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# An Exploration in Social and Emotional Health of Vietnamese High School Students

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## Abstract

Social and emotional health (SEH) aims to promote academic success and create school well-being. SEH has not been studied in Vietnam. This article focused on exploring the SEH of Vietnamese high school students because of the high-risk level in mental health that appeared in this group. The study was carried out using a qualitative case study approach to interviewing 74 students, 12 teachers, 7 school administrators, and 4 school counselors. We interpreted four features of SEH's expression of Vietnamese students: (1) Confident but lack of individual perspectives, (2) Respectful but lack of listening and empathy in school relationships, (3) Balanced but lack of authentic perception of emotions and effective emotional management, (4) Satisfied but lack of sustainability and action. This study has broadened our understanding of external behaviours and current limitations in the young people's SEH from their perspectives in a developing Southeast Asian country to promote positive psychological development in school-based prevention programs.

## Keywords

belief-in-self, belief-in-others, case study, emotional competence, engaged living, social and emotional health

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## Acknowledgements

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Social and emotional health (SEH) aims to promote academic success and create school well-being. SEH has not been studied in Vietnam. This article focused on exploring the SEH of Vietnamese high school students because of the high-risk level in mental health that appeared in this group. The study was carried out using a qualitative case study approach to interviewing 74 students, 12 teachers, 7 school administrators, and 4 school counselors. We interpreted four features of SEH's expression of Vietnamese students: (1) Confident but lack of individual perspectives, (2) Respectful but lack of listening and empathy in school relationships, (3) Balanced but lack of authentic perception of emotions and effective emotional management, (4) Satisfied but lack of sustainability and action. This study has broadened our understanding of external behaviours and current limitations in the young people's SEH from their perspectives in a developing Southeast Asian country to promote positive psychological development in school-based prevention programs.

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## Introduction

Social-emotional health (SEH) is recognized as the mental health (MH) aspect of social-emotional competence (SEC), which is approached according to the social-emotional learning (SEL) model (CASEL, 2017). Educators are increasingly interested in understanding the impact of the SEC on the students' mental resources and applying positive psychology development principles to the classroom (Lee et al., 2016; Seligman et al., 2009). SEH is a training process that helps children and adults develop basic social-emotional skills to deal effectively with MH problems. SEH forges the skills needed to trust oneself, trust relationships, and regulate emotions properly and demonstrate engagement with life (Furlong et al., 2014). These skills include recognizing and managing emotions, developing concern for others, demonstrating perseverance with the self, establishing positive relationships, and handling challenging situations effectively. From the results of studies on SEH, mental health care (MHC) programs for students based on the development and enhancement of the SEC were studied and implemented (You et al., 2015). These programs suggest optimal development strategies for core human psychological attributes (e.g., positive beliefs about self and others, emotional competence, capacity for attachment, well-being). Previous studies on SEH also show that the demand for MHC services of students is increasing in the context of society's technology (Furlong et al., 2020; Renshaw et al., 2014; Tanner-Smith et al., 2019).

In Vietnam, the issue of MHC for students has received much attention in recent years, especially at the age of high school students (HS; Huynh & Giang, 2021). According to the Vietnamese UNICEF (2018), adolescence is an age group with a rate ranging from 8-29% in the population with MH problems in Vietnam. Recently, the Government has stipulated the

establishment of a school counselling office and the implementation of school counselling and mental care for students in schools (Ministry of Education and Training, 2017). Therefore, to develop school-based MHC strategies in Vietnam, reference to the school-based MHC models in developed countries is necessary, including the SEH model of Furlong et al. (2020). From the context of Vietnamese education, SEC theory was initially applied in Vietnam as an integrated content in education to improve academic achievement and social-emotional skills for students, or the social-emotional learning (SEL) approach (Huynh, 2017; Nguyen, 2019; Tran, 2018). Approaches to SEH's studies among students have been limited in Vietnam. The current studies on MHC for Vietnamese students mainly focus on external behaviour (Vietnamese UNICEF, 2018) or each separate component of SEH such as the belief-in-self (Ho & Gu, 2021; Nguyen et al., 2019), belief-in-others (Nguyen-Thi et al., 2020; Tran & Lee, 2011), emotional competence (Ho et al., 2019; Tuong & Truong, 2022) and engaged living (Hang, 2020; Van Tran, 2016) of Vietnamese students. Systematic and integrated studies on SEH, applying the SEH model into MHC for students, or recognizing SEH as an internal resource in students' MH have not been mentioned. From this practice, the exploration of SEH in Vietnamese HS is necessary to gain initial insights and broaden our understanding of MH aspect of SEC.

## Literature Review

Studies on applying SEC theory to students' MHC have been carried out since the beginning of the 21st century. Researchers applied SEC theory to the development and design of intervention and educational strategies to give the students the best school MHC services.

