

## Social Emotional Learning Among School Students Using Technology- An Exploratory Study

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### ABSTRACT

Children need more than traditional academic learning to thrive in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Proficiency in non-academic skills enables children to adapt to the intricate requirements of social-emotional development and personal growth. Technology-based learning is more enjoyable, makes learning more effective, and creates opportunities to facilitate social and emotional advancements in children along with academic learning and achievement. Therefore, this research aimed to explore the social and emotional competencies of the students who participated in a Social Emotional Learning (SEL) training programme and whether technology-based SEL benefitted the students. A qualitative study approach was adopted for this purpose. The participants for the study involved secondary school students aged 13–15. One hundred students were randomly selected from the list of participants who completed the SEL training programme. A semi-structured interview was used to gather the SEL experiences of students, wherein the thematic analysis revealed that SEL programmes enhanced the social and emotional aptitudes, enabling children to confront obstacles and challenges in everyday life and to practice the skills acquired in real-life situations. The study results indicated that technology-enhanced SEL sessions effectively captured students' attention, reduced boredom, increased motivation and made learning more engaging and impactful. The study findings support the integration of SEL in classroom settings and advocate the use of technology to create more engaging and productive sessions, convey the intended messages effectively, and enhance students' capacities to model the acquired skills in their daily lives.

**Keywords:** *Social Emotional Learning, Technology, Social Emotional Competencies, SEL Training Programme*

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, student learning extends beyond the mastery of core subjects at school. Contemporary education should focus on the development of behavioural, cognitive, emotional, and social abilities in addition to their academic skills. Proficiencies in non-academic areas enable children to adapt to the intricate demands of personal growth and social and emotional development, better preparing them for successful adult lives (Day and Koorland, 1997, Greenberg et al., 2003; Durlak et al., 2011). Schools serve as essential catalysts for the holistic development of children. Most of a child's time is

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spent at school, which serves as a prime centre for academic learning and social-emotional growth. However, the pursuit of holistic development of children is hampered due to the schools' overemphasis on examination-orientated learning (Crespo-Cebada et al., 2014). This has led to many young children graduating without the necessary skills to thrive (Gilliam & Shahrar, 2006). Children with poor social skills learn less effectively and their academic performance takes a downturn (Yusuf et al., 2018). Good social-emotional abilities enable students to manage stress, recognise and manage emotions and maintain a positive outlook (Elfenbein & MacCann, 2017). According to Durlak et al. (2015), school-based Social Emotional Learning (SEL) programmes successfully improve children's socio-emotional, cognitive and behavioural skills. Consequently, equipping students with socio-emotional abilities enable them to overcome the obstacles and challenges in their lives.

With technological advancements, schools and teachers are incorporating technology into everyday teaching to make learning more effective (Shabiralyani et al., 2015). Technology-based learning (using digital content) is more enjoyable, makes learning more effective and creates opportunities for promoting social and emotional growth in children. Though SEL is becoming more important among academicians and researchers in the west, few studies are conducted on SEL and its benefits in India. Therefore, the present study aims to explore the socio-emotional competencies among students who participated in the SEL programme and determine whether the technology-integrated SEL training is effective in enhancing students' competencies.

Existing theoretical and empirical studies on SEL were reviewed to investigate its impact on students in school settings. SEL is a broad pedagogical model that aims to enhance social, emotional and academic competencies in children (CASEL, 2020). This conceptual approach aims to improve health, reduce behaviour problems and enhance social and emotional competencies in school children through combined efforts (schools, family and community). According to CASEL (2020), "SEL is the process through which children and adolescents acquire and effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions". Strong social and emotional abilities help children succeed academically, build healthy connections, emotionally adjust to peers and adults, and maintain overall improved health improvements (Payton et al., 2000). Wong et al. (2014) studied the impact of SEL on primary school students revealing fewer behavioural problems among children who participated in the SEL training. Social-emotional skills of middle school students examined by Coelho et al. (2015) demonstrated reduced social anxiety and notable improvements in self-control and social awareness following the intervention. Kothari and Wesley (2020) attempted to ascertain the SEL programme's effect on the emotional intelligence of teenagers in an Indian school context. The results showed a notable improvement in the students' emotional states, particularly in their comprehension and management of emotions.

