

Healing Hearts: Social and Emotional Learning as the Path towards Emotional Well Being

Kishan M^{1*}, Dr. S. Arulsamy²

ABSTRACT

Recent years has seen an ever-increasing demand to look into the social, mental and emotional perspectives of learning that the children derive from their immediate learning situation. It is seen vital nowadays for the learner to be armed with requisite life-oriented skills for problem solving, decision making, relationship building and emotional wellbeing as it helps them towards a far brighter future. This is where the advent of Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) takes shape to cater to the rising needs of the changing society and its goals. This paper outlines the need for proper incorporation of SEL into the domain of mainstream education and learning. The paper sheds light upon the true realization of SEL in educational sector aimed at the development of emotional intelligence and social behaviour of the learner and ultimately optimum emotional wellbeing through effective strategies for the implementation of SEL in the classroom environment.

Keywords: *Social-emotional learning, Emotional well-being, social behaviour, Gen Z*

These days the society faces the predicament of depreciating mental health among children all around the world raising growing concern among parents, educators and policy makers. The devastating COVID-19 pandemic not only led to physical health concerns but also associated problems related to mental health due to social isolation, alienation, stress due to distancing including school and other public place closure. Even before the pandemic, many children faced pressures from academic expectations, social media, family instability, and exposure to global crises, all of which can negatively impact their emotional well-being. But after the pandemic many have become too comfortable or even trapped with their own socio-emotional boundaries that it has become problematic to bring them open heartedly to the wonders of the outside world. This is why there is an ever-increasing demand for effective strategies to bring about positive socio-emotional channeling within the learners for uplifting them up to the demands and challenges of the society.

One strategy that stands above all is Social-Emotional Learning (SEL). SEL comprises of the procedure followed to ensure learners acquire and apply knowledge, attitudes and skills necessary to better understand and manage emotions, develop pro social behaviour, establish

¹Research Scholar, Department of Education, Bharathiar University, Coimbatore

²Professor of Education, Department of Educational Technology, Bharathiar University, Coimbatore

*Corresponding Author

Received: July 25, 2025; Revision Received: November 06, 2025; Accepted: November 10, 2025

positive relationships and make responsible decisions in any situation. Unlike traditional academic subjects, SEL focuses on the development of the whole child, recognizing that emotional well-being and social skills are just as important as cognitive abilities for success in school and in life. SEL promotes laying down the foundation for effective social behaviour by also ensuring proper state of emotional well-being of the individual. SEL if integrated into the mainstream educational curriculum can cater to expectations which the society places upon the learners helping them be better equipped to handle the demands of the workplace, build healthy relationships, and contribute positively to their communities.

In spite of the rising importance of SEL in educational sphere in many parts of the world, there still exists challenges for its widespread implementation. Most educational curriculum all over the world and especially in India puts more emphasis on purely academic subject of study and less importance to socio-emotional balance of the learner deeming it just as a pre-requisite or something gradually taken in by the learner. This negligence or ignorance on the importance of socio-emotional aspect of a child these days can have adverse effect throughout all phases of life which is why effective implementation of SEL becomes a much-needed reality

Status of Emotional Well Being of the Gen Z

Generation Z (or Gen Z) refers to the individuals born approximately between 1997 and 2012, following Millennials (Gen Y). What makes the Gen Z different from the generations before is their very exposure to technology. This generation grew up with widespread access to digital technology, social media, and smartphones, making them the first true “digital natives” (Dimock, 2019; Seemiller, 2016)

Unlike the generations before Gen Z learners have been exposed to series of factors like stress and depression and a decline in emotional wellbeing due to the heavy pressure to perform according to the expectations and goal. This is further boosted by the lack of proper socio-emotional balance and vital skills to adapt and adjust according to the demanding situations in one’s immediate environment. Social and emotional skills, such as self-awareness, emotional regulation, empathy, and interpersonal communication, are essential for individuals to navigate the complexities of their environment effectively.

In many cases we have seen Gen Z individuals turning up to extreme measures to convey their frustration and stress because they are not being heard or listened to. One definitely needs the comfort of peers, parents, well-wishers, mentors to share their emotional journey and hurdles along the way in order to move on in life, Afterall we are social animals. The feeling of being known, consoled and the act of sharing and indulging in effective interpersonal communication can take you a long way towards attaining socio-emotional equilibrium.