Payton et al. (2000) noted that many programs, especially SEL programs, have been developed to help schools improve MHC for students. Developed by the CASEL, the SEL framework can be used to guide the selection of school-based prevention programs that address mental health, substance abuse, violence, and sexuality prevention, personality, and social skills. Although not completely separated from the SEL framework, since the early years of the 21st century, SEC has been considered as a directional content to design a program to prevent students' mental health problems in schools.

Weare (2010) provided an overview of the principles of school counseling practice in promoting MHC in schools by influencing the SEC of students through specific exercises, thereby creating positive effects on students' learning, behavior, emotion, and mental health. Momentous Institute (2014) launched a Social-Emotional Health model with the goal of supporting school-based MHC services for students by developing the SEC with a hierarchy of specific skills and life values: Level 1 – Safe relationships; level 2 – Self regulation; level 3 – Awareness of self; level 4 – Understanding others; level 5 – Integrated influencer. Basically, these levels are the social-emotional skills needed in an individual, which help them to have enough internal resources and the ability to overcome adversity. This model has the limitation that is too focused on the aspect of skill development, not on the aspects of children's quality and attitude development.

Also in 2014, Furlong et al. (2020) systematized SEH theory based on human SEC. The theory focuses on aspects of psychological well-being, positivity, and motivation towards individual happiness in life. From here, Furlong et al. (2014) proposed the SEH model with four components: (1) Belief-in-Self (BS); (2) Belief-in-Others (BO); (3) Emotional Competence (EC); and (4) Engaged Living (EL). BS consists of three sub-components based on SEL theoretical constructs and self-determination theory literature: self-awareness, self-efficacy, and persistence. BO consists of three sub-components that stem from the underlying structures of social relationships that underpin individual personality since childhood: school support, peer support, and family coherence. EC consists of three sub-components that are also

based on constructs drawn from the SEL theory: emotion regulation, sympathy, and self-control. EL includes three sub-components built on the foundation of positive psychology: gratitude, zest, and optimism. With this model, SEH is understood as the successful, positive development of a human's emotional and social life, the inner cognitive tendencies of a person with a good level of SEH associated with the following: (a) positive beliefs or self-confidence, (b) positive beliefs in others, (c) emotional management, and (d) feel involved in everyday life. These tendencies are thought to promote SEH by promoting an upward spiral in the quality of interpersonal interactions (You et al., 2015). Within schools, SEH can reduce the number of students who need early intervention. Participating in SEH training and development programs will give students the skills they need to deal with challenges. It also helps teachers manage their classrooms in a way that fosters interest, engagement, optimism, and positivity, aiming to create a safe, healthy school climax (Furlong et al., 2018). For students who need intervention, SEH can be incorporated and reinforced in MH interventions provided by school counselors (Hinton et al., 2021). SEH also provides students with special needs (students with disabilities) practical empathy, love, readiness, and interaction in school (Bernard et al., 2007).

In Vietnam, studies on SEC have shown many possible applications in MHC: Huynh (2017) found that, when SEL components are improved in a positive direction, primary school students would achieve more academic success and improve their cognition, behavior, and emotions. Social skills helped children overcome psychological obstacles in life by themselves. It was noteworthy that the self-awareness competence of Vietnamese students was significantly improved through the SEL program and thereby, reducing many risks of emotional disorders (depression, anxiety) as well as behavioral disorders (school violence, sexual abuse). According to Nguyen (2019), the SEL program helped to create a safe and friendly school environment for students. To secondary school students, the SEC especially helped students to solve problems related to the crisis of puberty, behavioral problems (self-destructive behavior, addiction behavior, aggressive behavior, etc.), cognitive problems (gender awareness, career awareness, self-esteem, etc.) and emotional problems (depression, anxiety, stress, etc.). There has been some success with studies on SEC, bringing the concept of SEC closer to Vietnamese learners and society, but the current limitation is that it has not broken out the CASEL (2017)'s theory of SEL. This leads to results that focus on the educational effects that the SEL program creates. Currently, there is a lack of research directions on SEH, with the goal of improving students' ability to adapt and respond appropriately to mental health problems. Most importantly, case studies as well as qualitative studies on SEC or SEH are still limited in Vietnam, leaving theoretical and practical foundations at the descriptive level. This context sets the authors' motivation to explore the SEH by Vietnamese students within the SEH perspective of Furlong et al. (2020) in this study.

