emotional skills vs CASEL's skills

The parents in our study considered respectful behavior a self-contained construct of social-emotional skills. In contrast, respect for others' feelings and thoughts is a component skill of CASEL's social awareness competence domain. They associated respectful behavior with values or qualities they desired for their children (e.g. helping others, trustworthiness, fairness and appropriate manners). Such qualities are not directly visible in the skills descriptions used in the CASEL competence domains.

The parental construct of cooperation skills corresponds to skills in the CASEL domains of relationship skills (i.e. getting along with others, resisting peer pressure and conflict resolution) and social awareness (i.e. perspective-taking). The self-knowledge skills that parents perceived as crucial for adolescents to master reflect CASEL's domains of self-awareness (e.g. self-confidence, realistic self-image and accepting yourself as you are) and self-management (i.e. realistic goal-setting and perseverance). The parental construct of self-reliance skills overlaps with CASEL's domains of relationship skills (i.e. social problem solving), self-management (i.e. self-control) and responsible decision-making (i.e. sticking to your opinion and making independent decisions). Finally, the parents in our study emphasized that adolescents need to learn to speak up for themselves and set boundaries. These skills might reflect skills in CASEL's competence domains of self-awareness, self-management and relationship skills. Parents associated self-related skills with adolescent development, reflecting their perceived order in social-emotional skills development.

Notably, unlike the CASEL framework, parents did not mention self-regulation or empathy as skills they deemed crucial for adolescents to master. Possibly, parents believed that adolescents should already have acquired self-regulation, as is demonstrated in other research (Klimes-Dougan *et al.*, 2007). In addition, they might have associated empathy with helping others and perspective-taking and may have, therefore, perceived empathy as being included in respectful behavior and cooperation skills (Carlo *et al.*, 2003).

The finding that parents' language and interpretations concerning social-emotional skills vary from those used in the CASEL framework accords with other studies on parents and SEL (Miller *et al.*, 2018; Tyner, 2021). Hubbard (2019) determined in their study that parents considered skills to be interrelated. However, they did not provide insight into these interrelations nor into parents' views of the ordering of the development of skills like we did in our study. Considering parental language and interpretation of social-emotional skills, contextualizing SEL program implementation seems indicated to allow adolescents to acquire the social-emotional skills they need across contexts.

5.3 Parental role perceptions and practices on SEL

A second notable finding of our study is the role parents claimed for themselves in SEL, both at home and at school. Although perceiving themselves as experts and primarily responsible for SEL, parents acknowledged that schools have a role too. They considered schools to have a role in teaching skills that are difficult to learn at home, e.g. cooperation skills, and managing temptations such as intimate relationships. Additionally, parents expressed their motivation to collaborate with schools on aligning the skills taught at home and at school. The findings that parents in our study were of the opinion that both parents and schools have a part to play in SEL. Their wish to be informed about SEL at school is consistent with findings in other studies on SEL programs (Haymovitz *et al.*, 2018; Hill *et al.*, 2018). Similar to our study, Hubbard (2019) found that parents believed that skills taught at school should match up with the skills taught at home, but not that parents had doubts about teachers' expertise in SEL. Both the leading role parents claimed for themselves in teaching social-emotional skills and their wish to collaborate with schools on aligning the skills taught at home and school provide opportunities for fruitful parent-school collaboration on SEL. Insight into these parental perceptions is helpful when negotiating and deciding with them on the skills that adolescents need to master. Knowledge of the parenting practices relating to SEL can help to support parents in enhancing social-emotional skills at home.

The parents in our study mentioned several practices they liked to use in teaching social-emotional skills at home. The practice of communication – which comprised instruction, advising, explaining and coaching – was the practice preferred by most parents. According to Roy and Giraldo-Garcia (2018), parent-adolescent communication on SE skills is central to enhancing these skills. Comparable to findings in other studies (Kolb and Hanley-Maxwell, 2003; Mynttinen *et al.*, 2020), parents in our study attempted to provide a safe home context, monitor adolescent behavior and be role models for appropriate social-emotional skills.