Severe lack in social and emotional skills can not only affect emotional wellbeing but also have critical implications for academic achievement and interpersonal relationships. Individuals with poor social-emotional competencies often face difficulties in school adjustment, motivation for learning, and building positive relationships with peers and teachers. Thus, addressing social and emotional deficiencies among Gen Z is crucial for improving their emotional wellbeing. By fostering these socio-emotional skills through supportive environments at home and school, adolescents can develop the tools needed to handle stress effectively, build meaningful connections, and thrive both emotionally and academically.

Factors affecting Emotional Wellbeing of Generation Z

Emotional Well-being among the Gen Z is influenced by a lot of factors shaped up by the way of life and activities engaged by them throughout. Extreme digital exposure combined with social media obsession often leads to being victim of cyberbullying and confused self-perceptions channelled by the thought that social media is the only reality. Along with this comes the heightened stress associated with academic pressure and performance anxiety. Learners often find themselves isolated and alienated due to the societal stigma enforced upon them in the form of expectations. Such is the case that the need for emotional balance and stability never gains adequate attention in the academic as well as familial sphere of the individual. This insecurity and loss of emotional equilibrium is further increased by peer pressure, familial problems and identity crisis. Thus, all these factors along with neglect from institutional and educational authorities for the provision of socio-emotional support leaves the Generation Z individual stranded alone and vulnerable to emotional challenges.

Significance of SEL in Shaping Emotional Well-Being and Social Behaviour

Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) influences emotional well-being and social behaviour of individuals by equipping them with the skills necessary to navigate complex emotional and interpersonal experiences. The very aim of SEL is to empower individuals in developing emotional literacy; to be able to identify, label, understand and control emotions, which is fundamental to emotional well-being. Learners who are taught to be self-aware and manage their emotions effectively are less likely to experience emotional dysregulation, anxiety, depression, or impulsive behaviour (Brackett, 2014).

Social-Emotional Learning engages learners on how to recognize and better express their emotions, manage stress, resolve conflicts, and build healthy relationships, SEL helps to create a foundation for positive emotional well-being. Research has shown that children who participate in SEL programs are more likely to have better emotional regulation, improved social skills, and higher levels of empathy and resilience. Thus, it helps learners develop and activate specific set of skills much needed to boost their emotional and social balance for the classroom situation as well as make them better prepared for the future ahead.

SEL tries to cultivate a sense of identity and agency by helping individuals align their actions with personal values and goals, enhancing self-efficacy and psychological well-being. SEL shapes social behaviour by fostering empathy, perspective-taking, and ethical decision-making. Through repeated engagement in activities that require collaboration, active listening, and inter-personal communication, individuals become more socially competent and responsive. They learn to interpret social cues and adequately follow social norms, resolve conflicts constructively, and form positive relationships—skills that are vital for prosocial behaviour, peer acceptance, and inclusive participation in community life (Jones, 2012).

The role played by SEL is not limited to socio-emotional sphere but has direct impact upon academic achievement and performance of learners positively. Studies have found that students who are emotionally healthy and socially competent are more engaged in learning, have better attendance, and perform better academically. Thus, we can say that SEL aims at creating a positive school climate where all students can thrive, regardless of their background or abilities. As such, SEL does not function as an isolated intervention but as a continuous developmental process that enhances both internal emotional states and external social interactions, preparing individuals for a life of emotional balance, social harmony, and ethical responsibility.

Social Emotional Learning as a tool to enhance Emotional Wellbeing

Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) Framework is the transformative trend in educational sphere today covering fields related to relationship building, mental health enhancement, emotional equilibrium and overall social wellbeing. SEL is an educational framework that equips students with essential life skills such as self-awareness, emotional regulation, empathy, and interpersonal communication. These competencies are crucial for fostering resilience and coping mechanisms, particularly in the face of stressors that often lead to anxiety, depression, and emotional distress (CASEL, 2023; Durlak, 2011).

