



## Social-emotional learning implementation and its impact on student achievement

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### ABSTRACT

This article investigates social-emotional learning implementation in various educational institutions and its relation to student's academic and non-academic achievements. Social-emotional skills are essential as they have long-term impacts that can be felt in multiple aspects of life. The method used is a systematic literature review conducted by collecting, evaluating, and synthesizing various literature related to the research topic. The variables studied include methods for developing social-emotional competencies, implementing social-emotional learning, and its relation to students' academic and non-academic achievements. Data were obtained from literature searches on findings related to social-emotional competencies conducted over the past five years. The research findings indicate that social-emotional learning is applied using various methods and approaches across different levels of educational institutions. It was also found that social-emotional learning positively influences students' academic and non-academic achievements. Students with good social-emotional skills generally have better academic scores compared to their peers who do not possess such skills. They also feel happier, have better mental health, have higher attendance rates in class, and are rarely involved in problems with their peers.

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### ABSTRAK

Penulisan artikel ini bertujuan untuk menyelidiki implementasi pembelajaran sosial emosional di berbagai institusi pendidikan dan kaitannya dengan pencapaian akademik dan non-akademik peserta didik. Keterampilan sosial emosional merupakan hal yang penting untuk dimiliki karena memiliki dampak jangka panjang yang dapat dirasakan dalam berbagai aspek kehidupan. Metode yang digunakan adalah tinjauan literatur sistematis yang dilakukan dengan cara mengumpulkan, mengevaluasi, dan mensintesis berbagai literatur yang terkait dengan topik penelitian. Variabel-variabel yang diteliti meliputi metode pengembangan kompetensi sosial emosional, penerapan pembelajaran sosial emosional, dan kaitannya dengan pencapaian peserta didik baik akademik maupun non-akademik. Data-data diperoleh dari pencarian literatur mengenai temuan-temuan terkait kompetensi sosial emosional yang dilakukan selama 5 tahun terakhir. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa implementasi pembelajaran sosial emosional dilakukan melalui berbagai metode dan pendekatan di berbagai jenjang institusi pendidikan. Selain itu juga ditemukan bahwa pembelajaran sosial emosional memiliki pengaruh yang positif terhadap pencapaian akademik maupun non akademik peserta didik. Peserta didik dengan keterampilan sosial emosional yang baik pada umumnya memiliki skor akademik yang lebih baik ketimbang rekannya yang tidak memiliki keterampilan tersebut. Mereka juga merasa lebih bahagia dan memiliki kesehatan mental yang lebih baik, memiliki tingkat kehadiran yang tinggi di kelas dan jarang terlibat masalah dengan temannya.

**Kata Kunci:** pembelajaran sosial emosional; pencapaian akademik; pencapaian non-akademik

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## INTRODUCTION

Social-emotional learning and emotional intelligence are closely intertwined and cannot be easily distinguished. Emotional intelligence refers to the ability to identify and regulate one's emotions, as well as understand and influence the feelings of others (Buşu, 2020). In contrast, social-emotional learning (SEL) is how individuals build emotional intelligence, cultivate empathy, and learn problem-solving skills. The concept of "emotional intelligence" was first coined in 1990 by Peter Salovey and John Mayer, but it became widely recognized thanks to Daniel Goleman's contributions in 1995. Goleman, in his book entitled *"Leadership: The Power of Emotional Intelligence"* emphasizes that an individual's level of emotional intelligence is a crucial factor in determining their career success and overall happiness. Social-emotional skills are a process to hone the competence to recognize self-identity, recognize and manage emotions, be responsible in making decisions, be assertive, and apply effectively to various social demands (Yustikarini et al., 2024).

Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) was established in 1994 through the collaboration of experts in fields like bullying prevention, prevention science, emotional intelligence, public health, and child development. They aimed to identify critical skills and competencies contributing to student success in school and life. These experts formulated SEL as a cohesive framework to integrate various efforts to address students' social and emotional issues. To connect policy, research, and practice in fostering students' social and emotional development, they established the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) (see: <https://casel.org/>).

