



The Importance of Social-Emotional Learning in Schools

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SUBMITTED: 15 July 2024; REVISED: 25 July 2024; ACCEPTED: 27 July 2024

ABSTRACT: In recent years, the importance of addressing students' social and emotional development alongside their academic needs has gained increasing recognition. Traditional education systems have predominantly emphasized cognitive skills and academic achievement, often neglecting the emotional and social aspects of student growth. This oversight can lead to significant consequences, such as heightened rates of anxiety, depression, and behavioral issues among students. The lack of social-emotional learning (SEL) integration in school curricula results in many students being ill-prepared to manage their emotions, establish healthy relationships, and make responsible decisions. Modern life's pressures and complexities exacerbate this problem, demanding greater emotional resilience and interpersonal skills from young people. Integrating SEL into school curricula can substantially enhance students' overall well-being, academic performance, and future success. By equipping students with the tools to understand and manage their emotions, develop empathy, and build strong interpersonal relationships, SEL creates a more supportive and effective learning environment. This holistic educational approach addresses the immediate emotional and social needs of students and contributes to their long-term personal and professional development. The objective of this article is to explore the importance of SEL in schools and highlight its benefits for students, educators, and the broader educational community. SEL, as an educational framework, aims to develop students' emotional intelligence, social skills, and overall well-being. By integrating SEL into school curricula, we can foster a supportive and emotionally healthy learning environment that prepares students to navigate the complexities of life, ensuring they are well-equipped for future challenges and opportunities.

KEYWORDS: Social-emotional learning; emotional development; academic achievement; emotional resilience; interpersonal skills

1. Introduction

In recent years, there has been an increasing recognition of the importance of addressing not only the academic needs of students but also their social and emotional development. Traditional education systems have primarily focused on cognitive skills and academic achievement, often neglecting the emotional and social dimensions of student growth. This oversight can lead to significant consequences, including increased rates of anxiety, depression, and behavioral issues among students. The lack of SEL integration in school curricula means

that many students are ill-equipped to manage their emotions, establish healthy relationships, and make responsible decisions. The problem is further exacerbated by the increasing pressures and complexities of modern life, which demand greater emotional resilience and interpersonal skills from young people. Integrating SEL into school curricula will significantly enhance students' overall well-being, academic performance, and future success [1, 2]. By providing students with the tools to understand and manage their emotions, develop empathy for others, and build strong interpersonal relationships, SEL can create a more supportive and effective learning environment. This holistic approach to education will not only address the immediate emotional and social needs of students but also contribute to their long-term personal and professional development [3]. The objective of this article is to explore the importance of SEL in schools and to highlight its benefits for students, educators, and the broader educational community.

2. Understanding SEL

SEL is an educational framework aimed at developing students' emotional intelligence, social skills, and overall well-being, thereby fostering a supportive and emotionally healthy learning environment. SEL is built on the foundation of five core components: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making (Figure 1.). Self-awareness involves recognizing and understanding one's emotions, thoughts, and values, and how these influence behaviors. This includes accurately assessing one's strengths and limitations, fostering a well-grounded sense of confidence, and maintaining a growth mindset. When students develop self-awareness, they can better navigate their emotional experiences and build a positive self-concept. Self-management, the second core component, refers to the ability to regulate one's emotions, thoughts, and behaviors across various situations. This includes managing stress, controlling impulses, and motivating oneself to achieve personal and academic goals. Effective self-management helps students stay focused, organized, and resilient in the face of challenges. Social awareness is the ability to understand and empathize with others, including those from diverse backgrounds and cultures. It includes recognizing social cues, understanding societal norms, and appreciating different perspectives. Developing social awareness enables students to build strong, respectful relationships and navigate social situations effectively. Relationship skills, the fourth component, encompass the ability to establish and maintain healthy and rewarding relationships with individuals and groups. This includes clear communication, active listening, cooperation, conflict resolution, and seeking or offering help when needed. Strong relationship skills are essential for collaborative learning and creating a positive classroom environment. Finally, responsible decision-making involves making ethical, constructive choices about personal and social behavior. It includes considering the well-being of oneself and others, evaluating the consequences of actions, and reflecting on past experiences to inform future decisions. By honing these skills, students can navigate complex situations and contribute positively to their communities [4, 5].