**Self-of-the-Researcher**

The research team comprises experts who are lecturers in the Psychology Department of a critical pedagogical university in the Southern of Vietnam. The first researcher has more than five years of experience practicing counselling, SEL training, positive youth development, public mental health care, school health care and conducting the qualitative study. The second researcher has more than 20 years of research and practice experience in school psychology, education, SEL training and program development, Vietnamese culture, human behaviour, and social science. The third researcher has more than 10 years of practice SEL training and program development, life skill and life value education, school education, students' well-being and happiness, mental health care, youth development, positive psychology, and education. All researchers are always concerned about promoting mental health strategies to bring happiness and development to students in schools, including the research and application

of SEC, SEL, and SEH achievements. Especially in the context of reforming the national general education curriculum in Vietnam from 2019, the SEC is an interest in public educational sector. With the desire to provide public educational sector with knowledge and solutions to develop SEC for students through the SEH model, the team conducted this study. With professional experience and personal interest, the research team is qualified to carry out qualitative study on the SEH of HS.

## Methodology

### Study Design

The purpose of this study is to explore the SEH of Vietnamese HS through specific behavioral expressions. The researchers posed the question: "How do Vietnamese high school students express their social and emotional health?" Therefore, designing case study research involving a qualitative approach with in-depth interviews will provide sufficient and rich data to answer this question (Baškarada, 2014). According to Gülseçen and Kubat (2006), case study research allows for the exploration and understanding of complex issues. From this inquiry, we can investigate and understand the SEH within its real-life context when the boundaries between the phenomenon (SEH) and Vietnamese context are not clear, and multiple sources of evidence are used.

Based on the research question, the researchers employed the interpretive case study as the methodological approach which aimed to investigate and interpret the data (SEH expressions of HS) by developing conceptual categories, supporting, or challenging the assumptions made regarding them (McDonough & McDonough, 1997). Therefore, cultural integrity principles of Im et al. (2004) in study designing and triangulation of Creswell and Creswell (2017) in data collection process are needed to gain credibility findings when studying the SEH of Vietnamese HS. The five principles of cultural integrity were stated as follows:

The first principle, Cultural relevance, derived from the study purpose which aimed to explore the SEH behavioral expression of Vietnamese HS. With the scientific potential identified in the Self-of-the-researcher section, the research team ensured a deep understanding of the SEH framework, the cultural, psychological, and social characteristics of Vietnamese students. Therefore, we are qualified to carry out an interpretive case study on the SEH of Vietnamese HS.

The second principle, Contextuality, is based on the researchers' in-depth knowledge, understanding and practice of SEH and SEC development for HS which enabled the authors to approach participants respectfully. In keeping with the requirements of the Research Ethics Board of the Department of Science and Technology of a critical pedagogical university under the Vietnam Ministry of Education and Training (the supervised committee of this study) and following the Declaration of Helsinki, and to ensure that the study was conducted ethically (considering cultural integrity). Permission to access the participants was obtained by providing a plain language statement and consent form to the selected participants. The lead and second researchers' requisite knowledge, understanding and practice of SEH and Vietnamese culture helped the researchers to successfully access the HS's SEH, overcome the cultural bias and collect the data necessary for this study. As a researcher of HS's SEH, the investigator needs to acknowledge and frame the participants' SEH expressions and experience. No participant was a client of the interviewer.

The third principle, Appropriateness, involved the use of language congruent with that of participants and making careful translations (Im et al., 2004). It is considered important for the researcher and translators to be fluent in both the source language and target language and to be knowledgeable about both cultures (Chen & Boore, 2010). Interviews were conducted in

the mother tongue of HS (Vietnamese) and translated into English by the first and third author, then proofread by a native researcher. Being bilingual, these two authors were able to bring a culturally nuanced approach to transcription and capture words or concepts used by participants that could not be readily translated into English (Chen & Boore, 2010). To limit the risk of mistranslation, the accuracy and credibility of the interview translation and data analysis were ensured: translating the Vietnamese narrative into English text by using a bilingual translator (the first and third author). A comparison of translated transcripts with other transcripts was done to gain conceptual equivalence and credibility, and thematic and content analysis were carried out by the first and second author who are knowledgeable about SEH and Vietnamese culture. The third author assessed a critical mass of randomly selected interviews to triangulate and strengthen the credibility of the findings. All researchers discussed and refined themes as these emerged during data analysis until the most credible interpretation of the data was reached.

The fourth principle, Mutual respect, was obtained when the participants were carefully recruited in a manner that was consistent with the Vietnamese culture, school rules and SEH framework. Participants were allowed to refuse to participate in or withdraw from the study at any time. Participants also had an opportunity to choose a preferred time or place for their interviews. After the recruitment, the researchers requested a private and confidential initial meeting with the selected participants and provided further information on the study. After the participants agreed to participate, they were asked to sign a written consent to participate, secure information, and authorize the publication of results with the approval of their parents or their school administrators (only for students). All collected data were asked for permission from the participants to record by tapes; some used handwritten notes to record the information. Interview data after being translated and coded were sent to the participants to review once to ensure accuracy.

The fifth principle, Flexibility, was obtained through the interviewing process. Participants were conducted in a place that suited the participants and according to their time and availability. All participants had the option of declining questions they felt unable to answer or uncomfortable about answering and the option to withdraw from the study. Significantly, no participants declined to answer any of the interview questions, and no one withdrew from the study.