According to CASEL's website (see: <https://casel.org/>), there are five essential elements of SEL: social awareness, self-management, self-awareness, decision-making, and relationship skills. Self-awareness entails understanding one's own emotions and fostering a positive self-image. Concerning this research, Goleman later highlighted four characteristics of emotionally intelligent individuals in his book. These traits include understanding one's own emotions (self-awareness), managing emotions effectively (self-management), navigating the emotions of others (social skills), and demonstrating empathy for others' emotional needs (social awareness). Therefore, it can be concluded that SEL is essential for developing higher emotional intelligence. This is further supported by research indicating that SEL contributes positively to developing social-emotional competence (Ahmed et al., 2020). Furthermore, competence in these areas increases students' academic achievement and positive behaviors (Alzahrani et al., 2019). Thus, it is essential to implement SEL not only inside the classroom but also beyond that.

After understanding the importance of SEL for students, knowing how to implement this learning is crucial to the program's success. SEL can be applied not only in academic environments but also in non-academic environments. Therefore, to achieve optimal results, a collaboration between the school and the student's parents is necessary (Mahoney, 2021).

This article will explore various SEL implementations in school and non-school environments and their correlation with student achievements, both academically and non-academically. It is based on the synthesis and analysis of 50 previous studies to understand social-emotional learning better. These fifty studies are from the last five years, ensuring their relevance for current use.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### **Social Emotional Learning**

Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) is the process by which individuals of all ages learn and apply the knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed to build positive identities, regulate emotions, pursue personal

and group objectives, demonstrate empathy, foster supportive relationships, and make thoughtful, caring choices. Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) emerged as a formalized framework in the mid-1990s, based on the understanding that emotional intelligence and social skills are integral to students' success in school and life. Various research fields, including emotional intelligence, child development, public health, and bullying prevention, shaped the concept of SEL. The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL), established in 1994, played a pivotal role in formalizing SEL as an educational framework by identifying critical competencies for emotional and social growth. The CASEL framework can be seen in **Figure 1** below.



**Figure 1.** CASEL Framework

Source: <https://casel.org/fundamentals-of-sel/>

CASEL's five core competencies are self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. Self-management involves controlling one's emotions and behaviors, including intrinsic motivation and setting goals. Social awareness focuses on recognizing others' emotions and social situations. Relationship skills focus on building and maintaining healthy relationships and effective communication. Lastly, responsible decision-making entails problem-solving and accountability.

CASEL systematically emphasizes creating equitable learning environments and coordinating practices across classrooms, schools, families, and communities to enhance students' social, emotional, and academic development. Successful SEL depends on implementing well-structured, evidence-based programs in the classroom and incorporating SEL into the school's curriculum, policies, and culture. Partnering with families and community organizations is crucial for encouraging youth participation and engagement and building supportive environments. These efforts also strengthen adult SEL skills and cultivate authentic partnerships with families and communities. Students, families, schools, and communities are interconnected within larger systems that influence learning and development. Inequities related to race, ethnicity, class, gender identity, sexual orientation and more are embedded in these systems and affect both student and adult learning. While SEL alone cannot address deep-rooted systemic inequities, it can provide a framework for examining and challenging unfair policies, fostering more inclusive environments, and uncovering and nurturing the strengths of all individuals.

## **Effectiveness and Measurement of SEL**

Since its emergence in the 1990s, SEL has been widely researched and implemented in various forms. Several studies have aimed to assess the effectiveness and measurement of SEL. One study, for example, reported the results of a randomized controlled trial involving 357 students from two schools who participated in the SPARK Pre-Teen Mentoring Curriculum. The findings showed that students who took part in the curriculum experienced significant improvements in knowledge of the content, communication, decision-making, problem-solving skills, emotional regulation, and resilience compared to students in the control group (Green et al., 2021). Whole-school SEL interventions have also demonstrated small but meaningful positive effects on social and emotional adjustment, behavioral adjustment, and internalizing symptoms (Goldberg et al., 2019). Students who participated in SEL programs reported notable reductions in anger, hostility, and rejection, displayed more positive emotions and empathetic behaviors, and showed more significant academic improvements compared to those who did not engage in SEL programs (Matsuba et al., 2021).