SEL programs introduced in educational circumstances has been linked to reduce emotional distress, adjustment and coping skills (CASEL, 2023). For instance, SEL helps in identifying and managing emotions effectively, reducing symptoms of depression and anxiety while promoting a sense of belonging and inclusivity within school environments (Taylor, 2017; Domitrovich, 2007)

The benefits of SEL extend beyond individual emotional wellbeing improvements. Schools that integrate SEL into their curricula create safe and supportive environments where students feel valued and understood. Such environments not only mitigate bullying and aggression but also enhance students' overall sense of safety and connectedness. This holistic approach to education ensures that students are better prepared to navigate personal challenges while maintaining positive attitudes toward themselves and others (Zins, 2004; Jones, 2012).

SEL programs helps in experiencing improved emotional well-being throughout their lives. These programs instill lifelong skills such as problem-solving, self-regulation, and responsible decision-making—tools that empower individuals to manage stress effectively and maintain healthy relationships throughout their lives.

Role of SEL Competencies in developing Emotional Wellbeing

SEL includes 5 competencies that showcases the idea of perfecting socio-emotional equilibrium among individuals. These competencies are namely Self-Awareness, Self-Management, Social Awareness, Relationship skills and Responsible Decision making.

- **Self-Awareness**

Self-awareness fosters emotional wellbeing involving the ability to recognize and understand one's emotions, thoughts, and values. It includes identifying personal strengths and weaknesses, recognizing emotional triggers, and fostering self-confidence. Self-aware individuals can better navigate their emotions and behaviors, making informed decisions that align with their values. Schonert-Reichl (2015) understood that self-awareness, particularly when cultivated through mindfulness practices within an SEL program contributes to children's emotional well-being by enhancing their ability to control emotions and navigate developmental changes with greater resilience.

- **Self-Management**

Self-management supports emotional wellbeing by equipping the individuals with techniques to handle situations, control impulses and regulate emotions effectively. It includes skills like stress management, practicing calmness in adverse situations and setting up practical goals. Gross (2015) examined the process of emotional regulation, a function of self-management in reducing symptoms of depression and mood instability and ultimately emotional well-being of the individual.

Healing Hearts: Social and Emotional Learning as the Path towards Emotional Well Being

- **Social Awareness**

Social awareness contributes to emotional wellbeing by helping to cultivate empathy, respect and mutual understanding with people. It includes respecting diversity and recognizing the feelings of others. Students with strong social awareness can better understand and connect with their peers, fostering a sense of community and belonging. Caprara (2000) investigated that prosocial behaviour, characterized by social awareness and empathy contributes to emotional well-being by reducing vulnerability to depression and fostering positive social and affective outcomes.

- **Relationship Skills**

Relationship skills enhance emotional wellbeing by establishing healthy interpersonal connections and relationships through effective communication, teamwork, conflict resolution, and active listening. These skills enable students to navigate social challenges constructively and build strong, supportive social networks. Jones (2012) finds that fostering relationship skills is directly tied to promoting emotional well-being in students through SEL based intervention and practices.

- **Responsible Decision-Making**

Responsible decision-making develops emotional wellbeing through thoughtful and carefully constructed choices or decisions based on personal values and social norms while considering the consequences of actions for oneself and others. Beck (1998) highlights that cognitive behaviour therapy meant for developing responsible decision-making skills can solve anger and emotional issues and reduce irrational beliefs and emotional imbalance leading to emotional well-being.

These SEL competencies collectively provide students with the tools needed to navigate personal challenges effectively, build strong relationships, and maintain emotional well-being. By integrating these skills into educational settings, schools can create supportive environments that foster emotional wellbeing and resilience among students.

Strategies for the Development of SEL Competencies in the Learner

All the competencies of SEL can be followed in classroom learning environment through a series of strategies and techniques so as to better the socio-emotional development of the learner effectively.