**Subject Selection**

Because the SEH theory was derived from SEC studies, the SEH's exploration should begin with individuals who have SEC or have participated in SEL programs to detect blatant behavioral expressions of SEH. The study subjects are high school students from 16 to 18 years old. Using purposive sampling techniques, we contacted schools and students who had participated in previous Vietnamese SEL studies to invite them to participate in this study. These students had previously experienced SEL in secondary school during the 2018-2019 academic year (Nguyen, 2019). Currently, these students are studying in high school and continue to experience SEL integrated into educational activities. This is the population that provided rich data for our study. In addition, to get an objective observation and assessment, we selected three more groups of participants with close relationships with the participating students, including high school teachers (HT), school administrators (SA), and school counselors (SC). These three groups of participants are all working at the school where the participating student group is studying.

Initially, the research team contacted the SA to obtain the study's permission. After receiving approval from the SA, the research team contacted students, teachers, and school counselors to invite them to participate.

Seventy-four HS aged between 16 and 18 (M = 17.2, SD = 1.87) participated in the current study (45 female students and 29 male students). Regarding the remaining participants, 12 HT, 7 SA, and 4 SC participated. We used non-identifying codes, ensuring the confidentiality of the information. Serial numbers were placed after each code to mark the order of interviewing participants, e.g., HS1 for the first student interviewed, HT2 for the second teacher interviewed, SA3 for the third school administrator interviewed, SC4 for the fourth school counselor interviewed.

## Data Collection

The researchers collected data by using semi-structured interviews with individual participants. The interview guide was created using guidelines for conducting case studies (Marginson, 2004). We designed the list of questions to gather information on how the HS express their SEH through the BS, BO, EC, and EL components. In the interview process, we focused on open questions to allow the participants to express their experiences as wholly as possible. A summarized table of questions was sent to the participants at least three days before the interview to aid them in providing detail that might not have been revealed with unseen questions and facilitate their reflection on relevant experiences (Hays & Wood, 2011). In the questions, we replaced the phrases in brackets as each SEH component's keywords, including:

- Belief-in-Self: self-awareness, self-regulation, persistence
- Beliefs in others: family relationship, school relationship, friendship
- Emotional management: emotional regulation, empathy, self-control
- Engaged living: positive thinking, gratitude, enthusiasm for life

Each component's keywords were asked as an independent question with the same question structure. For HS, the interview began with the questions:

1. When I talk about the [family relationship], what does that mean to you?
2. How did you learn to express [empathy]?
3. Can you tell me about your experiences or expressions of [gratitude]?

In the closing section of the interview, we asked questions to ensure that they had enough opportunity to share and discuss their experiences:

1. Is there anything else that you would like to talk about that we have not covered?
2. Do you feel that you had a chance to share everything you wanted to?

For HT, SA, and SC, the interview began with the questions:

1. How would you assess the [emotional regulation] of your students?
2. Can you tell me about your experience observing the expressions of [self-control] in your students?

The questions in the closing section for these participants were the same as the HS's questions. The study was conducted through 97 in-depth interviews between the researcher and participants (all 1:1 interviews), lasting between 45 to 60 minutes (M = 48.5). Before the end of each interview, we asked the participants to double-check information to ensure they had fully shared their experience. The interview location was at the school counseling office

belonging to the participating schools, which guaranteed a comfortable space and the confidentiality of the interviewee information.

We fully informed the study's information to the participants regarding the interview prior. Participation in interviewing was considered a proxy consent to participate. All collected data were asked for permission from the participants to record by recorders; some used handwritten notes to record the information.

**Data Analysis**

The first author engaged with the concepts of bracketing and a search for essences in SEH frame after the data's translation and interpretation from the Appropriateness principle. According to Tamminen et al. (2013), this process required the researcher to explicitly identify their preconceptions relating to the topic, but Allen-Collinson (2009) opposed this principle. It should be acknowledged that to some extent, prior understanding may still have informed analysis and it was needed in this study due to the cultural integrity. Therefore, we contacted the third-party researcher to supervise the team to limit subjective biases in the bracketing process. This setting aside of preconceptions attempts to avoid the biases formed through personal experience.