Measuring social-emotional competence can be done in various ways. It can be assessed indirectly through classroom instruction, formative assessments, surveys, and observational data (Allbright & Hough, 2020; Martinsone et al., 2020). When conducting these measurements, it's essential to consider the school culture and climate. Schools must focus on equity by addressing disparities among student groups, mainly about SEL and school climate measures. For instance, African American students often face differential treatment, which leads to lower expectations, increased disciplinary actions, and feelings of insecurity and disconnection. To address these disparities, schools should analyze data by student subgroup and develop targeted interventions. State leaders can promote equity by requiring data disaggregation and creating indicators highlighting differences in access or opportunity.

An improvement mindset is also essential when using performance data. Data should be seen as a tool for continuous improvement, not as a means for punishment. Schools and districts must adopt a systemic approach to ensure that data fosters progress rather than being used manipulatively or punitively. Using multiple measures to evaluate school performance offers a more comprehensive view of strengths and weaknesses but can also increase complexity. To support effective school improvement, state leaders should provide clear guidance on interpreting and using these measures. When used thoughtfully, measuring SEL and school climate can help foster environments where students feel safe and supported and are better positioned to succeed academically and socially (Allbright & Hough, 2020).

## **METHODS**

### **Research Design**

This research utilizes a systematic literature review (SLR) method. An SLR is a structured approach synthesizing existing research literature on a particular topic or area. It involves identifying, selecting, and critically evaluating research to address a clearly defined question (Cabrera et al., 2023). This method has advantages over other literature review methods because it has a precise data collection and analysis procedure and a more comprehensive coverage of a specific topic. Additionally, by analyzing all relevant literature, the SLR method can identify knowledge gaps in existing research and provide recommendations for future studies.

## Data Search

The literature search was conducted using Science Direct and Google Scholar. The first step is to formulate research questions. Three main topics need to be covered based on the research questions formulated. The first one is the SEL impact on academic achievement; the second is the SEL impact on non-academic achievement; and the implementation of SEL in school and non-school environments. The keywords that were used are combinations of the following terms “social-emotional learning”, “implementation”, “impact”, “academic”, “non-academic”, “achievement”, “student”, “effective”, “intervention”, “school”, “program”, and “curriculum”.

The next step is to identify criteria for literature selection. The selected articles were Scopus-indexed articles published between 2019 and 2024.

## Data Analysis

Three steps were used to analyze the data. The first step was to filter the articles based on the title, Q-index (Q1 & Q2), and year of publication. Then, all the selected articles were filtered again based on the abstracts. When reading the abstracts, consider the research objectives, types of research, research instruments, and the main results. The last step was to read the remaining articles thoroughly and ensure they could be used to answer the research questions.

Data analysis involves summarising findings from relevant articles and classifying them based on predetermined research objectives. The results will be examined to gain insights into implementing SEL and its effects on student's academic and non-academic achievements.

There are 15 articles discussing the impact of SEL on academic achievement, 12 focused on its effect on non-academic achievement, 15 addressing SEL implementation, one examining the impact of SEL on both academic and non-academic achievements, five exploring SEL implementation and its influence on non-academic achievements, and two articles that look at SEL implementation alongside its effects on both types of achievement. **Table 1** will provide the research details, including the study type and the data collection instruments used.

