

THE MEDIATING ROLE OF COPING STRATEGIES BETWEEN SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL COMPETENCES AND PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING AND DISTRESS IN TEACHERS

El papel mediador del afrontamiento entre las competencias socioemocionales y el bienestar y malestar psicológicos en el profesorado

ALICIA RODRÍGUEZ-GÓMEZ¹, MARTA BECERRIL¹, JESÚS PRIVADO²,
MONTSERRAT AMORÓS-GÓMEZ¹ Y ESTHER ARGELAGÓS³

¹ Universidad Internacional de la Rioja (España)

² Universidad Complutense de Madrid (España)

³ Universitat de Girona (España)

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Autora de contacto / Corresponding author: Marta Becerril. E-mail: marta.becerril@unir.net

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INTRODUCTION. Teachers are a professional group especially exposed to high levels of stress leading to anxiety and depression problems. The development of their socio-emotional competences (SEC) and coping strategies can be considered essential personal resources that favour the possibility of responding to the high demands in the current educational context. The present study explores the mediating role of approach and avoidance coping strategies between socio-emotional competences and psychological well-being, distress, and teaching engagement. **METHOD.** The study was conducted in a sample of 395 primary, secondary, baccalaureate and university teachers of 45.07 years ($SD = 17.95$ years), 83.3% women, who completed a set of self-report questionnaires about the different variables studied. The data were analysed using confirmatory structural equation models to estimate the mediating role of coping strategies between socio-emotional competences and measures of psychological well-being, distress, and engagement. **RESULTS.** The mediation model showed a good fit with the data (Goodness of Fit Index = 0.955, Normed Fit Index = 0.932, Standardized Root Mean Square Residual = 0.117). Specifically, socio-emotional competences predicted directly and positively psychological well-being and engagement, and predicted negatively psychological distress. An indirect effect of socio-emotional competences on psychological well-being and engagement was found mediated by approach coping. In addition, another indirect effect of socio-emotional competences on psychological distress was found mediated by avoidance coping. **DISCUSSION.** The results of this study allow to consider the development of teachers' socioemotional competences and approach coping strategies as important

aspects to be included in the framework of their initial or in-service training in order to contribute to their psychological well-being and their engagement in schools.

Keywords: *Emotional intelligence, Coping, Well-being, Stress variables, Teachers, Structural equation model.*

Introduction

Social and emotional competences

In recent decades, interest in the development of socio-emotional competences (SEC) in organisational and professional environments has increased considerably, as their acquisition is now recognised as a key element of professional development given the current demands of the labour market (Oliveira *et al.*, 2022). This is also reflected in the educational field, where it is now considered essential for teachers to acquire these types of skill in order to respond to the new challenges of the twenty-first century (Ávila, 2019; Rueda & Filella, 2016).

SEC has been defined as 'the product of emotional development and social learning ... that lead[s] to improvements in inter or intrapersonal relationships and personal or professional performance' (Vaida, 2016, p. 118). Other authors have emphasized the impact of SEC on one's own well-being and that of others, considering SEC to be the 'effective management of intrapersonal and interpersonal social and emotional experiences in ways that foster one's own and others' thriving' (Collie, 2020, p. 77).

In the educational field, several theoretical models have been developed that describe the various dimensions of SEC. The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL, 2013) model establishes SEC as: self-management, self-awareness, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision making. Based on this model, Jennings and Greenberg (2009) focus on SEC and school teachers' well-being in the development and maintenance of supportive relationships between teachers and students and effective classroom management. For them, a socio-emotionally competent teacher is one who has a high level of emotional awareness, both in recognising their own emotions and in the way they modulate their relationships with students, families, and colleagues. In addition, such teachers are able to demonstrate prosocial behavior and make decisions that take into account how these can affect both themselves and everyone else in the educational community. Finally, they are people capable of managing their emotions, their behaviour, and their relationships with others in situations of uncertainty.

Other studies have reviewed the various theoretical models of SEC and used this to guide the validation of measurement instruments. For the adult population, the SEC inventory for adults developed by Mikulic *et al.* (2015) based on a review of different theoretical models is of particular note (Bar-On, 1997; Bisquerra & Perez, 2007; Boyatzis, 2007; Goleman, 1999; Graczyk *et al.*, 2000; Repetto *et al.*, 2007; Saarni, 2000; Salovey & Mayer, 1990). This instrument considers SEC to be made up of the following skills: emotional awareness, emotional regulation, empathy, emotional expression, self-efficacy, autonomy, prosocial behaviour, assertiveness, and optimism.

Social and emotional competences and psychological distress

Teachers are a professional group that are especially exposed to stress (Extremera *et al.*, 2010). Primary and secondary school teachers are a high-risk population with a high prevalence rate of work-related stress (Alsalhe *et al.*, 2021). Emotional distress and exhaustion are very common phenomena among teachers, which has an impact on their occupational health and performance. The human relationships that occur between teachers and students are one of the most rewarding aspects of the teaching profession, but at the same time, they also produce a higher level of distress (Granados *et al.*, 2020; Martínez-Otero, 2003). Secondary education teachers have been found to score higher for stress, anxiety and depression than the general population (Martínez-Monteagudo *et al.*, 2019). Ag-yapong *et al.* (2022) conducted a systematic review in which they concluded that the prevalence of stress in primary and secondary teachers ranged from 8.3% to 87.1%, anxiety from 38% to 41.2% and depression from 4% to 77%. In the occupational context, there is evidence that high levels of perceived stress among teachers at different grades in public schools, are associated with a higher frequency of illness days (Howard & Howard, 2020). Also, secondary teachers with burnout, a chronic stress-related syndrome, have higher absenteeism (Makhdoom *et al.*, 2019).