In this study, we used the 6-stages of IPA (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014) to analyze the transcripts. In the first stage, we read and re-read transcripts to achieve a sense of familiarity with each participant's experience, for example, the HS's interpretation of the lack of individual viewpoint in the belief-in-self of Vietnamese HS. In the second stage, the researchers identified themes by making comments in the page's descriptive, linguistic, or conceptual margin, for example, the quote "Why do I try to understand others' feelings? Am I not living their life for them?" was noted as emotional competence. In the third stage, a return to beginning of the transcript was made to identify and label essences in the negative margin to the one used earlier, for example, the quote in stage 2 was labeled as the "The lack of authentic perception of effective emotional management in Emotional competence." In the fourth stage, the essences of this transcript were produced, for example, three essences of A1's transcript were labeled as the confident in self (BS), the lack of authentic perception of effective emotional management (EC), and no empathy in school (BO). This method of analysis was then repeated for each transcript. In the fifth stage, we repeated from stage 1 to 4 to compare individual data to others under the supervision of the third-party researcher. This process allowed the authors to discover the universals underlying the inter-subjectively experienced phenomenon and limited the biases. The final stage was writing and translating essences into coherent account. The first author initially conducted this analysis process, followed by the second and third authors engaging in discussions to review and refine themes as these emerged during data analysis and until the most credible interpretation of the data was reached.

The findings were discussed in the group and supervised by the third-party researcher to ensure reliability, semantic consistency, and non-conflict. A relativist approach was applied to judge quality in the current research which used a list of criteria that can be added to, subtracted from, and modified (McGannon et al., 2021). Our study provided a substantive contribution to broadening our understanding of how the Vietnamese HS express their SEH and what the difference in SEH of Vietnamese HS is. The impact of this study is the understanding of the depth and essence of SEH expression in HS helps researchers, school psychologists, and educators design school-based prevention programs or SEH development programs more suitable to the characteristics of that school, that area. The width of data is provided through the numerous quotations to illustrate each interpretation, and the different expressions of each essence experienced by the participants. Furthermore, this study displays coherence in the presentation of those essences which were analogous to participants to provide

a meaningful picture of how Vietnamese HS express their SEH. McGannon et al. (2021) additionally suggested that the notion of critical friends, to encourage reflection and provide alternative interpretations and perspectives should be utilized. In line with this, the third author acted as a critical friend in reviewing the codes and respective quotes interpreted by the first and second authors. The authors' peer-review took place under the third-party researcher's supervision to ensure a minimal appearance of biases in the findings.

After the relativistic group discussion, the findings were returned to the participants for comment and approved to use in the findings section. In the quotations mentioned, the authors highlighted important keywords that described the participants' common experiences when it came to different aspects of the interpreted essence. These words provided a relationship among the SEH expressions in the interpreted essence. All steps in this section strictly followed the cultural integrity principle and triangulation to gain creditable findings.

## Findings

The participants discussed various experiences and expressions of SEH that shared common characteristics, which we have labeled four essences: (1) Confident but lack of individual perspective, (2) Respectful but lack of listening and empathy in school relationships, (3) Balanced but lack of authentic perception of emotions and effective emotional management, (4) Satisfied but lack of sustainability and action. These emergent themes are described in the HSs' experience of SEH.

### Confident but Lack of Individual Perspective

The first overarching theme described Vietnamese HSs' perceptions and expressions of BS component in their learning and living. Vietnamese HS had confidence in themselves. This was demonstrated by their actions and words that showed their confidence in learning, communicating as well as solving problems. A student confidently shared that: "I rarely hesitate in making decisions because I know what I want" (HS 32).

Currently, Vietnamese HSs well perceived of their own strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and challenges. They also had a complete understanding of their intrinsic strengths and mental health status. This data is confirmed by most of the HT and SA in their sharing and analysis of the HSs' BS. In terms of self-regulation, the students described their behavior management in different contexts and situations. It is practice and day-to-day reinforcement of students' self-regulation, not a completed skill. HT, SA, and SC confirmed that students' efforts to recognize and manage their behavior were better day by day when placed in the psychological and educational supports. A participant illustrated this point by stating that: "Without my homeroom teacher's support and encouragement, I have not been successful step by step in planning to study and exercise every day" (HS 8).

Although HS do not have problems with self-regulation and self-awareness, they have difficulty showing perseverance. Consistency and self-control under different circumstances were the limitations of how students express BS. Most participants were influenced by their parents and friends. They lacked persistence with their decisions because they were not fully aware of the problems and made decisions too hastily. One student emphasized this idea with statement, "I am quite weak in decision-making in my family. They [parent] decide my future because of my procrastination" (HS 4).

To better understand the limitations of HS's perspectives, we interviewed HT, SA, and SC. Interviews with groups of participants engaged in teaching and educating students helped us shape the idea that the dependence on social media and technology has led to HSs gradually lost persistent with themselves. One SC clearly described this dependence of students: "From

cyberspace, they (students) have many choices that they do not know what is right for them" (SC3).

Moreover, the educational perspective of HT and SA was still traditional and rarely listened to students. As a result, the imposition of perspective in education as well as the control over the freedom of self-expression in students still existed and discouraged them.

Thus, the problem of maintaining and protecting individual perspective appeared in the BS component of Vietnamese HS as an obstacle to the development and improvement of SEH.