**Table 1.** Details of The Articles Reviewed

No	Characteristics	Result
1	Type of Research	
	• Quantitative	27
	• Qualitative	14
	• Mixed Method	9
2	Data Collection Methods	
	• Questionnaire	24
	• Observation	4
	• Test	17
	• Interview	6
	• Documentation	10
	• Focus Group	2

*Source: Research 2024*

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Out of the 50 journals found, mapping was conducted based on various criteria, including the research focus, research methods, and the country of origin. Based on the research focus, it was found that broadly, the research is directed toward discussing the implementation of social-emotional learning and its connection to students' achievements in both academic and non-academic fields. Learning is

implemented in schools and families, and most studies positively impact student achievement. Research methods used in the analyzed articles include mixed methods, quasi-experimental, SLR, phenomenology, meta-analysis, literature review, observation, interviews, group discussions, surveys, action research, and experiments. Based on the country of origin of the research, the studies come from Canada (3), Australia (5), Portugal (3), South Africa (2), Kenya (1), Malawi (2), UK (3), Spain (4), Netherlands (1), US (11), Singapore (1), Turkey (2), Ecuador (2), Colombia (1), Panama (1), Uganda (1), Italy (1), Finland (1), Germany (2), Belgium (1), Ghana (1), and New Zealand (1).

## **Implementation of Social-Emotional Learning**

Among the collected articles, 22 studies focus on implementing social-emotional learning (SEL). Most of this learning occurs in schools, while some happens at the university level, in family settings, and within orphanages. In school environments, SEL is implemented through various methods, including art projects (Coelho et al., 2021; Lee & Lee, 2021), games (Toh & Kirschner, 2023), storytelling activities (Stevahn et al., 2022), and by integrating SEL with literacy learning (Daunic et al., 2021). In addition, SEL can be incorporated into schools by introducing SEL-related vocabulary, setting class rules grounded in SEL principles, offering behavioral guidance, and utilizing poetry and personal greetings to enhance self-concept and promote positive interpersonal relationships (Lee, 2023). Research findings indicate that collaborative and active learning approaches are essential for teaching social skills. In contrast, individual or traditional learning models, such as teacher assessments and passive listening, are seen as less effective (Virtanen & Tynjälä, 2022).

Some educational institutions have developed programs for enhancing social-emotional skills, such as the Positive Attitude Secondary School (PASS) program, which focuses on improving high school students' self-perceptions, including emotional self-concepts, social, and academic as well as self-esteem (Coelho et al., 2021). Additionally, there are programs like Weekendschool in the Netherlands (Helms et al., 2021), Pisoton in Colombia (Cosso et al., 2022), "Me and My New World" in Panama (Araúz-Ledezma et al., 2022), and the CASEL Guide for Schoolwide Social and Emotional Learning in the United States (Meyers et al., 2019).

Besides skill-based social-emotional development curricula, teacher training is also a determining factor for successfully implementing social-emotional learning in schools (Doyle et al., 2023). Teacher training is crucial for several reasons in successfully implementing SEL in schools. First, educators need to understand the principles and practices of SEL to integrate them into their teaching effectively. Training helps them develop their emotional intelligence and social skills, enabling them to model these behaviors for their students. Furthermore, well-trained educators can cultivate a positive classroom atmosphere that supports emotional and social growth, creating the necessary conditions for SEL to flourish. Training also provides educators with strategies to integrate SEL into current curricula, seamlessly embedding it into the learning process. Moreover, trained teachers are better prepared to recognize and address their students' emotional and social needs, providing appropriate support and interventions. Encouraging teacher collaboration through training leads to a more unified approach to SEL across different classrooms and grade levels. Finally, ongoing professional development ensures that educators remain engaged with SEL practices, helping to sustain and enhance these initiatives over time. High-quality teacher training is crucial for establishing a school culture emphasizing social and emotional growth, leading to positive outcomes for students and the wider school community.

In early childhood education (PAUD), an assessment scale has been created to evaluate SEL skills in young children, utilizing input from teachers and parents as informants (Anthony et al., 2020). Research in Australia suggests that SEL should be integrated into educational institutions to prevent health issues (Blewitt et al., 2021). At the university level, efforts are being made to design, implement, and assess

strategies to enhance social-emotional competence in higher education training ([Gandía-Carbonell et al., 2022](#)).

