

## Foundational Understanding of Socio-Emotional Learning: An Integration into Educational Sector

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### ABSTRACT

Socio-emotional learning (SEL) has recently become the most discussed topic regarding the broader understanding of areas like mental health, well-being, and life skills competencies. It has been viewed as a core competency that contributes to holistic development. The uncertainties with Covid-19, have amplified its relevance in one's life. The capabilities and competencies to deal with such uncertain scenarios are needed with valuable exposure to the learnings that boost the psycho-social skills. Various research has revealed the positive impact of SEL programs in elevating the quality of skills amongst children when incorporated into an educational framework. Hence, it is important to establish SEL programs in the curriculum from the early years. In addition, it is also crucial to work towards its effectiveness by ensuring quality through assessments and evaluations. The present paper attempts to provide an overview of socio-emotional learning and its establishment in the educational framework.

**Keywords:** *Socio-Emotional Learning, Life Skills, Emotional Intelligence, Social Skills, Well-Being, 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills, Education*

Socio-emotional learning is nothing but a process of understanding self, and society and making informed decisions within various settings. Socio-emotional learning (SEL), commonly known as a process of understanding own self, managing emotions, regulating self, understanding others with compassion, nurturing relationships, and making responsible decisions (CASEL, 2020). It can be simply broken down as understanding self, society and collaboratively leading situations with compassion that reflects the state of being in harmony (Kim et al., 2022; Waters and Sroufe 1983). Nowadays, SEL has become a crucial skill set that everyone feels the urge to adapt in their lives. It has been predominantly recognised during the COVID-19, which took us all to times of uncertainties; resulting in stress, anxiety, depression, isolation, and many more (Cooper et al., 2023; Rosanbalm, 2021; Yorke et al., 2021; Adam Smith & Simon-Thomas, 2020). Since then, everyone felt the need for a bridge to shield the gap like armor.

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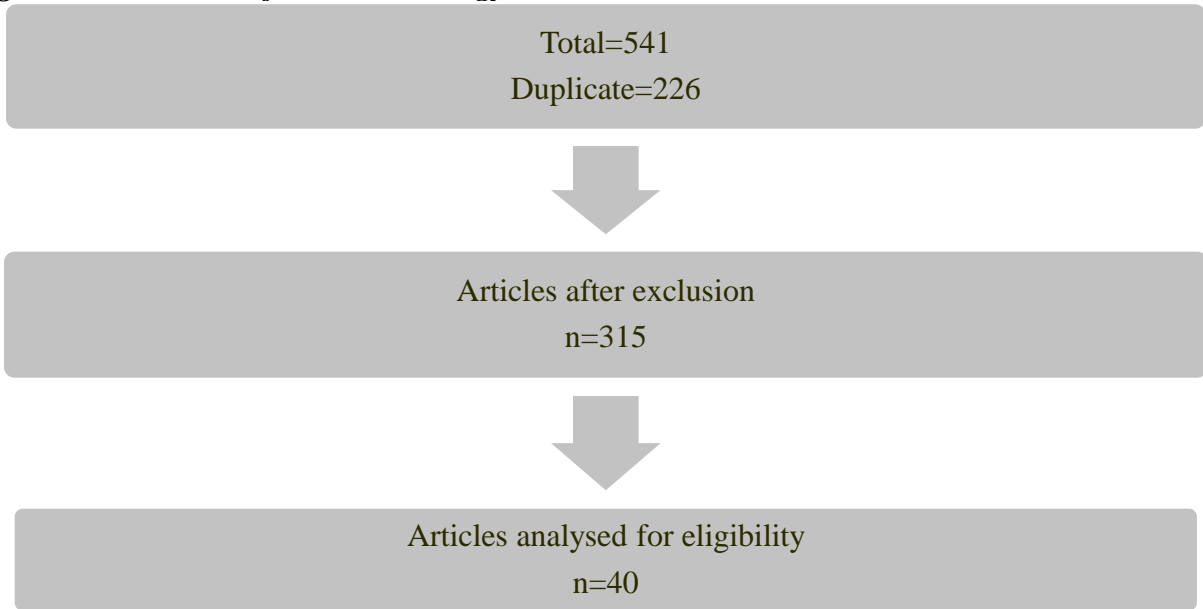
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## METHODOLOGY