Figure 1. Foundation of SEL.

3. Differences between SEL and Traditional Education

The integration of SEL into the educational landscape marks a significant shift from traditional education models, which primarily focus on academic achievement and cognitive development (Table 1). Traditional education often emphasizes standardized testing, rote memorization, and the acquisition of subject-specific knowledge, with success measured by grades and test scores. While cognitive skills and academic knowledge are undoubtedly important, this approach can overlook the holistic development of students, leaving gaps in their social and emotional growth. In contrast, SEL promotes a more comprehensive approach to education that values emotional and social competencies alongside academic skills. This holistic perspective recognizes that emotions play a crucial role in learning, decision-making, and relationship-building. For instance, students who are emotionally intelligent and socially skilled are better equipped to handle stress, collaborate with peers, and engage in productive learning experiences. By addressing these aspects, SEL aims to create a more inclusive and supportive learning environment where all students can thrive [5, 6].

Another key difference lies in the pedagogical methods used. Traditional education often relies on teacher-centered instruction, where the teacher is the primary source of knowledge, and students are passive recipients. This model can limit opportunities for students to develop critical thinking, problem-solving, and interpersonal skills. Student-centered pedagogical methods in SEL enhance critical thinking, problem-solving, and interpersonal skills by actively engaging students in their own learning process. Unlike traditional teacher-centered methods that often prioritize rote learning and direct instruction, SEL encourages students to explore and understand their emotions, motivations, and relationships, fostering a deeper level of self-awareness. This self-awareness promotes critical thinking as students reflect on their own experiences and perspectives. SEL's focus on collaboration and communication helps develop interpersonal skills by encouraging students to work together, resolve conflicts, and empathize with others. Problem-solving is also enhanced as SEL promotes a growth mindset, teaching

students to approach challenges creatively and persistently. By prioritizing these skills, SEL creates a more dynamic and responsive learning environment, where students are better equipped to analyze complex situations, make informed decisions, and interact effectively with others. In contrast, SEL encourages student-centered learning, where students actively participate in their education through collaborative activities, discussions, and projects. This approach not only enhances academic learning but also fosters essential social and emotional skills, such as teamwork, empathy, and self-regulation. Moreover, SEL places a strong emphasis on creating a positive school culture that supports the emotional well-being of students and staff. Traditional education systems may not always prioritize the social climate of the school, potentially leading to environments where bullying, discrimination, and disengagement are prevalent. SEL, however, actively promotes a culture of respect, inclusivity, and kindness. This is achieved through practices such as peer mentoring, restorative justice, and community-building activities, which help to create a safe and supportive atmosphere conducive to learning [3, 7].

Table 1. Differences between SEL and traditional education.

Aspect	SEL	Traditional Education
– Pedagogical Methods	Student-centered	Teacher-centered
– Primary Focus/goal	Holistic development	Academic achievement
– Core Components	Self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, responsible decision-making	Subject-specific knowledge, cognitive skills
– Emphasis	Emotional intelligence	Intellectual development
– Learning Environment	Collaborative and cooperative	Individual and competitive
– Integration	Integrated into daily activities	Structured curriculum
– Impact on Mental Health	Focuses on mental health and well-being	Less emphasis on mental health
– Assessment approach	Holistic assessments: qualitative, focusing on personal growth	Standardized tests: quantitative, focusing on academic performance

The goals of SEL also extend beyond the immediate educational context to prepare students for life beyond school. Traditional education tends to focus on preparing students for academic and professional success by equipping them with the necessary knowledge and skills for higher education and the workforce. While this is important, it can sometimes neglect the broader aspects of personal and social development. SEL, on the other hand, aims to equip students with the skills they need to navigate the complexities of life, including emotional resilience, interpersonal communication, and ethical decision-making. These competencies are crucial for success in all areas of life, from personal relationships to professional environments.