Parents play a vital role in fostering a child's self-regulation development in a family setting. Interactions between parents and children and parental emotion regulation neurocircuits can significantly impact the formation of children's emotion regulation neurocircuits ([Kerr et al., 2019](#)). Through engaging in games with their children, parents can promote self-regulation skills from an early age ([Day et al., 2022](#)). In Malawi, parents contribute to social and emotional development by teaching positive behaviors and practicing empathetic listening. Furthermore, community-supported initiatives, such as after-school programs and faith-based organizations, help create an environment prioritizing children's social and emotional well-being ([Lee, 2022](#)). In addition to parental support, the backing of teachers and peers also plays a role in SEL ([Orson et al., 2020](#); [Forsblom et al., 2021](#)).

Factors that can enhance the implementation of SEL include innovation and responsiveness to lesson adaptability, local needs, and program acceptance. On the other hand, barriers include limited time for SEL lessons within the regular curriculum, challenges related to cultural transferability, and organizational structures ([Araúz-Ledezma et al., 2022](#)). Moreover, considering the local cultural context is crucial when implementing SEL ([McCallops et al., 2019](#); [Denston et al., 2022](#)).

### **Relation to Academic Achievement**

Eighteen articles were identified that address the link between academic achievement and social-emotional competence. The majority indicate that there is a positive correlation between the two. A positive relationship was found between an individual's social-emotional competence and achievement ([Wolf et al., 2021](#)). Students with positive attitudes tend to achieve better results ([Parker et al., 2021](#)). Research indicates that happiness is associated with improved performance, whereas negative emotions like boredom and anger are associated with lower cognitive task performance and decreased motivation ([Camacho-Morles et al., 2019](#); [White & Ingram, 2023](#); [Schrader & Grassinger, 2021](#)). The more children report feeling happy and the less anxious and bored, the better their performance is ([Raccanello et al., 2022](#)). High motivation positively impacts test results ([Heirweg et al., 2019](#)).

One aspect of social-emotional learning is self-management, where one of the indicators is perseverance. Wills and Hofmeyr researched primary school students from disadvantaged backgrounds in South Africa, and the results stated that students with perseverance significantly differ from their less successful peers in various dimensions, especially socio-emotional skills. Students with strong social-emotional skills, particularly perseverance, generally achieve better results regardless of social status ([Wills & Hofmeyr, 2019](#)). Additionally, perseverance is a significant predictor of reading success, even among students in schools with deficient levels of functionality ([Hofmeyr, 2021](#)). Students with good social-emotional competence experience fewer mental health problems, leading to better academic achievements than their peers ([Panayiotou et al., 2019](#)). They are reportedly more willing to learn and engage more in class activities. This indirectly affects their academic achievements ([Mondi et al., 2021](#); [Latorre-Coscolluela et al., 2022](#)).

Besides perseverance, achievement orientation as a self-management indicator has also positively impacted learning outcomes. Goal-oriented learners are more likely to use high-level learning strategies, good effort management, high self-efficacy related to mistakes, and adaptive handling of errors, which positively impact learning outcomes ([Reindl et al., 2020](#)).

As part of social-emotional skills, responsible decision-making also positively impacts students' academic achievements. Decision-making based on sound moral reasoning can boost academic achievement ([Corcoran et al., 2020](#)). The only study with different results is a research conducted in the

United States that examined the influence of the Positive Behavior Skills (PBS) program on English and mathematics skills and student attendance rates. Schools implementing PBS had higher attendance rates than non-PBS schools, but no significant difference was found in their academic achievements (Xia et al., 2022).