The research articles were searched from search engines like Scopus, Google Scholar, ERIC, PubMed and Psych Info. The search descriptor used were “Socio-emotional learning”, “SEL skills”, “life skills”, “SEL AND Education”, “SEL curriculum”, “SEL OR Emotional Intelligence”. These topics were articulated using AND, OR, “ ” connectors. Zotero was also used to manage and organized the set of data. The articles analysed for eligibility were sorted based on its main topic is not SEL, not fully accessible and not a research article.

*Figure 1 Flow Chart of the Methodology*



The inclusion criteria involve research studies published between 2000-2023 wherein two classical theoretical concepts of 1950 and 1994 taken, studies involving children and adolescents, and educational settings, and published in English language. The exclusion criteria involve topics focusing on mental health and clinical interventions, solely focused on academics and not SEL, target populations are adulthood and beyond, and are in other languages than English.

### *Theoretical Framework*

The standard definition of socio-emotional learning varies across its usage in the context. As realised by Hoffman, it can be used to refer to any school-based programs directed from public health, mental health, moral and ethical, or child rights perspectives (Hoffman, 2009). However, SEL has been widely known for contributing to the enhancement of Emotional Intelligence. CASEL’s framework on the other hand has now been widely used and accepted to understand the concepts (CASEL, 2020; CASEL, 2017). It addresses the concept as a process essential for any human to develop skills that foster their self and social identities (Ross & Tolan, 2018; Elbertson, Brackett, & Weissberg, 2010). Provided with five core competencies that lead to a broader understanding of SEL, CASEL discerns its integral part in education and human development. These competencies include; self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making (CASEL, 2020; Greenberg et al., 2017). These are related and interconnected with one's own beliefs, personality traits, and social conduct (Duckworth and Yeager, 2015).

**Table No. 1 CASEL’s Competencies Framework (CASEL, 2020).**

Competencies	Concepts
Self-awareness	It is the ability that focus on one’s own emotions and state of being well. It recognises one’s thoughts, perspectives, ethical and moral principles.
Self-management	It is the ability to conduct and direct one’s own self efficiently and effectively.
Social-awareness	It is the ability to empathise with others, and to understand their views, thoughts, and perspective.
Relationship skills	It is the ability to construct a wholesome relationship with people and groups, and to have a sense of compassion and empathy in the connection.
Responsible decision making	The ability to make thoughtful, socially responsible, and informed decisions.

Schools are recognized as the primary institutions besides the home environment for initiating and nurturing socio-emotional learning (SEL) skills in children. According to Durlak et al. (2010, 2011), school programs focused on SEL should include SAFE components to be effective; Sequenced: Learning should happen in a constructed way by building up with the previous knowledge, Active: Engaging students to participate and be an active partner in the course of learning, Focused: Focus and attention should be on developing specific skills, Explicit: Clearly and explicitly define the taught SEL program (Durlak et al., 2010, 2011; Verma, 2022).

Qualitative teacher training, healthy school cultures, fostering environment result in positive academic achievement and student performance (Thapa, Cohen, Guffey, & Higgins-D'Alessandro, 2013). In a meta-analysis, the high quality SEL programs implemented in schools result in boost in the academic achievement of students and also contribute to their positive personality and behavioral outcome (Sklad et al., 2012; Wiglesworth et al., 2016, Taylor et al., 2017). With the increase of socio-emotional issues worldwide, like negative emotions, lowered self-esteem, and anti-social behaviour, it is important to build coherent knowledge and skills to reduce such issues (Colomeischi et al., 2022; Esen-Aygun & Sahin-Taskin, 2017).