Gomes and Golino (2012) found correlations with a general index of SEC made up of the specific skills of Aperture, Conscientiousness, Extraversion, Amiability and Emotional resilience. Specifically, this index correlated significantly with anxiety ($r = -0.46$) and stress ($r = -0.50$). Sánchez-Pujalte *et al.* (2023) found negative relationships between depressive symptoms and clarity ($r = -0.32$) and emotional repair ($r = -0.44$) in secondary school teachers.

Social and emotional competences and psychological well-being

Another aspect addressed in the literature is the well-being of teachers. Among the different definitions of the concept of well-being (Diener, 1984; Ryff & Keyes, 1995), of particular note is that provided by Sandoval *et al.* (2017), according to which well-being is a personal perception that is built through the set of positive or negative experiences of the individual, including the quality of interpersonal relationships and the availability of sources of support. Regarding psychological well-being, Ryff and Keyes (1995) defined it as a subjective perception, a state or feeling that is built through the psychological development of the person and their ability to relate in a positive way, to be adaptable and flexible in their daily life. Ryff (1989) developed the multidimensional model of psychological well-being, which is structured by six factors or dimensions: self-acceptance, positive relationships, mastery of the environment, autonomy, purpose in life, and personal growth. Kamboj and Garg (2023), analysed the impact of SEC on psychological well-being in school teachers, finding statistically significant results. In the Spanish educational context, Lucas-Mangas *et al.* (2022) also found a significant relationship between SEC and psychological well-being in active elementary, primary and secondary teachers and teachers-in-training. Ávila (2019) found positive relationships between Ryff' (1989) psychological well-being factors and the SEC of educators working with different educational stages (primary, secondary, and university). The results indicated that there is a positive relationship between social and emotional competence and: self-acceptance ($r = 0.56$); positive relationships ($r = 0.43$); autonomy ($r = 0.37$); mastery of the environment ($r = 0.54$); purpose in life ($r = 0.37$); and personal growth ($r = 0.54$).

Finally, a study by Vesely *et al.* (2019) indicated that SEC training improves the health and psychological well-being of school teachers.

Social and emotional competences and engagement

More recently, teachers' SEC has also been studied in relation to their perceived engagement with their work. This construct refers to a positive and persistent mental state, related to work and formed by the dimensions of vigour, dedication, and absorption (Schaufeli *et al.*, 2002). The Vigour dimension refers to high levels of energy, along with a strong desire for effort and persistence in the tasks even despite difficulties. Dedication refers to being intensely involved in work, experiencing high levels of meaning, enthusiasm, inspiration, pride and challenge in the work. The third factor, Absorption is characterized by being completely concentrated and absorbed in one's work, having the feeling that time passes quickly and having difficulty disconnecting from what one is doing, due to the strong doses of enjoyment and concentration that develop.

There is evidence of a positive relationship between SEC and teaching engagement. In the study by Mérida-López *et al.* (2017), a positive correlation was observed between a general measure of SEC and engagement ($r = 0.40$) in elementary, primary and secondary teachers. Moreover, D'Amico *et al.* (2020) observed a positive overall correlation between SEC and engagement ($r = 0.42$) in elementary, primary and secondary teachers. In this study, the SEC measure was positively correlated with the three engagement subscales (vigour: $r = 0.41$; dedication: $r = 0.40$; and absorption: $r = 0.33$). Similarly, a study by Extremera *et al.* (2019) showed a positive correlation between teaching engagement and SEC ($r = 0.40$) in primary and secondary teachers, as well as with organizational support from colleagues ($r = 0.31$) and organizational support from supervisors ($r = 0.20$).

Research also shows positive associations between teacher engagement and well-being with engaged secondary educators experiencing higher well-being (e.g., Wang, 2024). Bernal and Donoso (2017) also affirm that engagement is important because it appears as a way to face psychological distress in university teachers and, on the contrary, helps to promote their well-being.

Social and emotional competences and coping strategies

Another strand of research into SEC studies its relationship with coping responses. These are the cognitive or behavioural strategies that an individual implements with the aim of reducing or eliminating psychological distress and/or stressful conditions (Fleishman, 1984). They consist of constantly changing strategies that are initiated to cope with external and/or internal demands that the individual evaluates as overwhelming and that can help people undergoing stressful periods (Lazarus & Folkman, 1986; Moos & Schaefer, 1993), thus influencing their psychological well-being and mental health.

The coping responses that people exhibit can be divided into two groups: approach and avoidance. Each of these can be further divided into two types of coping method: cognitive or behavioural. In general terms, approach coping focuses on the problem and its resolution through cognitive and behavioural strategies. By contrast, avoidance coping, instead of focusing on solving the problem, focuses on the emotion it generates. It manifests in the cognitive and/or behavioural efforts that the person makes to avoid thinking about the stressor and its consequences (Fleishman, 1984; Lazarus & Folkman, 1986; Gil-Monte *et al.*, 2014; Moos & Schaefer, 1993).