### **Relation to Non-Academic Achievement**

In terms of non-academic achievements, 20 articles address this topic. Research shows that social-emotional competence positively impacts non-academic outcomes. Among the five competencies assessed—emotional awareness, social regulation, tolerance, emotion regulation, and perceived competence for assertiveness—a positive correlation was found with autonomous motivation, prosocial behavior, and introjected regulation (Collie, 2022). Additionally, social-emotional skill enhances intrinsic motivation in learning (Latorre-Coscolluela, 2022). Students with effective emotional regulation are more likely to attend classes regularly and engage actively in learning (Santos et al., 2021; Xia et al., 2022; Doyle et al., 2023). Conversely, negative emotions such as anxiety can hinder perseverance (Tang et al., 2021). Developing emotion regulation skills in early adulthood can also help lower the risk of affective disorders and enhance health in general (Lopez & Denny, 2019). Moreover, having strong social and emotional skills can protect against cyberbullying in online environments (Marín-López et al., 2020).

Students with low social-emotional competence can benefit from participation in social-emotional learning intervention programs. For instance, the Positive Attitude Secondary School (PASS) program, which focuses on enhancing self-perceptions (including social, academic, and emotional self-concepts and self-esteem), showed statistically significant improvements in social self-concept and self-esteem.

The results revealed that students involved in the PASS program experienced significant improvements in social self-concept and self-esteem compared to those in the control group. Even so, no significant differences in the program's effectiveness were observed based on the levels of developer involvement. Overall, these findings affirm the efficacy of the PASS program in improving self-perceptions, indicating it is prepared for broader implementation (Coelho et al., 2021). Additionally, participants demonstrated improved social skills, increased willingness to learn, reduced feelings of isolation, fewer signs of depression, fewer emotional challenges, and greater levels of personal resources (Mondi et al., 2021). In general, intervention programs can help reduce behavioral issues, improve mental health, enhance self-regulation skills, and contribute to cognitive and socio-emotional development (Alvarado-Suárez & Acosta-González, 2022; Daunic et al., 2021; Ezmeçi & Akman, 2023; Malhotra et al., 2021).

Not all social-emotional learning programs produce consistently positive outcomes. The Young Potential Development program, a supplementary curriculum and professional development initiative for teachers designed to enhance social and emotional skills among youth in Quito, Ecuador, showed no significant impact on participants' socio-emotional skills or other related outcomes.

## **CONCLUSION**

Social-emotional learning (SEL) positively impacts various aspects, including academic and non-academic achievements, self-regulation, and socio-emotional well-being. SEL can be implemented in multiple contexts, such as schools, universities, family environments, and orphanages. SEL teaching methods involve various activities such as art creation, games, storytelling, and executive function training. Collaborative and active learning was more effective than traditional or individual learning models. Social-emotional skill development programs, such as Positive Attitude Secondary School (PASS), Weekendschool in the Netherlands, Pisoton in Colombia, and others, have proven effective in enhancing positive self-concept, interpersonal relationships, and academic achievements.



The significance of teacher training and parental support in promoting SEL is also highlighted. In the family context, parents play a vital role in fostering children's self-regulation, and their interactions with children can impact the development of emotion regulation neurocircuits. Furthermore, support from teachers and peers also affects social-emotional learning. Key factors for successful SEL implementation include innovation, adaptability, and acceptance of the program, whereas challenges consist of limited time within the regular curriculum and issues with cultural transferability. Additionally, it is essential to consider the local cultural context during the implementation of SEL.

In terms of academic success, a positive correlation was observed between performance and social-emotional competence. Students with positive attitudes and high motivation tend to achieve better results. Social-emotional skills such as perseverance and achievement orientation also strongly predict academic achievement. Non-academic achievements are also positively influenced by social-emotional competence, including intrinsic motivation in learning, active attendance, and engagement in learning. Social-emotional learning intervention programs such as PASS have proven effective in improving students' self-concept and socio-emotional skills.

However, it should be noted that not all SEL programs yield positive results, as seen in the case of The Young Potential Development program in Ecuador, which did not show a significant impact. This conclusion underscores the importance of designing and implementing appropriate SEL programs to achieve desired outcomes. A needs analysis is necessary to determine schools' issues and the best ways to address them.

## **AUTHOR'S NOTE**

The author states that there are no conflicts of interest related to the publication of this article and that the data and content of the article are free from plagiarism.

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