Self-Awareness

- **Mood Meters:** Mood meters are visual tools that help learners identify and name their emotional states by plotting energy and pleasantness on a color-coded grid. Teachers implement this strategy by asking students to check in daily using the meter, promoting routine daily reflection. (Brackett, 2014)
- **Journal entry:** Journals provide a structured outlet for students to document their emotional experiences. Educators guide learners to write short daily entries reflecting on events and accompanying feelings (Baikie, 2005).
- **Self-Reflection Prompts:** Daily or weekly reflection prompts allow students to introspect about their experiences and internal states. Such prompts enhance metacognitive awareness and help students make sense of how their thoughts and emotions influence their actions. (Schonert-Reichl K. A., 2015).
- **Meditation Exercise:** Teachers can guide the students to mindfully scan their bodies and mind to relive any stress or difficulty for about 5 to 10 minutes to ease themselves. (Zenner, 2014)

Healing Hearts: Social and Emotional Learning as the Path towards Emotional Well Being

- **Role Play Workshops:** Roleplaying situations helps students identify moral dilemmas or life scenarios and facilitate reflection and discussion. This helps learners understand how values guide behaviour, providing a moral compass and strengthening identity development. (Narvaez, 2002).

Self-Management

- **Mindful Breathing Exercises:** Mindful breathing involves teaching students to focus their attention on slow, deep breaths to anchor themselves in the present. Teachers guide students through a few minutes of calm breathing, often accompanied by visualization or soft music. (Felver, 2016).
- **Muscle Relaxation Exercise:** It is a strategy involving the systematic tensing and relaxation of different muscle groups to help students become aware of and release physical tension. (Feuerstein, 2014).
- **Guided Visualization:** This technique involves mentally transporting students to peaceful, calming environments through sensory language and imagination. Teachers may use scripts or audio tracks describing tranquil scenes. (Schonert-Reichl K. A., 2015).
- **Impulse Pause Techniques:** Impulse control is nurtured by teaching students to pause before reacting. A simple method includes counting to ten, taking deep breaths, or using cue words like “stop and think.” Teachers model this in conflict situations and reinforce its use during emotional triggers. (Duckworth, 2019).
- **Stress Ball and Sensory Tools:** Providing access to stress balls, fidget tools, or textured items helps students manage emotional overload or anxiety discreetly. This technique promotes self-soothing and regaining control over one’s emotions. (Koenig, 2010).

Social Awareness

- **Role-Play:** Students act out situations that require adopting another person’s viewpoint. This strategy encourages learners to imagine how others feel or think, fostering greater emotional atonement and reducing bias (Narvaez D. , 2002).
- **Cultural Exchange Projects:** Students collaborate with peers from different backgrounds or countries to complete joint projects either virtually or in-person. These activities foster real-world intercultural communication. (Banks, 2008).
- **Multicultural Celebrations:** Incorporating holidays, art, or cuisine from different cultures into the curriculum promotes respect for diversity (Gay, 2010).
- **Social Outreach Activity:** Service-learning projects and social outreach programmes connect academic goals with community service. Teachers guide learners in volunteering (e.g., at shelters or clean-up drives) and prompt reflective journals or discussions about the people affected. (Billig, 2000).
- **Awareness Talks:** Inviting speakers who share unique life stories—such as immigrants, differently-abled individuals, or professionals from marginalized communities—enriches learners’ worldview. (Howard, 2010).

Relationship Skills

- **Jigsaw Cooperative Learning:** In this strategy, each student in a group is assigned a unique part of the topic to learn and teach back to their peers. Teachers design learning materials and monitor group dynamics to ensure equitable participation. (Aronson, 2002).

Healing Hearts: Social and Emotional Learning as the Path towards Emotional Well Being

- **Think-Pair-Share:** This structured discussion technique begins with individual reflection, followed by partner dialogue, and concludes with whole-class sharing. (Lyman, 1981).
- **Good Samaritan Board:** A classroom board to track kind acts among students to record and celebrate examples such as helping, complimenting, or including others. This cultivates a culture of appreciation and prosocial behaviour. (Caprara, 2000).
- **Team-Building and Group Trust Challenges:** Structured group activities like trust fall and trust walk are used to build cooperation and communication. Teachers lead reflections after each activity to discuss team dynamics and emotional responses. (Hammond, 2014)
- **Fishbowl Communication Exercises:** In a fishbowl, a small group discusses a topic in the centre while the rest of the class observes and takes notes on communication patterns. Afterward, roles reverse. (Brookfield, 2012).