***Developmental Perspective on SEL***

Erik Erikson’s theory of psycho-social development provides a comprehensive framework that focuses on the interrelation between one’s psychological processes and social interactions across the lifespan. For example, the first stage “Trust v/s Mistrust”, states the importance of social presence and secure relationships to be built with the child, to boost the sense of trust and belonging within themselves, which is essential for healthy psychological development (Erikson, 1950). The initial stage of forming a bond with the caregivers and their consistent availability for the children fosters the positive socio-emotional skills which become significant throughout the lifespan (Malik & Marwaha, 2022).

Similarly, stances from Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory can be taken into account, wherein the theory emphasizes the interconnectedness of a child with their immediate environment. This environment at different levels, influences a child throughout their lifespan at biological, psychological, social, and cultural levels. For example, the microsystem which is the innermost level depicts the child’s immediate environment which

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comprises parents, siblings, grandparents, friends, teachers, and others. A secure and healthy relationship among them is crucial and contributes to the holistic development of the child (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). Thus, insights from the stated developmental theories suggested a significant need for nurturing soft skills (also, social-emotional skills) amongst children from the initial period of their life.

### ***Socio-emotional learning in India***

In India, the prevalence of socio-emotional learning has recently been recognised within the National Education Policy 2020 (NEP, 2020). Throughout independence, India has had three educational policies in the years 1968, 1986, and 2020. Specifically, the socio-emotional skills have been known as one of the components that leads to quality development (Loomba & Chawla, 2020). However, it has been considered a secondary skill until recent policies and frameworks have increased the emphasis on the importance of such skills for holistic development and its incorporation in educational curriculums (Bhat & Pillai, 2022). The National Education Policy 2020 and National Curriculum Framework- 2022, highlight the importance of building social-emotional and life skills in children that nurture and lead to the holistic development of a child thus breaking the barrier of traditional education perspectives and practices (Loomba & Chawla, 2020). It has come to notice that the urge to develop soft skills along with academics is not only crucial but has become a foundational part of learning (NEP 2020). The National Education Policy- 2020, has also highlighted the importance of developing such skills from the foundational years by incorporating them in the early childhood curriculums.

The Happiness Curriculum also bridges the areas within the same compendium of SEL (socio-emotional learning). It was introduced in the year 2018 by the government of NCT, Delhi. The objective of this curriculum is to promote well-being, life skills, and SEL by incorporating various activities and methodologies into the school curriculum (State Council of Education, 2019). It has been provided to the children of classes nursery to class 8, and they have a bi-weekly period for about 45 minutes. Along with this, an assessment also takes place that focuses on the progress and path of the child over the results (Sharma, 2021).

Amidst the pandemic, an initiative by the government of India under the Ministry of Education called 'Manodarpan' was launched in the year 2020 for children to provide psychosocial support for mental health and well-being. It supported students, parents, and teachers to provide tips and guidelines during the COVID times and continues to provide further (Sharma, 2021).

### ***Impact of SEL on Educational Outcomes***

Globally, SEL has been known for creating an impact and is understood as an important pillar for the holistic growth and development of a child. Empirical evidence can be found in the 2001 resolution voted by the National Conference of State Legislations in America, which endorsed the instruction of social-emotional skills in educational settings (Hoffman, 2009). In a meta-analysis conducted by Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor, and Schellinger (2011), the authors examined the statistical impact of school-based universal interventions designed to enhance students' social and emotional learning (SEL). They demonstrated how students' SEL abilities have improved and how they are now better able to manage their emotions, collaborate with others, and solve challenges. Overall, it was discovered that the Hedges'  $g$ , or standard mean effect (ES), was 0.57 (Durlak et al., 2011). Likewise, Brown et al. (2010) discovered that SEL programs improved the relationships in the classroom and showed an increase in pro-social behaviour. Another finding was made,

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wherein an SEL-based program in school led to positive outcomes in school achievements and lowered the aggressive behaviours in students (Chuang et al., 2020). Such programs also affect controlling issues like bullying, fighting, and victimization in schools (Espelage, Rose, & Polanin, 2015). However, at the same time, it is also important to understand the implementation of such programs varies across the geographical, racial, ethnical, gender, and diverse needs of students; and such an integrated and standardised program is required (Cipriano & McCarthy, 2023).