Augusto-Landa *et al.* (2011) examined how SEC measures of attention, clarity, and emotional repair relate to different approach coping strategies (behavioural, cognitive, and emotion-focused) and

avoidance coping strategies (cognitive and behavioural) used by primary education teachers. The results indicated that attention was the best predictor of coping: 1) attention and clarity explained 14% of behavioural coping ($r = 0.25$ between attention and coping; $r = 0.24$ between clarity and coping); 2) attention, clarity, and repair explained 11% of cognitive coping ($r = 0.20$ between attention and coping); 3) attention explained 4% ($r = 0.20$) of cognitive avoidance; 4) attention, clarity, and repair explained 39% of emotional coping ($r = 0.56$ between attention and coping); and 5) attention explained 9% ($r = 0.30$) of behavioural avoidance. Pulido-Martos *et al.* (2022) showed how the dimensions of emotional competence (emotional attention, emotional clarity, and emotional repair) influenced the probability of primary teachers belonging to a certain coping profile. The results regarding emotional attention are particularly noteworthy, as this dimension significantly predicts the probability of a teacher having an approach coping profile rather than a behaviourally and cognitively avoidant profile.

The mediating role of coping strategies

There are few studies aimed at evaluating coping strategies as mediators between SEC and psychological distress and well-being or engagement in teachers. Nizielski *et al.* (2013) found that primary and secondary teachers' assessment of their own and others' emotions influences psychological distress, measured as burnout, mediated by approach coping and attending to the needs of students. Those teachers who can adequately appraise their own emotions and those of others present greater approach coping ($\beta = 0.10$ to 0.15), and this type of coping reduces burnout ($\beta = -0.30$ to -0.34). Furthermore, the adequate assessment of one's own and others' emotions positively influences attention to students' needs ($\beta = 0.08$ to 0.11), and this attention reduces burnout ($\beta = -0.15$ to -0.17), while the appraisal of emotions does not directly influence burnout. More recently, Schäfer *et al.* (2020) conducted a study with 457 pre-service teachers whose objective was to analyse whether different coping strategies (approach and avoidance) mediated the relationship between measures of SEC (resilience, regulation, and acceptance) and perceived stress. The results indicate that emotional regulation has a direct effect on stress ($\beta = -0.24$), as well as an indirect effect, mediated by avoidance coping. Specifically, emotional regulation weakly decreases avoidance coping ($\beta = -0.04$), and avoidance coping increases perceived stress ($\beta = 0.31$).

Objective and hypotheses

There is limited evidence on the importance of the mediating role of coping strategies on SEC and distress, well-being and engagement in the educational context. Therefore, the present study aims to contribute to clarify the role of coping strategies in order to favour the development of future lines of teacher training that focus on SEC and coping strategies.

The objective of the present study is to examine the mediating role of coping strategies (approach and avoidance) between SEC and psychological well-being, distress, and engagement in teachers working with a range of educational stages.

The hypotheses of this study are as follows:

- H1. SEC will positively predict the positive criteria (psychological well-being and engagement) and negatively predict the negative criterion (psychological distress).

- H2. Approach coping will have a greater mediating effect in the relationship between SEC and the more positive criteria (psychological well-being and engagement) and avoidance coping will mediate to a greater extent between SEC and the negative criterion (psychological distress).

Method

Participants

The sample was made up of 395 teachers, with an average age of 45.07 years ($SD = 17.95$ years), 83.3% women, from all across Spain. 73.2% were married or had a partner, 9.4% were divorced, 16.5% were single, and 1.0% were widowed. 19.7% were teachers in early childhood education, 72.2% in primary education, 6.1% in secondary education, 1.0% at baccalaureate level, 0.5% in vocational training, and 0.5% in higher education. The establishments in which they taught were 76.2% publicly owned, and 91.4% of them were full-time. Those evaluated had been teaching for 17.95 years ($SD = 10.07$ years). By autonomous community, the participants belonged to the following regions: Andalucía (8.4%), Aragón (1.5%), Asturias (3.0%), Baleares (7.8%), Canarias (1.8%), Cantabria (1.0%), Castilla-La Mancha (6.3%), Castilla y León (1.8%), Cataluña (21.3%), Ceuta (0.5%), Valencia (6.3%), Galicia (10.9%), La Rioja (1.8%), Madrid (7.1%), Murcia (0.5%), Navarra (3.5%) and País Vasco (12.4%).

Instruments

The following instruments were used:

1. The Adult Socioemotional Competences Inventory (SECI) by Mikulic *et al.* (2015), made up of 72 items, and composed of the following competencies: self-efficacy, optimism, assertiveness, emotional awareness, emotional expression, empathy, emotional regulation, prosociality, and emotional autonomy (5-alternative Likert-type scale). The internal consistency indices of each of the measures collected in the study appear in Table 1.
2. The Coping Responses Inventory (Mikulic, 2000), made up of 48 items, divided into eight scales: logical analysis, positive reappraisal, seeking guidance and support, problem solving, cognitive avoidance, acceptance or resignation, seeking alternative rewards, and emotional discharge (Likert-type scale of 4 alternatives). For this study, the scales have been divided into two groups: approach coping, made up of logical analysis, positive reappraisal, seeking guidance and support, and problem solving, and avoidance coping, made up of cognitive avoidance, acceptance or resignation, seeking alternative rewards, and emotional discharge.
3. The Depression, Anxiety and Stress Scale (DASS-21, Bados *et al.*, 2005), which measures psychological distress and is made up of 21 items, producing scores for anxiety, depression, and stress (Likert-type scale of 5 alternatives).
4. Positive Psychological Functioning, which measures psychological well-being (PPF, Merino & Privado, 2015). This is composed of 33 items and produces scores for 11 factors (self-esteem, resilience, curiosity, optimism, autonomy, vitality, environment mastery, purpose in life, humour, enjoyment, and creativity) and produces a total score, this general factor of psychological well-being being referred to as Positive Psychological Functioning (Likert-type scale of 5 alternatives).