## Respectful but Lack of Listening and Empathy in School Relationships

The second theme described how Vietnamese HS express their BO. In social relationships, Vietnamese HS commonly showed trust with family, friends, and teachers by the respect in communication. This respect can be in avoiding conflict or showing empathy and listening when communicating. It can be affirmed that the culture of communication and mutual respect has been formed in the HSs' perception since their beginning of school. With their families, HSs showed love and respect. Between them is unconditional love, even though there are sometimes disagreements. For students, family is always an effective resource to support their mental health and help them develop their SEH. One student representatively shared this common sense that "Family is the respect and love" (HS 25).

With friends, in the HSs' perception, at any stage of development, friends are the best mental support and encouragement when facing difficulties. Peer relationships at school were described by students with trust, respect, and pride. It was the social connection that strengthened Vietnamese HSs' belief in social relationships. Unfortunately, in which the way of showing respect in avoiding and limiting conflicts prevails, especially between HS and HT. This was a solution to limit conflicts in communication, but it brought a breakdown of trust with teachers at school. Most of the students shared with us how they found it difficult to trust their teachers because of the times they [HT] refused to listen and did not acknowledge the students' efforts in the classroom. One student illustrated this point: "My homeroom teacher scolded me in front of the class. She never listens to me" (HS 37).

The communication between HS and HT currently has many unresolved conflicts. The cause stemmed from not listening and understanding each other from the teacher's perspective. Because the teachers did not listen and empathize with students, the school support complex and sometimes formal. However, this was a controversial issue when there were many streams of opinions and perspectives.

Explaining from the school counselor's perspective, SC1 reported: "Currently, there are many communication conflicts between students and teachers. The students were not satisfied with the teacher's behavior. They resisted in many ways. Some other teachers may have personal problems that they even misunderstand the students."

In addition, through interviewing and interpreting the findings, we found that the current perspective in the communication between the participated Vietnamese teachers and students was still strict and traditional, even backward in the context of the intensive development of the 4.0 era and the school's communication and behavior culture. It was because HT and SA still hold the perception that "the power and words of the teacher are absolute," leading to dissatisfaction in student communication. When and only if this problem is solved by solutions related to the restructuring of building a school communication culture on the basis of "respect - listening – cooperation" towards a happy school, then HS can develop their BO component.

## Balanced but Lack of Authentic Perception of Emotions and Effective Emotional Management

The third theme described the HSs' emotional balance through the management and adjustment of individual emotions in relationships. HS commonly knew how to care and empathize with others. They knew how to control their negative emotions. This balance is present in all EC's expressions. However, this was a precarious balance – a balance of "floating" emotion. The main participants stopped at the level of neutralizing negative emotions and did not recognize that negative emotions were theirs or others. An interview from HS 63 provided us with significant evidence: "I got difficulty in understanding others' feelings. Even though I understand it, I am not certain that my understanding is correct… Why do I try to understand others' feelings? Am I not living their life for them?"

Vietnamese HS perceived issues related to emotions rather superficially and somewhat subjectively. They knew how to balance and handle EC-related issues. However, there was the appearance of coercion and emotional rationalization in the students' expression. HT 12 provided us an insight to this point: "I always teach my students to put themselves in the shoes of others. I even saw them cry more than their sad friend, but that cry was for their different problems."

Teaching Vietnamese HS how to balance and regulate emotions with rules, laws, and the imposition of adults was the way that HT have done. In stark contrast to this perspective of emotional education, SCs had quite urgent and hesitant responses to Vietnamese students' EC. In their understanding and practice, the current EC expressions of HSs were unintentionally hurt and even a traumatic trigger. Not only that, the SCs also explained that the students' capacity to recognize and manage emotions currently was mostly subjective and lacked practice.

Thus, HSs' emotional regulation was imposed in a framework. The emotional problems were rationalized. As a result, HSs did not have an accurate perception of their emotions and effective emotional management. A hypothetical scenario about how the student would behave if rejected was used during the interview to shed light on these problems: "On the outside, I might be fine, but at night I felt uncomfortable, especially when I get rejected by my beloved" (HS 52).

Objectively, Vietnamese HS only stopped at solving emotional problems in the upper part. They did not understand the nature of dealing with negative emotions and acted by their emotional experiences. This was the cause of many emotion-related MH problems as well as their EC improvement.

## Satisfied but Lack of Sustainability and Action

The final theme described how the main participants express their EL through the three concepts of positive thinking, gratitude, and enthusiasm for life. Almost the HSs felt satisfied and adapted well to different contexts. They knew how to think positively, were self-motivated to learn, and had fun every day. This experience brought satisfaction to their lives. HS 71 shared the optimistic experiences: "Feel the joy just enough. Every day, I wish to have at least one joyful thing coming to me."