Technology-assisted learning is becoming a prominent form of learning in classrooms. Literature was reviewed on the potential of technology-integrated SEL programmes. A study by Iaosanurak et al. (2016) showed a significant improvement in empathy related skills among participants who participated in technology-integrated SEL programmes. Evaluations on digital story telling by Zarifsanaiey et al. (2022) demonstrated a meaningful improvement in social interactions and emotions among school-going children. The study by Vásquez and Gomez (2018) showed that animated stories promoted learning in students. Research evidences showed utilising technology is one of the greatest strategies for implementing

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SEL successfully (Iaosanurak et al., 2016). Besides, technology-enhanced stories, digital learning materials and games are not only excellent tools and behaviour models for promoting social and emotional skills, but they also make learning more enjoyable and effective (Goldsworth, 2002; Conde Gonzalez, 2008).

Even though SEL is the subject of numerous research studies worldwide, minimal studies are conducted on the social skills and emotional abilities of students in India (Jacob & Philip, 2022; Kothari & Wesley, 2020). Moreover, literature evidences on whether technology-based learning promotes social and emotional development are relatively less (Iaosanurak et al., 2016). To address this gap, the researcher planned a study on SEL among school-going students. The main objective is to explore the social and emotional competencies of the students who participated in the SEL training programme. The study also explored whether technology-integrated SEL programme aided social-emotional learning in students. For this purpose, the researcher developed an SEL training package for secondary school students.

### **METHODOLOGY**

A qualitative approach was adopted for the present investigation. Participants involved secondary school students, aged 13–15, who attended the SEL training programme. A total of 100 students, who completed all sessions of the SEL training programme, were randomly drawn from the list of participants. Data on students' SEL experiences were gathered using a semi-structured interview schedule developed by the researcher. The interviews were based on the SEL framework by CASEL and the SEL training package created for the programme. Students' opinions on SEL, skills acquired by them during the program, and the application of those skills in their daily lives were elicited through the interviews. The students were asked to share their experiences on how technology (presentations, animation stories, computer-based projects, puzzles, quizzes and discussions) aided the acquisition and development of their skills.

#### ***SEL Training Package Developed for the Study***

The SEL training module developed by the researcher is based on the CASEL framework for SEL, which includes five core competences, namely, self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship management and decision-making. The major objective of the SEL training package is to empower school students to manage and regulate emotions, develop self-awareness, become socially aware, maintain relationships and make responsible decisions in life. The outcome expected from this training programme is to make students socially and emotionally competent to face challenges and obstacles in the complex world and become future-ready. The developed training package consisted of two modules. The SEL training programmes followed the Sequenced, Active, Focused and Explicit (SAFE) approach by CASEL where all sessions were sequenced and structured, involved active forms of learning (role plays, debates and discussions) and focussed on teaching social and emotional skills, and explicitly targeted and defined specific knowledge, attitudes and skills. The developed SEL module used animated stories, presentations, computer-based assignments, quizzes and puzzles to enrich the sessions. The SEL activities provided opportunities for reflection, discussion and critical thinking among students. Technology-based tasks were assigned throughout the sessions to enhance engagement and skill application among students. The SEL training consisted of 15 sessions conducted twice a week, with each session lasting 60 minutes.

### **Data analysis**

The data was analysed according to the guiding principles of thematic analysis. The qualitative information collected from the in-depth interviews was examined, categorised and further developed into themes. The thematic analysis ensured an accurate interpretation of the data.

## **RESULTS**

Two main themes that emerged from this thematic analysis are: (i) Social-Emotional Competencies developed in Children and (ii) SEL using Technology – Students' Experiences

### **(i) Social Emotional Competencies developed in Children**

#### **a. Improved Understanding of Self and Others:**

SEL sessions enabled the learners to have an improved understanding of themselves and recognise their strengths and shortcomings. The activities helped the students to be aware of their emotions. The sessions aided in understanding others' emotions and in developing strong social awareness skills. The SEL programme enhanced the students' abilities to empathise with, understand and accept others' perspectives. The following are the experiences shared by the participants:

*"The activities helped to understand my strengths and work on my weaknesses."*

*"The reflections during activities helped me start looking into what bothered me whenever I was upset. It also helped me practice reflection in my daily life. This helped me understand myself better and correct myself when required. Sometimes, I find it difficult, but I try to practice."*