In traditional education, assessment methods are primarily quantitative, focusing on academic performance through standardized tests, quizzes, and grades. These assessments are designed to measure students' knowledge and proficiency in specific subjects, providing a clear and objective metric of academic achievement. However, they often fail to capture the nuances of students' social and emotional development. In contrast, Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) employs qualitative assessment methods that emphasize personal growth and development. SEL assessments include self-reflections, where students evaluate their own emotions and behaviors, fostering self-awareness and personal accountability. Peer evaluations allow students to give and receive constructive feedback, enhancing social awareness and

relationship skills. Performance-based assessments, such as role-playing exercises and group projects, enable students to demonstrate their social and emotional competencies in real-world contexts. Additionally, behavioral observations by teachers and counselors provide insights into students' interactions and emotional regulation in various settings. Together, these holistic assessment methods offer a comprehensive view of a student's growth, beyond academic achievement, capturing the full spectrum of their development [1, 5].

4. Benefits of SEL Integration in Schools

4.1. Academic performance.

Integrating SEL into school curricula addresses gaps left by traditional education, which often focuses solely on academic content and cognitive skills. SEL emphasizes the development of crucial social and emotional skills such as self-awareness, self-regulation, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. These skills help students manage their emotions, build empathy, and form healthy relationships, creating a supportive and inclusive learning environment. Research shows that students in SEL programs typically achieve better academically compared to their peers. SEL fosters a positive learning environment, enhances motivation, and improves study habits by teaching self-management and goal-setting. Additionally, it promotes a growth mindset, encouraging students to view challenges as opportunities for growth, which boosts persistence and resilience [8, 9].

4.2. Mental health and well-being.

One of the most profound benefits of SEL integration is its positive impact on students' mental health and well-being. Today's students face a myriad of stressors, including academic pressures, social challenges, and personal issues, which can take a toll on their mental health. SEL programs equip students with the tools to manage their emotions, cope with stress, and seek support when needed. By fostering emotional intelligence, SEL helps students recognize and articulate their feelings, understand the sources of their stress, and develop healthy coping strategies. This proactive approach to mental health not only reduces the incidence of anxiety and depression but also promotes a general sense of well-being. Moreover, SEL creates a school culture where mental health is prioritized, reducing stigma and encouraging open discussions about emotional challenges. When students feel emotionally supported, they are more likely to engage positively with their peers and teachers, further enhancing their overall school experience [3, 10].

4.3. Social skills and relationships.

SEL significantly enhances students' social skills and their ability to form and maintain positive relationships. The core components of SEL, such as social awareness and relationship skills, teach students how to empathize with others, communicate effectively, and resolve conflicts constructively. These skills are essential for building strong, healthy relationships both within and outside the school environment. In the classroom, improved social skills foster a collaborative learning environment where students work well in groups, support each other, and respect diverse perspectives. This collaborative spirit not only enhances academic learning but also creates a more inclusive and harmonious school climate. Outside the classroom, strong social skills help students navigate complex social interactions, build meaningful friendships,

and establish supportive networks, which are crucial for their personal development and future success. Furthermore, students who develop robust social skills are better prepared for the interpersonal demands of the workplace and community life, making SEL an invaluable component of holistic education [6, 9].

4.4. Behavioral outcomes.

The integration of SEL in schools leads to significant improvements in student behavior. SEL programs teach students how to regulate their emotions, manage their impulses, and make thoughtful decisions, which contribute to more positive behavior both in and out of the classroom. When students learn to understand and manage their emotions, they are less likely to engage in disruptive behaviors such as aggression, bullying, or defiance. Instead, they are more likely to exhibit pro-social behaviors like cooperation, kindness, and respect for others. These behavioral improvements create a safer and more conducive learning environment, where all students can thrive. Moreover, SEL helps reduce disciplinary issues and the need for punitive measures, which can often be counterproductive. By addressing the root causes of behavioral problems and promoting positive behaviors, SEL fosters a more positive school climate and improves overall student engagement and attendance. Schools that implement SEL programs often report fewer incidents of violence, reduced suspension rates, and a more positive school culture [1, 9].