Responsible Decision-Making

- **Ethical Dilemma Discussions:** Students are presented with age-appropriate moral dilemmas and asked to debate or write about what they would do. (Narvaez D. &., 2008).
- **Debates:** Age old activity where students evaluate options and come to solution by listing potential positive and negative outcomes of a given problem or situation. (Kuhn, 1991).
- **Decision Mapping:** Students draw visual maps outlining the short- and long-term outcomes of a decision. For example, a map for skipping homework might include immediate relief and long-term academic decline. (Zins, 2004).
- **Decision Diaries:** Learners keep diaries where they briefly record daily decisions (small or significant), reasons for choices, and reflections on results. (Bandura, 1997).
- **Civic Engagement Simulation:** Students participate in mock elections, model parliaments, or school policy debates, assuming roles as voters, legislators, or activists. These activities promote democratic thinking, responsibility, and understanding of civic duties in both school and society. (Torney-Purta, 2001).

CONCLUSION

The world today is moving aggressively towards an era of perfection and innovation and this high pace has left behind several set of individuals who have failed to adapt to these transformative trends. This is especially true in the case of children especially at their learning age may tend to be stressed by the heavily academic oriented environment that is devoid of any consideration for their socio-emotional development. This is where the role of SEL comes into play with the advent of new age classroom strategies to integrate and apply specific set of skills and tasks meant to equip children with emotional intelligence, resilience and interpersonal skills to navigate life. Schools, families, and communities must work collaboratively to create environments where social and emotional growth is valued alongside academic learning. Policymakers should support SEL through funding, research, and the development of standards that ensure all children have access to high-quality programs. Technology can also play a role in expanding the reach of SEL, offering innovative tools and resources to support children's development both in and out of the classroom.

Thus Social-Emotional Learning should not be considered just as a leisure or an add-on course, but a necessity for nurturing healthy, capable, and compassionate individuals within

the classroom environment and embracing SEL should not be treated as just an educational choice; it is a moral imperative for the well-being of our future generation.

REFERENCES

- Aronson, E. (2002). Building empathy, compassion, and achievement in the jigsaw classroom. In *Improving academic achievement* (pp. 209-225). Academic Press.
- Baikie, K. A., & Wilhelm, K. (2005). Emotional and physical health benefits of expressive writing. *Advances in psychiatric treatment*, 11(5), 338-346.
- Bandura, A. (1986). Social foundations of thought and action. *Englewood Cliffs, NJ, 1986* (23-28), 2.
- Bandura, A. (1997). *Self-efficacy: The exercise of control*. Macmillan.
- Banks, J. A. (2008). An introduction to multicultural education.
- Beck, R., & Fernandez, E. (1998). Cognitive-behavioral therapy in the treatment of anger: A meta-analysis. *Cognitive therapy and research*, 22(1), 63-74.
- Brackett, M. A., & Rivers, S. E. (2014). Transforming students' lives with social and emotional learning. In *International handbook of emotions in education* (pp. 368-388). Routledge.
- Brookfield, S. D., & Preskill, S. (2012). *Discussion as a way of teaching: Tools and techniques for democratic classrooms*. John Wiley & Sons.
- Caprara, G. V., Barbaranelli, C., Pastorelli, C., Bandura, A., & Zimbardo, P. G. (2000). Prosocial foundations of children's academic achievement. *Psychological science*, 11(4), 302-306.
- Dimock, M. (2019). Defining generations: Where Millennials end and Generation Z begins. *Pew research center*, 17(1), 1-7.
- Domitrovich, C. E., Durlak, J. A., Staley, K. C., & Weissberg, R. P. (2017). Social-emotional competence: An essential factor for promoting positive adjustment and reducing risk in school children. *Child development*, 88(2), 408-416.
- Duckworth, A. L., Gendler, T. S., & Gross, J. J. (2016). Situational strategies for self-control. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 11(1), 35-55.
- Durlak, J. A., Weissberg, R. P., Dymnicki, A. B., Taylor, R. D., & Schellinger, K. B. (2011). The impact of enhancing students' social and emotional learning: A meta-analysis of school-based universal interventions. *Child development*, 82(1), 405-432.
- Elias, M., Zins, J. E., & Weissberg, R. P. (1997). *Promoting social and emotional learning: Guidelines for educators*. Ascd.
- Felver, J. C., Celis-de Hoyos, C. E., Tezanos, K., & Singh, N. N. (2016). A systematic review of mindfulness-based interventions for youth in school settings. *Mindfulness*, 7(1), 34-45.
- Feuerstein, G. (2012). *The yoga tradition: Its history, literature, philosophy and practice*. SCB Distributors.
- Gay, G. (2018). *Culturally responsive teaching: Theory, research, and practice*. teachers college press.
- Gross, J. J. (2015). Emotion regulation: Current status and future prospects. *Psychological inquiry*, 26(1), 1-26.
- Hammond, Z. (2014). *Culturally responsive teaching and the brain: Promoting authentic engagement and rigor among culturally and linguistically diverse students*. Corwin Press.
- Howard, T. C. (2019). *Why race and culture matter in schools: Closing the achievement gap in America's classrooms*. Teachers College Press.
- Jones, S. M., & Bouffard, S. M. (2012). Social and emotional learning in schools: From programs to strategies and commentaries. *Social policy report*, 26(4), 1-33.