Although parents in our study perceived self-efficacy on skills teaching, they also felt challenged on SEL during adolescence. In particular, they missed the support from other parents when their children were still in primary education. This lack of support is presumably due to the decline in parent involvement in secondary education (Hill *et al.*, 2018; Roy and Giraldo-Garcia, 2018). According to parents, schools are trustworthy sources for supporting them on the SEL of their children (Hubbard 2019).

5.4 Differences and similarities in parents' perspectives on SEL

Parents in our study largely agreed on the social-emotional skills they considered crucial for adolescents to master and the parenting practices appropriate for helping their children acquire these skills. They perceived themselves as having expertise and claimed a leading role in adolescent SEL. However, consistent with other research, their perceptions of skills and parenting practices also varied depending on their background characteristics (Grusec, 2011; Kagitcibasi, 2012).

As our study shows, parents also have their own ideas about which social-emotional skills are crucial for adolescents to master. These ideas varied related to their education level and

socio-culturally rooted beliefs, values and goals regarding child development and differed from the descriptions of skills embedded in CASEL.

Parental skills perceptions are expressed in their language, understanding of skills, their views on the interrelations between skills, and the order in which they believe skills develop. In their perception, migrant parents reflected a more other-centered approach to social-emotional skills considered critical to learning; Dutch parents found it important to acquire more self-oriented skills (Hoffman, 2009; Kagitcibasi, 2012). Besides, parents are motivated to work with schools on aligning the skills taught at school and home to improve adolescents' prospects in life, education and work. Working with parents and their children requires awareness of differences and similarities regarding SEL amongst them.

5.5 Strengths and limitations

Our study contributes to the literature on SEL by presenting a parental model of social-emotional skills. Particularly, the language parents use, their interpretation of social-emotional skills, and the order in which they believe these skills develop cause them to prioritize and relate skills in ways that differ from the skills embedded in professional SEL frameworks (Jones *et al.*, 2019; Kane, 2012). Parents' perceptions of skills have recently become a research focus. However, the model presented in this study is one of the first to provide comprehensive insight into how parents order and interrelate adolescent social-emotional skills.

In addition, including low-educated parents from various socio-cultural backgrounds is a strength of our study, as typical research procedures are insufficient for engaging these parents (Bonevski *et al.*, 2014). However, the selective group of parents included in our study limits the generalizability of our findings (Ayres *et al.*, 2003).

Our list of eight operationalized skills derived from the CASEL framework is both a strength and a limitation of our study (Durlak *et al.*, 2015). The list enabled us to openly discuss and explore the social-emotional skills parents desired their children to master, their interpretations of these skills, and the order in which they perceive these skills ideally develop. However, the operationalizations might also have narrowed parents' perceptions of skills and prevented them from elaborating on a broad range of skills beyond those operationalized. By using open-ended questions and inductive coding, we tried to prevent this as much as possible (Thomas, 2006).

The small and specific sample of parents of low-achieving students in PrE should also be considered a limitation. As all parents participated in our study voluntarily, they might not be representative of those who declined to participate and those not reached with the invitation strategies used (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009). Although we managed to include parents varying in their sociocultural background, family composition, and, to a lesser extent, education level and gender, the conceptual model of social-emotional skills constructs that emerged from our study cannot be generalized to other parents (Patton, 2002).

Another limitation is that parents possibly responded in a socially desirable way in the interviews and might have presented an idealized picture of their parenting practices, while underreporting undesirable practices to put themselves in a good light. Such desirable answering might have compromised the validity of our findings (Hewitt, 2007). However, we tried to prevent this problem by creating an open and informal atmosphere in the interviews. We believe both parents' engagement and openness in sharing their thoughts, reasoning, doubts and uncertainties, and the differences we identified between the parental model and the CASEL framework demonstrated that we managed to limit social desirability bias.