5. Best Practices and Strategies for SEL Implementation

Effective SEL implementation begins with thoughtful curriculum design and integration. SEL should be woven into the fabric of the school's curriculum rather than being treated as an add-on or isolated program. This integration can be achieved through explicit SEL instruction and embedding SEL principles into academic content. Explicit SEL instruction involves dedicating specific time to teach SEL skills, such as through stand-alone lessons or dedicated class periods focused on topics like empathy, emotional regulation, and conflict resolution. Embedding SEL into academic content, on the other hand, involves incorporating SEL principles into everyday lessons. For instance, a literature class might explore themes of empathy and perspective-taking by analyzing characters' emotions and motivations, while a science lesson could include discussions about ethical decision-making in environmental conservation. Integrating SEL throughout the curriculum ensures that students have ongoing opportunities to practice and reinforce these crucial skills in various contexts, making SEL a natural and essential part of their learning experience [11].

In addition to curriculum design, effective classroom practices play a crucial role in the successful implementation of SEL. Creating a supportive classroom environment that promotes emotional safety and inclusivity is fundamental. Teachers can establish a positive classroom climate by setting clear expectations for behavior, fostering respectful interactions, and modeling SEL skills themselves. Techniques such as morning meetings or check-ins can be used to build a sense of community and give students a platform to express their feelings and experiences. Collaborative learning activities, such as group projects and peer mentoring, encourage students to develop and practice social skills, such as communication, teamwork, and problem-solving. Additionally, incorporating mindfulness practices, such as deep breathing exercises or guided meditation, can help students develop self-regulation skills and manage stress. Providing regular feedback and opportunities for self-reflection also supports

students in recognizing their growth in SEL competencies and identifying areas for improvement. By creating a classroom environment that values and promotes SEL, teachers can help students feel more connected, supported, and engaged in their learning [12, 13].

For SEL to be effectively implemented, teachers need adequate training and ongoing support. Professional development programs should be designed to equip educators with the knowledge and skills necessary to teach SEL and integrate it into their classrooms. Training should cover the core components of SEL, effective instructional strategies, and ways to create a supportive classroom environment. It should also address common challenges and provide practical solutions for integrating SEL into various subjects. Furthermore, teachers should receive training on how to manage their own social and emotional well-being, as their ability to model SEL skills is crucial for students' learning. Ongoing support is equally important. Schools should establish systems for continuous professional development, such as coaching, peer collaboration, and access to SEL resources. Regular meetings or professional learning communities can provide teachers with opportunities to share experiences, discuss challenges, and exchange best practices. Additionally, schools should ensure that teachers have access to mental health and wellness resources to support their own emotional well-being. When teachers feel supported and confident in their ability to teach SEL, they are more likely to implement it effectively and create a positive impact on their students [10, 12].