5. The UWES Engagement Questionnaire (Utrecht Work Engagement Survey, Salanova & Schaufeli, 2004), made up of 17 items, obtaining 3 subscales: vigour, absorption, and dedication (Likert-type scale with 7 alternatives).

Design

A cross-sectional selective design was employed, since the data were collected at a single time point and the participants were selected with the requirement that they were teachers at any educational level.

Procedure

After ethical approval was granted by Universidad Internacional de La Rioja [reference: PI034/2023], an online questionnaire was disseminated that contained sociodemographic questions and the instruments indicated above. The recruitment strategy involved emailing the management teams of educational establishments across all regions of Spain. In this email, they were asked to assist with the research by providing their teaching staff with the link to the questionnaire, so that each teacher could decide individually if they wanted to participate. To facilitate participation, the management teams were provided with extensive information about the main research objectives, the participation criteria, the basic characteristics of the questionnaire, and data management procedures guaranteeing the confidentiality and anonymity of the participants. The time for completing the different questionnaires was about 20 minutes.

Data analysis

First, the distribution of the different indicators that would form the confirmatory model was calculated, as was the reliability of each of the measured variables using SPSS V. 25. Second, several confirmatory structural equation models were estimated using AMOS V. 23 (Arbuckle, 2006). The estimation procedure used was unweighted least squares, as the criterion of multivariate normality was not met. The goodness of fit indices used were: 1) Absolute: the χ^2/df ratio (Bentler & Bonett, 1980), which indicates a good fit with values less than 3, the Goodness of Fit Index (GFI) (Jöreskog & Sörbom, 1993), which indicates good fit with values above 0.95, the Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR) (Hu & Bentler, 1999), with values < 0.08 indicating good fit (Hair *et al.*, 1999); 2) Incremental: which compares the empirical model with the null model, the Normed Fit Index (NFI) (Bentler & Bonett, 1980), with values above 0.95 indicating good fit; and 3) Parsimony: the Parsimony Goodness of Fit Index (PGFI) (Jöreskog & Sörbom, 1993), and the Parsimony Normed Fit Index (PNFI) (James *et al.*, 1982), with values above 0.50 indicating good fit. Byrne (2001) recommends using ten participants for each indicator in analyses of this type. 34 indicators were used for a sample of 395 participants: ratio = $395/34 = 11.62$, so the minimum was met.

Results

Descriptive analysis

Table 1 shows the descriptive statistics, asymmetry, kurtosis index, and reliability of the different measures. All measures had absolute skewness values of less than 2 and absolute kurtosis values of less

than 7, so it can be assumed that they were normally distributed (West *et al.*, 1995). The internal consistency of the measures was calculated with Cronbach's α , obtaining adequate values in most of the measures, at least 0.70 (Hair *et al.*, 1999).

TABLE 1. Descriptive statistics, skewness, kurtosis, and Cronbach's alpha for the measures

Measures	Mean	SD	Asymmetry	Kurtosis	Cronbach's α
Self-esteem (PPF)	12.08	2.04	-0.71	1.06	0.834
Resilience (PPF)	12.47	1.96	-0.81	1.07	0.603
Curiosity (PPF)	12.56	1.81	-0.88	1.74	0.673
Optimism (PPF)	11.76	2.10	-0.44	0.19	0.733
Autonomy (PPF)	12.36	1.85	-0.96	2.06	0.655
Vitality (PPF)	11.65	2.28	-0.54	0.25	0.857
Environment mastery (PPF)	10.29	2.47	-0.34	-0.28	0.684
Purpose in life (PPF)	12.57	1.90	-0.96	2.41	0.802
Humour (PPF)	12.30	2.31	-0.84	0.62	0.850
Enjoyment (PPF)	12.38	2.03	-0.84	1.05	0.798
Creativity (PPF)	12.09	1.89	-0.73	1.27	0.716
Global PPF	12.05	1.49	-0.87	2.41	0.908
Depression (DASS-21)	10.92	5.19	2.01	4.32	0.898
Anxiety (DASS-21)	12.15	5.82	1.36	1.30	0.879
Stress (DASS-21)	16.18	6.92	0.67	-0.47	0.904
Logical analysis, (CRI)	16.84	3.63	-0.29	-0.10	0.725
Positive reappraisal (CRI)	16.77	3.50	-0.45	0.14	0.703
Seeking guidance and support (CRI)	14.45	3.48	0.21	-0.08	0.588
Problem solving (CRI)	17.06	3.80	-0.33	-0.28	0.808
Cognitive avoidance (CRI)	13.38	3.73	0.26	-0.39	0.713
Acceptance or resignation (CRI)	12.18	3.91	0.42	-0.42	0.750
Seeking alternative rewards (CRI)	15.82	3.59	-0.21	-0.01	0.701
Emotional discharge (CRI)	13.01	3.19	0.21	-0.11	0.567
Approach coping (CRI)	65.12	12.16	-0.32	0.39	0.856
Avoidance coping (CRI)	54.39	11.18	0.04	0.18	0.776
Self-efficacy (SECI)	31.45	9.72	0.51	-0.02	0.897
Optimism (SECI)	28.39	4.65	-0.84	1.06	0.870
Assertiveness (SECI)	30.87	7.83	0.12	-0.23	0.853
Emotional expression (SECI)	33.03	6.58	-0.21	-0.23	0.850
Emotional awareness (SECI)	14.80	5.12	0.62	0.15	0.855
Empathy (SECI)	18.47	2.97	-0.55	0.99	0.647