5.6 Implications for practice and research

Parents' perceptions of the social-emotional skills that adolescents should master differ from the professional perceptions embedded in SEL programs. Being aware of these differences is

crucial for implementing SEL programs that will benefit all adolescents, including those in marginalized situations (Garbacz *et al.*, 2015; Jagers *et al.*, 2019). Therefore, we recommend a four-step approach to parent-school collaboration on SEL. These steps are as follows: (1) Acknowledge parents as active agents with expertise on SEL and involve them as partners in SEL at school; (2) Collaboratively explore which social-emotional skills parents and schools perceive as crucial for students to master, paying attention to both parties' beliefs, values and goals regarding child development, language, and interpretations of skills; (3) Align the skills taught at home and school based on joint negotiations and decisions on the skills adolescents need to master; (4) Discuss opportunities for parents and teachers to employ complementary practices to improve these skills.

We recommend that diverse and inclusive schools implementing SEL programs use a systemic approach involving teachers, students and parents in a team setting to explore, negotiate and align the differences in interpretations of and language used on skills taught at home and school. Such a systemic approach is required for implementing an SEL program schoolwide and at the classroom level to adapt to the skills students from diverse backgrounds bring to school (e.g. Jagers *et al.*, 2019; McCallops *et al.*, 2019). Collaboration with parents on SEL may be achieved in several ways. For instance, parent-teacher conferences and school websites seem to be straightforward resources for informing parents about SEL programs; however, engaging and supporting parents does require personal communication, which a school website does not offer. Awareness of potential barriers to collaboration, such as differences in skills perceptions, parents' socio-cultural background, language and unfamiliarity with school participation, is crucial (Hornby and Blackwell, 2018). Therefore, we recommend additional teacher training and support on engaging and collaborating with parents from various backgrounds.

Further research is required to refine, validate and extend the conceptual model of the four social-emotional skills constructs that emerged from our study, either using our operationalizations of the CASEL skills or conducting more open-ended interviews and grounded theory methods to gain in-depth insights into parents' skills perceptions (Kane, 2012; McKenna and Millen, 2013).

Since our study included mainly lower-educated mothers of low-achieving adolescent students, future research should aim to provide insight into the perspectives on SEL of, e.g. fathers and parents from other backgrounds and with children in different educational tracks, to inform the implementation and tailoring of SEL programs to students' needs. Such knowledge is also necessary to indicate if and which of our findings are generalizable to other parents. Besides this, the four-step approach we presented for collaboration with parents on implementing SEL programs needs to be evaluated in future research.

6. Conclusion

Both parents and schools have a part to play in adolescent SEL, and both have expertise in this topic. The conceptual model of four interrelated adolescent social-emotional skills constructs, presented in our study, indicates that parents' perceptions of these skills might differ from the professional skills embedded in SEL programs and frameworks. Therefore, we argue that aligning the skills young people are expected to master for their success in life, education, and work should be an integral part of the parent-school collaboration on SEL program implementation in diverse and inclusive schools. To accomplish such alignment, we advise schools to explore parents' willingness to collaborate on SEL and to come to agreements with them about the skills taught at school. For informing parents, the need for (cultural) adaptations of SEL material should be examined. Furthermore, teacher training is necessary to facilitate communication and collaboration on SEL with parents from various

socio-cultural backgrounds. Finally, further research is required on the skills perceptions and constructs beyond those of parents of low-achieving students in prevocational education.

The study was approved by the Dutch Central Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects (CCMO). Parents received written information from the teacher or were orally informed about the purpose of the study by the researchers. Parents included in the study agreed to participate.

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Appendix

Topics	Subtopics
1. Interview context	- Home - School/parent-teacher conference - Telephone
2. Background characteristics	- Gender - Family composition - Country of birth - Educational level
3. Familiarity with SEL at school	- Knowledge of SEL at school - Attitude towards SEL at school
4. Social-emotional skills crucial learning (CASEL framework)	- (Most) crucial skills for adolescents - Need for learning these skills - How do adolescents acquire these skills?
4. Responsible for teaching skills	- Parents - School - Others
5. Parenting practices related to learning skills	- Skills parents teach themselves - How parents teach skills - Development of skills
6. Parent support on SEL	- Perceived efficacy of parents in teaching skills - Need for support in teaching SEL

Source(s): Author's own creation/work

Table A1. Topic list for the interviews on parents' perspectives on SEL

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