*"The activities helped me to be kind and affectionate to my classmates. I offered help in class activities whenever they were in need."*

*"I stopped using foul language against my peers in class. The activities helped me to respect and be in harmony with my peers in class and at home. It decreased my quarrels with my classmates over trivial issues."*

*"The programme helped me and my friends not to put down each other whenever we were angry."*

*"The activities helped me understand others and take their perspectives. Attending sessions helped me start appreciating others, which I seldom do. Listening to other students' experiences, struggles, and challenges helped me become more supportive and compassionate to friends in class, siblings, and community."*

#### **b. Self-management Skills:**

Self-management skills define the ability to regulate emotions, behaviour and thoughts effectively. Such skills help students accomplish their personal and academic goals using self-management strategies. Through SEL sessions, students learnt to manage emotions appropriately and refrain from abusive and aggressive behaviour towards their fellow students. Self-management skills equipped students to plan and work towards achieving their set of goals. The following are the experiences shared by the participants:

*"Initially, when I joined the programme, I was not sure how it would help me. The activities helped learn to manage time effectively both at school and at home. I learnt to set goals in my day-to-day life and try achieving them."*

*"Managing our time and doing assigned tasks also decreased our teacher's stress".*

*“The activities helped me handle my stress while studying, especially during exams. I started practicing reflection and relooking into myself, which helped me control my stress and anxiety.”*

**c. Improved Relationship Skills:**

Relationship skills define an individual’s ability to form positive and rewarding connections with others. It involves competence in active listening, cooperation, negotiation and seeking support when necessary. The activities enabled students to establish relationships with peers and teachers, participate in classroom-related activities, and both receive and provide support to peers as required. The following are a few instances shared by participants where they applied the relationship skills they had learnt:

*“The session activities helped me understand the importance of good relationships with peers, siblings and parents. I try to avoid arguments and disagreements with peers and siblings.”*

*“The group work and discussions helped us learn to work together and listen to each other’s views while working on various projects.”*

**d. Improved Leadership Skills:**

The SEL sessions provided the students with opportunities to participate in activities at both individual and group levels. The teaching strategies employed in the SEL programmes differed greatly from their regular classes. Engaging in SEL activities increased their confidence in completing the tasks assigned to them. The students volunteered to initiate group activities. They displayed improved leadership skills and self-esteem. The activities motivated them to complete the assigned projects on time. The following are the experiences shared by the participants:

*“I have never presented a task given in class. The activities provided opportunities to present the projects before other students. This enhanced my belief in myself and helped me take on leadership roles in class.”*

*“Participating in role play also built my confidence and taught me that I can do the tasks and responsibilities assigned like my peers.”*

*“The activities not only helped me take initiative in academic activities but also to participate in extracurricular activities like dance and singing. Watching videos of other students like me participating in various activities from different parts of the country motivated me to try new things. I now participate and sometimes initiate dance programs at school.”*

**e. Improved Motivation to Learn:**

The SEL programme emphasized on students’ organisational skills and the establishment of periodic goals. The activities on goal setting and methods to accomplish the set goals helped students to develop a positive attitude towards academics and school. The participants shared the following experiences:

*“Earlier I was not very attentive in class. But now I obey the instructions in class, try to be attentive and complete the given tasks. My teacher is pleased with me.”*

*“The activities using technology inspired and motivated me to learn. The participatory activities were very interesting, and they helped me learn new skills. I felt like learning more.”*

**f. Application of Skills Outside Classroom:**

An important learning outcome for a majority of students was the application of skills acquired during the SEL sessions in real-world situations, both in the classroom and beyond, including at home and in the neighbourhood.