6. The Role of Educators and Stakeholders

6.1. Collaboration and shared responsibility.

The successful implementation of SEL hinges on the collaborative efforts and shared responsibility of all stakeholders within the educational ecosystem. Educators, administrators, support staff, students, and families must work together to create a cohesive and supportive environment that fosters the development of social-emotional skills. At the core of this collaboration are educators, who play a pivotal role in modeling, teaching, and reinforcing SEL principles. Teachers need to be equipped with the necessary training and resources to integrate SEL into their daily instruction and classroom management practices. This requires a commitment from school leadership to provide ongoing professional development opportunities and to foster a school culture that prioritizes SEL. Administrators also play a crucial role in the successful implementation of SEL by setting clear goals, allocating resources, and creating policies that support SEL initiatives. They must work closely with teachers to identify needs, address challenges, and celebrate successes. Support staff, including counselors, social workers, and paraprofessionals, provide essential services that complement classroom-based SEL efforts, offering targeted interventions and additional support to students who need it. Shared responsibility extends beyond the school walls to include district leaders and policymakers who can advocate for SEL at a higher level. By promoting SEL-friendly policies, securing funding for SEL programs, and establishing standards for SEL implementation, these stakeholders ensure that SEL becomes an integral part of the educational system. Moreover, fostering a collaborative approach involves creating spaces for regular communication and collaboration among all members of the school community. Professional learning communities, interdisciplinary teams, and regular meetings focused on SEL can help maintain a unified and consistent approach to SEL across the school [3, 5].

6.2. *Parental and community involvement.*

Parental and community involvement is critical to the success of SEL initiatives. Parents and guardians are their children's first teachers and play a fundamental role in reinforcing SEL skills at home. Schools must actively engage families in the SEL process by providing them with information, resources, and strategies to support their children's social-emotional development. This can be achieved through regular communication, workshops, and family engagement activities that highlight the importance of SEL and offer practical tips for integrating SEL practices into daily life. Effective communication between schools and families is essential for building trust and fostering a collaborative partnership. Schools should keep parents informed about SEL programs, goals, and outcomes through newsletters, parent-teacher conferences, and school events. Additionally, involving parents in the planning and implementation of SEL initiatives can enhance their sense of ownership and commitment to the process. When parents understand the benefits of SEL and feel equipped to support their children's social-emotional learning, the impact of SEL efforts is significantly amplified. Community involvement is equally important in creating a supportive environment for SEL. Community organizations, local businesses, and social service agencies can provide valuable resources and support for SEL initiatives. Partnerships with these organizations can offer students access to a broader range of services, such as mentoring programs, after-school activities, and mental health resources. Furthermore, community members can serve as role models and mentors, helping to reinforce SEL skills and provide additional support and guidance to students [3, 5, 10].

Schools can also engage the broader community by organizing events and initiatives that promote SEL principles, such as community service projects, cultural events, and wellness fairs. These activities not only provide students with opportunities to practice social-emotional skills in real-world settings but also strengthen the bond between the school and the community. By fostering a culture of collaboration and shared responsibility, schools can create a supportive network that extends beyond the classroom, ensuring that students receive consistent and comprehensive support for their social-emotional development. In addition to direct involvement, community stakeholders can advocate for SEL at a policy level, helping to secure funding and resources for SEL programs and promoting policies that support the integration of SEL into the educational system. Community advocacy can also raise awareness about the importance of SEL and mobilize broader support for SEL initiatives [14].

7. **Long-Term Impacts and Future Directions**

7.1. *Preparing students for future challenges.*

The long-term impacts of SEL extend far beyond the classroom, equipping students with essential skills that prepare them for the myriad challenges they will encounter throughout their lives. SEL fosters emotional intelligence, resilience, and interpersonal skills, which are critical for success in both personal and professional realms. As students develop self-awareness, they gain a deeper understanding of their strengths, weaknesses, and values, enabling them to make informed decisions and pursue careers that align with their passions and skills. Self-management skills, including stress management and impulse control, are vital for navigating the pressures of higher education, the workforce, and adult life. By learning to regulate their emotions and behaviors, students become more adaptable and capable of handling adversity

and change. Social awareness and relationship skills are equally crucial, as they enable students to build and maintain healthy, supportive relationships. In an increasingly interconnected and diverse world, the ability to empathize with others, communicate effectively, and resolve conflicts constructively is essential. These skills enhance teamwork and collaboration, which are highly valued in today's job market. Moreover, responsible decision-making, another core component of SEL, empowers students to weigh the consequences of their actions, consider the well-being of others, and make ethical choices. This holistic development prepares students not only for academic and career success but also for meaningful, fulfilling lives as engaged and compassionate members of society. Furthermore, the benefits of SEL extend into long-term mental health and well-being. Students who have been exposed to SEL are more likely to possess the tools necessary to cope with stress, anxiety, and other emotional challenges. By fostering a positive self-concept and emotional resilience, SEL helps to reduce the incidence of mental health issues and promotes a lifetime of emotional well-being. This foundation is critical as students transition into adulthood, where they will face new and complex challenges that require strong emotional and social competencies [1, 15].