Most HS shared their extraordinary living. Opportunities would come to those who know how to seize them. Vietnamese HS did not give up and always strived every day to improve themselves, live with what they have, and spread this love to those around them. Most students narrated that, "My life has too many wonderful things that I want to discover."

Optimistic thinking is good, but not making actions consistent with thoughts will not create motivation or excitement. This was the current limitation in their action of optimistic thinking that we discovered through their deep explanation on how to sustain and act in study.

When learning about EL, some individuals would take action to turn that thought into a reality, but some individuals just stopped at the idea and made it impractical to connect with life. HT, SA and SC clarified this limitation by giving us an insight to the current problems. HSs did not know how to express gratitude, optimism, or a positive attitude properly. They lacked skills and guidance from the teachers. Many educational programs and activities that the school used to organize, to propagate the spirit of optimism, gratitude, or learning motivation; only stopped at the level of remembering and understanding, not the application.

It was because of the limitation on how to practice the values learned that HSs knew more than they did. This was also a limitation in the current educational curriculum in Vietnam when it focused too much on teaching new knowledge and neglected the application. SA 2 asserted that: "Learning must go hand in hand with action... but what students have experienced, is just forced memorization. We could not yet teach and guide them to practice the social-emotional skills."

In fact, the difference between the feeling of inner satisfaction and the ability to actualize and show it outside has caused many Vietnamese HS not to develop their EL and their SEH.

## Discussion

This study was designed to explore the SEH of Vietnamese HS through specific behavioral expressions by using an interpretative case study approach. Based on the four SEH components' experience and expressions of the current 74 HS and the observation of 12 HT, 7 SA, and 4 SC, we interpreted the four essences of SEH's behavioral expression of Vietnamese HS via the belief-in-self, belief-in-others, emotional competence and engaged living - the four components of SEH in Furlong et al.'s theory (2020). To the author's knowledge, this study provides the first qualitative account of exploring the world view perspectives of Vietnamese young people about their SEH. These findings advance research on the SEH of school-age population from differing disciplines by increasing our understanding of SEH behavioral expressions. By sampling from a novel population and utilizing an interpretative case study approach, previous studies' limitations were addressed to improve the understanding of Vietnamese HS's SEH as far as possible. Vietnamese HSs have SEH but not stable. HSs' understanding and practice of SEH is only the "shell" of their mental health instability. When this shell was opened, the student's SEH revealed certain limitations in how to adapt socially and deal with mental health problems. Understanding this aspect of practicing SEH will both promote practical improvement and broaden society's understanding of SEH in a multi-cultural society. The findings indicate that school psychologists, educators and researchers with important gaps and limitations in students' skills training and life values education. The application stage in Bloom's taxonomy (Bloom & Krathwohl, 2020) has not been consolidated after learning and the teachers themselves also do not understand the nature of the application stage in social-emotional skills practicing. This is what makes their SEH just an "empty shell." With the findings above, we have the following discussions.

According to Furlong et al. (2014), the BS component is related to the theory of SEL and the self-awareness component of the SEL model. Our findings reflected that those students who had experienced SEL had self-awareness competence. Based on the SEH model, a student with a BS means that they have positive trust and skills related to self-awareness, self-regulation, and persistence (Furlong et al., 2014). However, the self-awareness competence had a limit that prevented them from developing their BS. That is persistence. Vietnamese HS has

not been able to express and protect their perspectives (in study, career, relationships). Others' opinions easily influence Vietnamese HS. A healthy individual is an individual who has a positive, healthy self-belief and can transform this energy to the outside, helping to strengthen and build good social relationships (Helzer & Dunning, 2012). One hypothesis that the authors put forward is that HSs in developing countries with similar cultures and educational systems to Vietnam have similar findings in terms of BS. School psychologists, educators, school administrators and future researchers need to focus on investigating and improving personal courage and instructing students how to protect their perspectives. It is especially essential to guide students to practice persistence in the true nature of the application phase.

In the next SEH component, the BO reveals the nature of an individual's social relationships from childhood to adulthood (Masten, 2009). Vietnamese HS has an optimistic trust in family and friends expressed by respect and love. These are two resources that promote the healthy mental development of students. However, the relationship between students and teachers has many uncertainties. HS shows negative respect to teachers. This was a risk that negatively affected the learning process and the MH of students while at school. Strategies to improve the quality of school-based behavioral culture/school climax and training conflict resolution skills for both students and teachers are necessary to build trust in school relationships. This is the context in school relationships that educators, school administrators and school psychologists need to investigate closely to overcome this limitation.