Measures	Mean	SD	Asymmetry	Kurtosis	Cronbach's α
Emotional regulation (SECI)	17.86	5.22	0.19	-0.42	0.808
Prosociality (SECI)	11.17	3.22	0.70	1.42	0.628
Emotional autonomy (SECI)	12.35	3.67	0.31	-0.27	0.665
Vigor (UWES)	27.77	5.34	-0.99	1.90	0.809
Dedication (UWES)	25.51	4.27	-1.58	4.23	0.842
Absorption (UWES)	26.99	5.43	-0.91	1.58	0.726

Mediational model

Following the example of Holmbeck (1997) and Ato and Vallejo (2011), the mediating role of coping strategies between SEC and psychological distress, well-being, and engagement was analysed. First, it was verified that the model based on a direct effect of SEC on the criteria (psychological well-being, distress, and engagement) fitted the data (see Figure 1); then, the mediational effect of the coping strategies on these measures was verified, considering that SEC directly influences the criteria (restricted model) or that SEC influences the coping strategies and the criteria (unrestricted model) (see Figure 2).

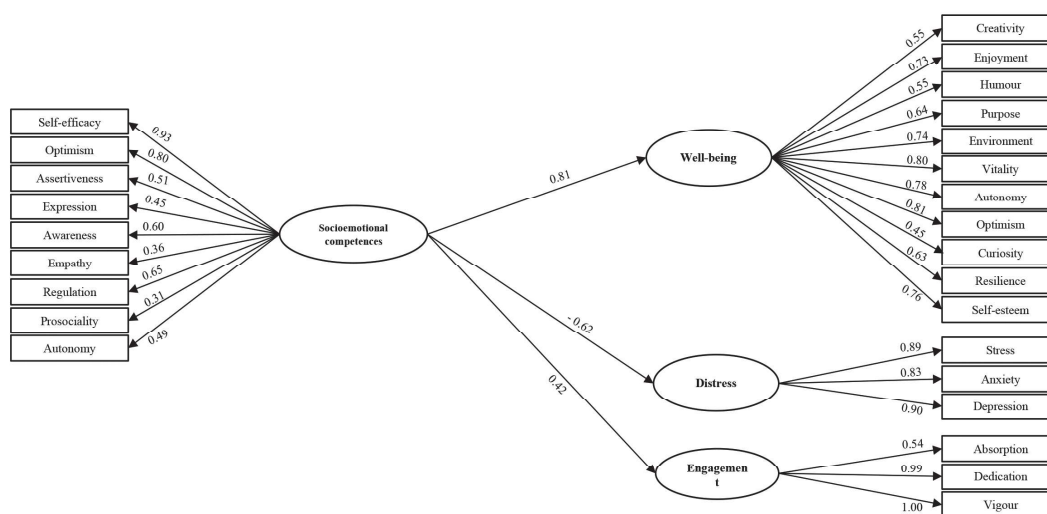


FIGURE 1. Direct effects model

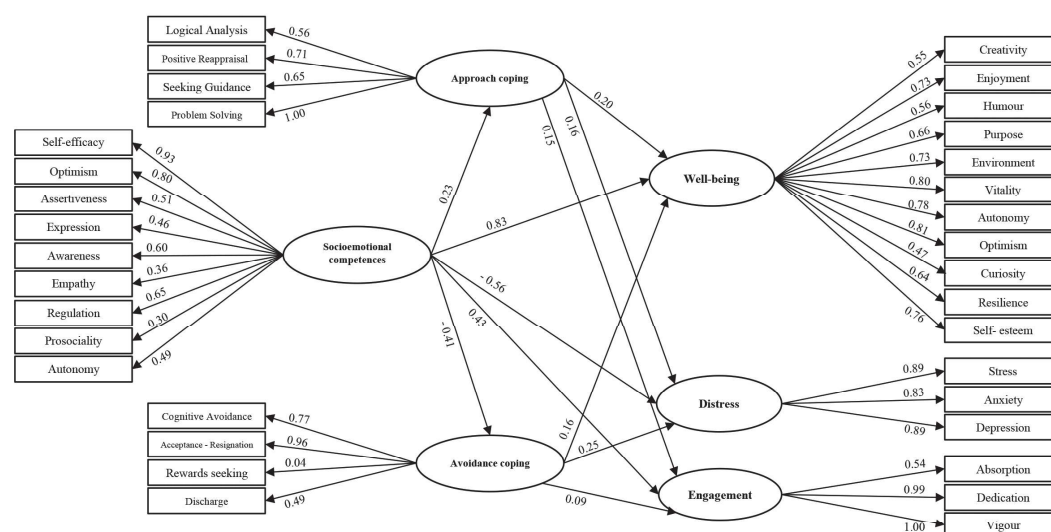


FIGURE 2. Mediation model of coping strategies as a mediator between SEC and well-being, psychological distress, and engagement

Table 2 shows the goodness of fit indices for the model of direct effects of SEC on the criteria in question. The model fitted the data very well and confirmed that SEC positively predicted psychological well-being ($\beta = 0.81$) and engagement ($\beta = 0.42$), and negatively predicted psychological distress ($\beta = -0.62$).