In India, a study was conducted to determine how well a social-emotional learning (SEL) intervention module improved the emotional intelligence (EI) of teenagers in the 13–14 years of age range from a Chennai CBSE school in 2020. The module covered aspects such as self-awareness, social awareness, responsibility, empathy, and decision-making, which are fundamental to EI as provided by CASEL's framework (CASEL 2020; Kothari & Wesley, 2020). The results showed a substantial increase in EI scores from the pre-test to the post-test, proving the SEL intervention's efficacy (Kothari & Wesley, 2020).

Pratham's Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) 2019, showcases that children's academic and overall development are greatly aided by social-emotional learning (SEL). It reported a large number of children lack fundamental SEL abilities including conflict resolution and emotion recognition. Hence, the urgency to incorporate the SEL programs in school curriculums in India was highlighted by it (Pratham, 2019; Bhat & Pillai, 2022).

### **RESULT**

The systematic review included 40 studies, that discussed about the impact of SEL skills on student's benefit by integrating them into school curriculums. The impact of the SEL skills program has been provided timely through various meta-analyses, suggesting the importance and need of including socio-emotional learning skills for children, through their immediate environment (Mahoney et al., 2018). At the same time, concerning about the quality that suggests to focus 'SAFE' (Sequenced, Active, Focus and Explicit) components for the effectiveness (Durlak et al., 2010, 2011; Verma, 2022). The common relation recommended throughout is the importance of facilitating techniques, monitoring, teacher training, evaluating, and community awareness (Durlak et al., 2011; Sklad et al., 2012; Wiglesworth et al., 2016; Taylor et al., 2017). Hence, it is important to also note that the initiative has been taken by the Indian education system through policies and programs for integrating SEL and life skills. It also brings us back to the areas formulated by studies that focus on the quality application of the program. This brings us to a suggested scope of further study, wherein the quality of SEL programs in the Indian education system can be assessed, and informed implementations can be made.

### **CONCLUSION**

Socio-emotional learning has become an essential component in the education systems, with many realised its relevance and importance to incorporate for early years onwards. This topic is not a new concept to many a developed country, however, developing societies have yet to establish a standardized approach to SEL programs with school education. The effectiveness of such programs is conditional upon the progressions from early years to later years, with a profuse collaboration between students, teachers, parents, and administrators (Devaney et al., 2006; Greenberg et al., 2003). Now, what is fundamental here is a quality-assured design and implementation of SEL programs or practices in schools/institutions for its effectiveness (CASEL, 2020). The synthesized findings of various meta-analyses suggested that the high-quality SEL programs when conducted in a monitored and evaluated

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school environment, resulted in a positive impact on student's achievement and personality (Durlak et al., 2011; Sklad et al., 2012; Wigglesworth et al., 2016; Taylor et al., 2017). The future directions of these programs need to be understood at three levels; classroom, institutional, and community (CASEL 2020; Greenberg et al., 2017). At the classroom level, the foremost need for an effective incorporation of SEL programs is through teacher training. As training will help teachers/facilitators to seamlessly integrate SEL into their curriculum and practices, and prepare them for opportunities. An effective classroom should promote inclusivity and 21st-century skills, employing a student-centric approach that fosters collaboration by actively listening to students' suggestions and thoughts initiated and well-supported by their teachers or facilitators (Domitrovich & Greenberg, 2000). At the institutional level, the socio-emotional learning programs need to be incorporated into the curriculum with standardisation. A consistent and high-quality framework can be achieved through regular monitoring, assessment, and evaluation regularly at this level. The legal representative of the education system must take action wherein the schools become accountable for the effective dissemination of socio-emotional learning among students (Blewitt et al., 2018; Durlak et al., 2011). Thirdly, the community level provides us with an opportunity to create a cohesive ecosystem with society (not limited to parents, and caregivers but community as a whole). Actively, collaborating with these stakeholders helps to a supporting environment for the children that effectively promotes and enhances their socio-emotional skills (Kam, Greenberg, & Walls, 2003). Top of Form Enabling communities have proven to reinforce these skills at home, hence creating a consistent approach to effective outcomes of such programs.

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### ***Conflict of Interest***

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