The EC was balanced but lacked an authentic perception of emotions and effective emotional management. This component, which reflects an individual's emotional intelligence (Riggs et al., 2006), is drawn from SEL theory with three primary expressions: emotion regulation, sympathy, and self-control (Greenberg et al., 2017). Vietnamese HS recognized their emotions and knew how to regulate their emotions. However, the context of Vietnamese society and in-depth analysis of students' experiences on this issue appears unreasonable. The study of Nguyen (2019) on SEC of secondary school students also reflected the students' capacity to manage emotions at an average level. The latest report on adolescent MH during the COVID-19 pandemic in Vietnam also reflected that HS experienced much stress, anxiety, and even crisis due to prolonged stress and witnessed the death of a loved one (Manh Than et al., 2020). The findings reflected their skills related to emotion regulation, sympathy, and self-control were problematic. Vietnamese HS's perception of emotions was imitation and not authentic in emotional science. They learned emotional management skills through adult experiences. According to Denzin (2017), emotions are derived from individual needs. It is a risk that Vietnamese HS imitate the emotions of adults while ignoring the recognition of their emotions. Because of the incorrect understanding of personal emotions, the way students managed their emotions was ineffective and only stopped at the surface level of solving problems. Strategies to train social-emotional skills to help students correctly perceive and understand their emotions authentically need to be paid attention. In addition, for current young people, we find it essential to study their emotional management skills in different socio-cultural contexts to design an appropriate school-based prevention program, with particular emphasis on how the students understand their emotions and practice managing emotions.

In EL, HS were satisfied but lacked sustainability and action in their lives. This component was formed based on positive psychology with three expressions of gratitude, zest, and optimism (Furlong et al., 2014). Our study found that the life values of Vietnamese HS have a gap between the sense of inner satisfaction and the capacity to act a positive behavior. All three values of gratitude, zest, and optimism have been integrated into the Vietnamese educational program, namely, Ethics/Civic Education, as well as social science subjects (Ministry of Education and Training, 2018). These are typical Vietnamese life values that have been handed down from generation to generation. However, students understood gratitude, zest, and optimism, but they have not shown it successfully. Psychological apprehension and

the imposition of life values from social relationships have caused students to lack the capacity to sustain and act. Vietnamese HS accepted what they have and gradually lost their motivation to study and dedicate themselves to life if they continue to maintain this unsafe satisfaction. To develop EL for HSs, strategies on skills training and practicing demonstrating the values of gratitude, zest, and optimism are essential and must adhere to the context of society and the Vietnamese culture.

Currently, there has been an appeal for a shift from the pathological orientation to growth orientation in youth development. Many conceptual frameworks in the field of positive youth development were studied and claimed their positive contribution to the healthy development of young people (Benson et al., 2011; Bronk, 2013; Catalano et al., 2004; Lerner et al., 2011; Schonert-Reichl et al., 2017; Shek et al., 2019). Our study highlights the importance of social-emotional skills that high school students need to recognize and manage emotions, develop concern for others, demonstrate perseverance with the self, establish positive relationships, and handle challenging situations effectively or the importance of social-emotional health, from their perspectives. This approach is consistent with the SEL framework approach when emphasizing the importance of psychosocial skills to the positive youth development. These findings of this study have broadened our understanding of external behaviours and current limitations in the HS's SEH of a developing Southeast Asian country to promote positive psychological development in school-based prevention programs.

Besides these findings, our study has some limitations. The sample selection was quite limited because the only sample selected was students who had had previous experience with the SEL program. The discovery of SEH in a new sample group that has never had access to SEL or a sample group in culturally specific geographical areas (remote area or ethnic minority students) has not been mentioned. Therefore, research orientation on a larger scale in terms of quantity and quality of subjects to fully describe SEH of Vietnamese HS is necessary. Another limitation is that we have not explored the depth of SEH components when conducting case studies, for example, the influence of BS on the mental health of LGBT students, or the impact of EL to the belongingness in young people. Further studies, especially clinical or case report studies, may focus on this aspect of SEH to uncover interesting findings. An additional limitation was that the effect of non-traditional clusters of unknowns in social media that can influence a person's perspective was not considered. Perhaps the next studies may focus on the influence of social media on the social-emotional health or well-being of young people.

## Conclusion

In summary, Vietnamese HS expressed SEH through specific behavioral expressions from the four components in the SEH model. However, the expression of SEH has many limitations that we have discovered in this study, including the lack of individual viewpoint in BS, the lack of listening and empathy in school relationships in BO, the lack of authentic perception of emotions, and effective emotional management in EC, and the lack of sustainability and action in EL. These limitations have hindered Vietnamese HS's SEH development, as well as created related MH problems. Through this study, we provide a broader understanding of the external behaviours and current limitations in the HS's SEH from the youth people perspectives. These findings help the school psychologists, educators, researchers, or education administrators shape and strengthen the school-based prevention programs that provides positive development for young people or promote the training course on developing SEH or SEL-based practice in schools. Hence, the development of future studies in SEH of students in Southeast Asia or developing country like Vietnam should recognize and overcome our current limitations and offer more findings on this field in terms of practice.

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