TABLE 2. Goodness of fit indices for direct and mediational effects models

Model	χ^2/df	GFI	NFI	PGFI	PNFI	SRMR
Direct effects	4024.25	0.982	0.973	0.826	0.883	0.086
Restricted	9169.74	0.951	0.927	0.830	0.858	0.124
Unrestricted	8239.56	0.955	0.932	0.828	0.857	0.117

Once it was verified that the direct effects model fitted the data, the next stage was to verify whether the coping strategies mediated between SEC and the criteria. To do this, two models were contrasted, one restricted, in which the regression weights of SEC on the criteria were set to 0, and another without setting those regression weights to 0 (unrestricted model) (see Figure 2). Table 2 shows the goodness of fit indices for both models, which indicated an adequate fit in both cases. The two models were compared to decide which was most appropriate. There was a statistically significant difference between them ($\Delta\chi^2_3 = 45974.84, p < 0.001$), and so the unrestricted model was accepted as adequate (Ato & Vallejo, 2011; Holmbeck, 1997), indicating that SEC had both a direct influence and an indirect influence (through coping strategies) on the three criteria (psychological well-being, psychological distress, and engagement).

As shown in Figure 2, SEC predicted psychological well-being both directly and indirectly. SEC directly predicted psychological well-being ($\beta = 0.83$) and to a lesser extent did so indirectly through the two types of coping ($\beta = 0.20$ approach, $\beta = 0.16$ avoidance). In total, 72% of psychological well-being was explained by the three predictors (SEC, approach and avoidance coping). Regarding psychological distress, SEC also predicted it directly ($\beta = -0.56$) and indirectly through the mediation of the two forms of coping ($\beta = 0.16$ approach, $\beta = 0.25$ avoidance). In total, 47% of psychological distress was explained by the three predictors. Regarding engagement, SEC also predicted it both directly and indirectly. SEC predicted approach coping ($\beta = 0.23$), and then approach coping positively predicted engagement ($\beta = 0.15$), an indirect effect, SEC also directly predicted engagement ($\beta = 0.43$), while avoidance coping barely predicted this criterion ($\beta = 0.09$). In total, 21% of engagement was explained by the three predictors.

In addition, SEC are able to predict coping strategies. Specifically, positively the approach strategies ($\beta = 0.23$) and negatively the avoidance strategies ($\beta = -0.41$). Therefore, it seems that SEC enhances those strategies that are more appropriate and decreases those that are less appropriate for coping with stressful phenomena.

On the other hand, regarding the effect of coping strategies, we can see that coping strategies increase psychological well-being ($\beta = 0.20$) and engagement ($\beta = 0.15$), but also slightly increase psychological distress ($\beta = 0.16$). And avoidance strategies increase psychological distress ($\beta = 0.25$) and slightly psychological well-being ($\beta = 0.16$). Overall, taking into consideration the highest values of the betas, we can say that approach coping favors well-being, while avoidance coping favors psychological distress.

In conclusion, these results confirmed the predictions of the present study. First, SEC positively predicted the positive criteria (psychological well-being and engagement) and negatively predicted the negative criterion (psychological distress) and second, positive criteria were predicted to a greater extent by approach coping, and negative criteria were predicted to a greater extent by avoidance coping.

Discussion

This study investigated how teachers' coping strategies affected the relationship between social-emotional competence (SEC) and both psychological well-being and engagement, as well as between SEC and distress. The final model seems to indicate that SEC influenced these three criteria both directly and indirectly (through the two types of coping: approach and avoidance).

As a prelude to analysing coping strategies, the first hypothesis (H1) of this study posited that SEC would positively predict the positive criteria (psychological well-being and engagement) and negatively predict the negative criterion (psychological distress). In terms of the direct effect of SEC, the study found that it positively influenced the two positive criteria (psychological well-being ($\beta = 0.81$) and engagement ($\beta = 0.42$)) and negatively influenced the negative criterion (psychological distress ($\beta = -0.62$)), as predicted.

Previous studies had already demonstrated the importance of SEC development in the professional and work environment (Oliveira *et al.*, 2022), as well as in the educational field (Ávila, 2019; CASEL, 2013; Collie, 2020; Lehtinen *et al.*, 2025; Rueda & Filella, 2016; Vaida, 2016). SEC has been widely

related to schoolteachers well-being (Vesely *et al.*, 2019) and especially to distress (Extremera *et al.*, 2010; Gomes & Golino, 2012; Granados *et al.*, 2020; Martínez-Otero, 2003; Martínez-Monteagudo *et al.*, 2019; Sánchez-Pujalte *et al.*, 2023). Similarly, elementary, primary and secondary teachers' SEC has been studied in terms of connection with perceived engagement (D'Amico *et al.*, 2020; Mérida-López *et al.*, 2017; Schaufeli *et al.*, 2002) and with the coping responses that primary teachers implement to minimise stressful situations (Augusto-Landa *et al.*, 2011; Pulido-Martos *et al.*, 2022).

The present study provides further evidence that SEC directly influences psychological well-being (Vesely *et al.*, 2019), teacher engagement (Mérida-López *et al.*, 2017; Schaufeli *et al.*, 2002; Sun *et al.*, 2025), and distress (Granados *et al.*, 2020; Sánchez-Pujalte *et al.*, 2023) in schoolteachers.

The second hypothesis (H2) of this study proposed that approach coping would have a stronger mediating effect in the relationship between SEC and the more positive criteria (psychological well-being and engagement), while avoidance coping would have a greater mediating effect between SEC and the negative criterion (psychological distress). As predicted, SEC did indeed influence approach coping, which in turn influenced the positive criteria; while the influence of SEC on avoidance coping indirectly affected the negative criterion. Furthermore, three predictors (SEC, approach coping, and avoidance coping) explained a substantial portion of the variance in the three criteria considered: 72% of the variation in psychological well-being, 21% of the variation in engagement, and 47% of the variation in psychological distress.