Healing Hearts: Social and Emotional Learning as the Path towards Emotional Well Being

- Koenig, K. P., & Rudney, S. G. (2010). Performance challenges for children and adolescents with difficulty processing and integrating sensory information: A systematic review. *The American Journal of Occupational Therapy*, 64(3), 430-442.
- Kuhn, D. (1991). *The skills of argument*. Cambridge University Press.
- Lyman, F. T. (1981). The responsive classroom discussion: The inclusion of all students. *Mainstreaming digest*, 109(1), 113.
- Narvaez, D., & Bock, T. (2002). Moral schemas and tacit judgement or how the defining issues test is supported by cognitive science. *Journal of Moral Education*, 31(3), 297-314.
- Narvaez, D., & Lapsley, D. K. (2008). Teaching moral character: Two alternatives for teacher education. *The Teacher Educator*, 43(2), 156-172.
- Schonert-Reichl, K. A., & Hymel, S. (2007). Educating the heart as well as the mind social and emotional learning for school and life success. *Education Canada*, 47(2), 20-25.
- Schonert-Reichl, K. A., Oberle, E., Lawlor, M. S., Abbott, D., Thomson, K., Oberlander, T. F., & Diamond, A. (2015). Enhancing cognitive and social-emotional development through a simple-to-administer mindfulness-based school program for elementary school children: a randomized controlled trial. *Developmental Psychology*, 51(1), 52.
- Seemiller, C., & Grace, M. (2016). *Generation Z goes to college*. John Wiley & Sons.
- Taylor, R. D., Oberle, E., Durlak, J. A., & Weissberg, R. P. (2017). Promoting positive youth development through school-based social and emotional learning interventions: A meta-analysis of follow-up effects. *Child Development*, 88(4), 1156-1171.
- Torney-Purta, J., Lehmann, R., Oswald, H., & Schulz, W. (2001). *Citizenship and education in twenty-eight countries: Civic knowledge and engagement at age fourteen*. IEA Secretariat, Herengracht 487, 1017 BT, Amsterdam, The Netherlands.
- Vygotsky, L. S., & Cole, M. (1978). *Mind in society: Development of higher psychological processes*. Harvard university press.
- Zenner, C., Herrleben-Kurz, S., & Walach, H. (2014). Mindfulness-based interventions in schools—a systematic review and meta-analysis. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 5, 603.
- Zins, J. E. (Ed.). (2004). *Building academic success on social and emotional learning: What does the research say?*. Teachers College Press.

Acknowledgment

The author(s) appreciates all those who participated in the study and helped to facilitate the research process.

Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

How to cite this article: Kishan, M. & Arulsamy, S. (2025). Healing Hearts: Social and Emotional Learning as the Path towards Emotional Well Being. *International Journal of Indian Psychology*, 13(4), 916-924. DIP:18.01.083.20251304, DOI:10.25215/1304.083