7.2. Future research and practice in SEL.

As the field of SEL continues to evolve, future research and practice must focus on several key areas to enhance the effectiveness and reach of SEL initiatives. One important area is the development of comprehensive, evidence-based SEL curricula that are culturally responsive and inclusive. Future research should explore how SEL can be tailored to meet the diverse needs of students from different backgrounds, ensuring that all students have equitable access to SEL resources and opportunities. This includes understanding how cultural differences impact the expression and interpretation of social and emotional skills and developing strategies to address these differences in SEL programming. Another critical area for future research is the long-term impact of SEL on various life outcomes. While existing research highlights the immediate benefits of SEL on academic performance, behavior, and well-being, more longitudinal studies are needed to understand how SEL influences long-term success in areas such as career achievement, relationship satisfaction, and community involvement. These studies can provide valuable insights into the sustained effects of SEL and inform the continuous improvement of SEL practices. Integrating technology into SEL is another promising direction for future research and practice. Digital tools and platforms can enhance SEL delivery, making it more interactive and accessible. Future research should investigate the effectiveness of digital SEL programs and identify best practices for their implementation. This includes exploring how technology can be used to provide personalized SEL experiences, facilitate remote or hybrid learning, and support ongoing assessment and feedback. Additionally, there is a need for continued research on effective professional development for educators. As the primary facilitators of SEL, teachers require ongoing training and support to effectively integrate SEL into their classrooms. Future research should examine the most effective methods for training educators in SEL, including the use of coaching, mentoring, and collaborative learning communities. Understanding how to best support educators in their own social-emotional development is also crucial, as their ability to model SEL skills is a key component of successful SEL implementation. Policy advocacy and funding are also essential for the future of SEL. Researchers and practitioners must work together to advocate for policies that support SEL at local, state, and national levels. This includes securing funding for SEL

programs, developing standards and guidelines for SEL implementation, and promoting the integration of SEL into teacher preparation programs. By influencing policy and securing resources, stakeholders can ensure that SEL is prioritized and sustained in schools and communities [6, 9, 16–18].

8. Conclusion

SEL is an essential framework in education that fosters students' emotional intelligence, resilience, and interpersonal skills. Integrating SEL into school curricula enhances academic performance by creating a supportive and engaging learning environment. SEL also plays a critical role in improving mental health and well-being, equipping students with the tools to manage emotions, cope with stress, and seek support when needed. Additionally, SEL significantly enhances social skills, helping students build and maintain positive relationships, and improves behavioral outcomes by promoting pro-social behaviors and reducing disruptive incidents. Effective SEL implementation requires collaboration and shared responsibility among educators, administrators, families, and the broader community. Educators need comprehensive training and ongoing support to integrate SEL into their teaching practices effectively. Parental and community involvement further reinforces SEL skills, providing a consistent support network for students. The long-term impacts of SEL are profound, preparing students for future challenges by fostering skills crucial for personal and professional success. SEL promotes lifelong mental health and well-being, enhancing students' ability to navigate the complexities of adult life. Future directions for SEL research and practice include developing inclusive and evidence-based SEL curricula, understanding the long-term effects of SEL, integrating technology into SEL programs, and providing effective professional development for educators. Policy advocacy and funding are essential to sustain SEL initiatives and ensure their widespread implementation.

Acknowledgments

The authors thank Universidad de los Andes Colombia and Universidad de los Andes Colombia and Universidade de Santiago de Compostela Spain for facilitating this study.

Competing Interest

All authors declare no competing interest.

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