Therefore, this study demonstrated that SEC influenced these three criteria indirectly—that is, through the two types of coping: approach and avoidance. These findings align with the work of Nizielski *et al.* (2013), who found that SEC (specifically understood as the assessment of one's own and others' emotions) in primary and secondary teachers was related to psychological distress, mediated through approach coping; those teachers who adequately appraised their own emotions and those of others presented greater approach coping, which reduced burnout or psychological distress. Furthermore, our findings also partially aligned with those of Schäfer *et al.* (2020), who found that SEC (understood in this case as emotional regulation) had an indirect effect, mediated by avoidance coping, on stress or psychological distress in pre-service teachers.

The results obtained in this study expand on those found in the narrower previous studies cited above. It offers a broader view of the influence of SEC on approach coping and of approach coping on the positive criteria (psychological well-being and engagement); as well as the indirect influence of SEC, mediated by avoidance coping, on the negative criterion (psychological distress). Furthermore, it shows that SEC and approach and avoidance coping predicted, to a large extent, the three criteria considered: psychological well-being, engagement, and distress.

Regarding the limitations of the present work, it should be noted that this was a cross-sectional study and it would be interesting to contrast the model with a longitudinal design in order to see if the trend persists over time. It should also be noted that the sample is mainly made up of primary education teachers; it would be good to expand the study with a larger sample that included those teaching other educational stages. There was also a higher percentage of women in the sample, which could affect the results. Another limitation lies in the fact that other sociodemographic factors or psychosocial variables that could influence the emotional competencies of the participants were not taken into account; in future research, questions relating to these aspects could be added to the form, so that undue weight is not given to SEC and contextual aspects that could have a huge impact are not neglected.

As for possible future lines of research, in addition to those discussed in the previous paragraph, we would recommend including burnout in future work, as this is a relevant indicator that especially influences the psychological distress of many teachers, along with its causes and consequences, which may have both a direct and an indirect relationship with the SEC of educators.

Despite its limitations, and the fact that much remains to be investigated as regards SEC in teaching professionals, we consider this study to be an important contribution to this field. The model developed in this work corroborates and adds to previous studies in showing that SEC influences well-being, psychological distress, and engagement both directly and indirectly (through the two types of coping). Directly, SEC positively influenced the two positive criteria (psychological well-being and engagement) and negatively influenced the negative one (psychological distress). Indirectly, SEC positively influenced approach coping, and this in turn influenced the positive criteria; it also negatively influenced avoidance coping, and this in turn affected the negative criterion. We conclude that SEC and coping strategies predict psychological well-being, distress, and engagement in teachers.

Looking to the future, it is important to consider that the results of this study not only provide insight into teachers' SEC and coping strategies but also how these factors influence their psychological well-being, engagement, and feelings of distress. These competencies in teachers, particularly in early childhood and primary education (which represents the majority of the sample of this study), can also have a significant impact on students' competencies and academic performance (Aldrup *et al.*, 2024). For instance, in terms of classroom environment, research has shown that teachers who possess effective socio-emotional strategies and competencies are better able to create a positive classroom atmosphere where students feel safe and valued (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). According to Durlak *et al.* (2022), a school environment that promotes emotional safety not only improves student participation and engagement, but also reduces problematic behaviours. In the same vein, Shen *et al.* (2024) highlighted that when students experience emotional support from their teachers, they also tend to exhibit greater well-being, engagement, and improved academic performance, since they are more willing to take risks in their learning and ask for help when needed.

In addition, teachers with SEC not only model positive behaviours but also usually explicitly teach social-emotional skills to their students (Durlak *et al.*, 2022). This is crucial for the social and emotional development of learners. Martins (2024) emphasised that interventions focused on social-emotional learning can result in significant improvements in students' interpersonal skills and emotional regulation. In consequence, the improvement of students' SEC may enhance their 'learn to learn' competence. According to Olid Luque *et al.* (2004), students who develop skills such as self-awareness and self-regulation are more likely to set personal goals and reflect on their own learning process, allowing them to be autonomous and effective learners.

Examining how different socio-emotional factors influence educators helps shed light on the relationship between the variables studied and their impact on teachers' psychological health, which, in turn, will have an influence on students' learning and competencies. In conclusion, given the current demands of the educational context, teacher training should prioritise SEC and approach coping strategies.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

Data availability statement

Participants did not consent to the publication of their individual data.

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Resumen

El papel mediador del afrontamiento entre las competencias socioemocionales y el bienestar y malestar psicológicos en el profesorado

INTRODUCCIÓN. Los profesores son un colectivo profesional especialmente expuesto a altos niveles de estrés conducentes a problemas de ansiedad y depresión. El desarrollo de sus competencias socioemocionales y estrategias de afrontamiento pueden considerarse recursos personales imprescindibles que favorecen la posibilidad de dar respuesta a las altas demandas en el contexto educativo actual. El presente estudio explora el rol mediador de las estrategias de afrontamiento de carácter aproximativo y evitativo entre las competencias socioemocionales y el bienestar y malestar psicológicos y el engagement docente. **MÉTODO.** El estudio se realizó en una muestra de 395 profesores de primaria, secundaria, bachillerato y universidad de 45,07 años ($DT = 17,95$ años) y un 83,3 % de mujeres, quienes respondieron un conjunto de cuestionarios de autoinforme sobre las diferentes variables estudiadas. Los datos fueron analizados mediante modelos de ecuaciones estructurales de carácter confirmatorio para estimar