The students applied the acquired skills with their siblings, parents and extended family members. They discussed their learnings and important events at school with their parents. Additionally, students found their interactions with their older and younger siblings had improved. The following are some of their expressions:

*“I became more tolerant towards my younger brother. I listened to him and agreed to what he said, which I earlier did not do even if it was right.”*

*“Now my sister and mother are my best friends.”*

**(ii). SEL and Technology- Students Experiences**

The SEL training programmes used technology throughout the sessions, thereby rendering learning as both interesting and effective. Delivering technology-integrated sessions resulted in the capturing participant’s attention, reducing boredom and increasing motivation. Using technology to tell stories motivated students to acquire many skills and apply them in real-life scenarios. The sessions were visually more appealing than the conventional methods of teaching. The use of technology during SEL sessions (using animation, digital content, stories, presentations, technology-based assignments) resulted in greater student engagement. This approach proved particularly effective for students, who tend to disengage from conservative teaching methods. The following are the participants’ experiences, as shared by them:

*“The videos and stories during sessions helped me understand and learn skills such as managing anger, being empathetic and developing compassion. It also helped capture our attention. I found the sessions very interesting.”*

*“The stories I watched and the presentations familiarised me with topics like empathy, and self-management skills better than the usual classroom learning. The stories I viewed during SEL sessions are still fresh in my memory.”*

*“The presentations, animated stories, and digital content were interesting, and increased our interest to attend the programme continuously.”*

*“The projects we worked using resources from the internet improved our creativity, critical thinking, sharing ideas and collaboration skills.”*

*“I forgot some of the lessons I learned in class, but I can still recall the stories and skills learned watching the videos and presentations in the SEL class.”*

*“The technology-based projects assigned to us in groups helped me improve my collaboration skills. I learnt to adjust, be patient, be tolerant and listen to the group members to complete the task.”*

*“Each one of us was assigned tasks to complete the technology-based projects. For this, I needed the support my peers in the group. I learnt to seek support whenever required and at the same time do things independently.”*

**DISCUSSION**

The present study explored the social and emotional competencies acquired by students through the SEL programmes. The findings revealed that SEL programmes equipped students to understand their strengths and work on their weaknesses. The programme further aided in the development of self-management strategies, empowering students to set and achieve personal goals. The participants concurred that the SEL programmes improved their relationship skills and social awareness, thus cultivating the ability to live in harmony and to

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respect and accept others. The SEL programmes motivated students to learn and apply the skills acquired both inside and outside the classrooms. Additionally, the study's findings are in line with previous research on SEL interventions in school settings by Durlak et al. (2011) and Green et al. (2021), which revealed improved interpersonal skills, positive attitudes towards oneself and others, decrease in behavioural problems and better performance at school. The results were also consistent with research on SEL programmes implemented in Indian schools, which led to notable gains in social skills (Kumari, 2020), emotional skills (Kothari & Wesley, 2020), relationship skills and emotional regulation (Vidya & Krishna, 2023).

The study also explored whether the technology-infused SEL programme facilitated social and emotional skill development among children. The structured and planned sessions delivered using interesting presentations, animation stories, quizzes, puzzles and technology-based projects facilitated the enhancement of SEL among students. Students found learning through technology as interesting and effective and they opined that it improved their engagement, captured their attention, reduced their boredom and improved their motivation to learn. The study findings were in agreement with other studies that showed technology-based SEL interventions in the classroom enhanced social-emotional skills (Iaosanurak et al., 2016) and social adjustment (Al Hussaini, M. H. (2023). The results aligned with the study by Zarifsanaiey et al. (2022), which showed the use of technology-integrated SEL programmes enhanced both emotional and social skills among students.

The thematic analysis indicated that integrating SEL programmes in the school curriculum can play a crucial role in shaping students' emotional and social competencies. The findings have important implications for educators and policymakers to integrate SEL into the school curriculum so that students can improve their social-emotional skills for a successful adult life. In light of the above findings, the following are some recommendations for stakeholders and policymakers:

1. Introduction of SEL programmes in schools as they are crucial to the social and emotional development.
2. Introduction of technology-based SEL programmes in schools and train teachers to facilitate technology-based SEL, which will improve learning among students.

## CONCLUSIONS

The present study was carried out to explore the social-emotional competencies of children who participated in the SEL programme in their school. Additionally, the study attempted to investigate if the use of technology in education improved students' social and emotional competencies. The in-depth interviews aided in gathering information on students' learning and experiences after the programme. The findings showed that the introduction of SEL programmes in the classroom enhanced students' social-emotional skills. The study results also revealed that using technology in SEL programmes helped students develop and refine their social and emotional skills. The study findings encourage the integration of SEL into the curriculum along with the use of technology to engage students more effectively, convey appropriate messages, and empower them to model social-emotional skills in their daily lives.

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### **Conflict of Interest**

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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