el efecto mediacional de las estrategias de afrontamiento entre las competencias socioemocionales y las medidas de bienestar y malestar psicológicos y el engagement. **RESULTADOS.** El modelo mediacional mostró un buen ajuste de los datos (GFI = 0,955, NFI = 0,932, SRMR = 0,117). Concretamente, las competencias socioemocionales predijeron de forma directa y positivamente el bienestar psicológico y el engagement y negativamente el malestar psicológico. Se obtuvo un efecto indirecto de las competencias socioemocionales sobre bienestar psicológico y engagement, mediado por el afrontamiento de aproximación. Además, se obtuvo otro efecto indirecto de las competencias socioemocionales sobre malestar psicológico, mediado por el afrontamiento de evitación. **DISCUSIÓN.** Los resultados de este estudio permiten considerar el desarrollo de las competencias socioemocionales y las estrategias de afrontamiento de carácter aproximativo de los docentes como importantes aspectos a incluir en el marco de su formación inicial o permanente con el objetivo de contribuir a su bienestar psicológico y engagement.

Palabras clave: *Inteligencia emocional, Afrontamiento, Bienestar, Variables de estrés, Profesores, Modelo de ecuaciones estructurales.*

Résumé

Le rôle médiateur des stratégies d'adaptation entre les compétences socio-émotionnelles, le bien-être psychologique et la détresse chez les enseignants.

INTRODUCTION. Les enseignants constituent un groupe professionnel particulièrement exposé à des niveaux élevés de stress, pouvant entraîner des problèmes d'anxiété et de dépression. Le développement de leurs compétences socio-émotionnelles et de leurs stratégies d'adaptation peut être considéré comme une ressource personnelle essentielle pour répondre aux exigences élevées du contexte éducatif actuel. Cette étude vise à examiner le rôle médiateur des stratégies d'adaptation actives et évitantes entre les compétences socio-émotionnelles et le bien-être psychologique, la détresse psychologique et l'engagement des enseignants. **MÉTHODE.** L'étude a été réalisée auprès d'un échantillon de 395 enseignants du primaire, du secondaire, du lycée et de l'université qui ont répondu à une série de questionnaires d'auto-évaluation sur les différentes variables étudiées. L'âge moyen était de 45,07 ans (SD = 17,95 ans). Le pourcentage de femmes parmi les répondants s'élevait à 83,3 %. Une modélisation par équations structurelles confirmatoire (Structural Equation Modeling [SEM]) a été réalisée pour analyser l'effet médiateur des stratégies d'adaptation entre les compétences socio-émotionnelles et les mesures du bien-être psychologique, de la détresse psychologique et de l'engagement. **RÉSULTATS.** Le modèle de médiation a montré de bons indices d'adéquation (GFI = 0,955 ; NFI = 0,932 ; SRMR = 0,117). Plus précisément, les compétences socio-émotionnelles prédisent directement et positivement le bien-être psychologique et l'engagement et prédisent négativement la détresse psychologique. Un effet indirect des compétences socio-émotionnelles sur le bien-être psychologique et l'engagement a également été obtenu, médiatisé par les stratégies actives. En outre, un effet indirect des compétences socio-émotionnelles sur la détresse psychologique a été obtenu, médiatisé par les stratégies d'adaptation d'évitement. **DISCUSSION.** Les résultats de cette étude nous permettent de considérer le développement des compétences socio-émotionnelles et des stratégies d'adaptation actives des enseignants comme des aspects importants à inclure dans le cadre de leur formation initiale ou de leur formation continue afin de contribuer à leur bien-être psychologique et à leur engagement.

Mots-clés : *Intelligence émotionnelle, Stratégies actives, Bien-être, Variables de stress, Enseignants, Modèle d'équation structurelle.*

Authors' professional profile:

Alicia Rodríguez-Gómez

PhD, assistant professor in the area of Psychology at the Faculty of Education of the Universidad Internacional de la Rioja (Spain). She teaches different subjects related to child development. Her main research interests are focused on emotional competences of teachers, psychosocial factors in educational contexts, and Child Sexual Abuse (CSA).

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7079-1827>

Marta Becerril

PhD, assistant professor in the area of Educational Psychology at the Universidad Internacional de la Rioja (Spain). She teaches diverse subjects related to support of students with Special Educational Needs (SEN) for future teachers. Her research interests are about teachers' socioemotional competences, psychosocial factors related to the job context of SEN teachers, and interventions to support primary to secondary educational transition of students with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD).

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8805-3312>

Jesús Privado

PhD, Associate Professor at the Faculty of Psychology of the Universidad Complutense de Madrid (Spain). Expert in social science methodology and in the construction and validation of psychometric instruments. His research lines focus on individual differences in intelligence, personality, and psychological well-being.

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1511-5129>

Montserrat Amorós-Gómez

PhD, assistant professor in the area of Educational Psychology at the Universidad Internacional de la Rioja (Spain). She teaches diverse subjects related to health psychology and pedagogy for future teachers. Her research interests revolve around well-being and socioemotional competences in future teachers, and the personal strengths necessary for teaching and learning.

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0004-2811-5245>

Esther Argelagós

PhD, assistant professor in the area of Developmental and Educational Psychology at the Universitat de Girona (Spain). She teaches diverse subjects related to academic and professional competences for future psychologists, as well as developmental psychology and learning for future teachers. Her research interests revolve around the competences necessary for teaching and learning at different educational levels.

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6425-1499>

