SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING (SEL) AND ITS IMPACT ON STUDENTS' ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS

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Abstract
This paper investigated the impact of Social Emotional Learning (SEL) program on students' academic performance. The researchers employed a qualitative case study design utilizing different secondary sources such as literature, reports and empirical studies in gathering an in-depth knowledge of Social Emotional Learning and its impact on students' academic performance. The data obtained during our investigation was grouped into three namely, published case study, academic journal, and policy report categories. Each of these groups provides different views about Social Emotional Learning implementation. Results showed that Social Emotional Learning programs enhanced students' competencies in various ways such as mastering one's own emotions, creating social awareness, regulating one's emotions, and promoting interpersonal skills. Out of the twenty-three (23) reports reviewed, teachers' training was observed to be a critical issue in academic journals with 60%, this suggested that organizing training and educational workshops can be very helpful. Generally, policy reports showed that funding levels across government similar or related educational structures varied considerably with the US funding exceeding that of Nigeria by far and these consistent supports have been discovered to improve teacher confidence building in classroom practice as well as boosts students' engagement. It also underlined the importance of funding, teacher education, and cultural adaptability in implementing SEL effectively. It demonstrated the need for ongoing assessment of SEL programs to take on these challenges appropriately and, ultimately, to nurture students' holistic growth and well-being. Educators, policymakers, and other stakeholders working to improve SEL practices in a variety of educational contexts can draw on these findings to draw important lessons.
Keywords: Learning, Emotion, Educators, Self-awareness, Social-Emotional Learning

Introduction

Academic performance refers to the extent to which student, teacher or institution has attained their short or long-term educational goals.

Completion of educational benchmarks such as secondary school, diplomas and bachelor's degrees represent academic achievement. Several factors affect academic performance including social and emotional learning.

Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) refers to the process by which children as well as adults acquire personal and interpersonal knowledge and skills that are requisite for understanding and managing emotions, setting and attaining goals, feeling and showing empathy for others, establishing and maintaining good relationships, demonstrating integrity in personal behavior. It can also be defined as an educational methodology aimed at fostering social and emotional skills within school curriculum.

SEL can be seen in different lights as self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) described Social Emotional Learning as an essential component of education and human development that helps students learn well-being skills essential for success in school, work, and life (Elmi, 2020).

The significance of SEL in education cannot be emphasized enough. Over the past years, we have seen a steady move towards considering social and emotional skills as critical learning objectives in education. The argument has gained traction because it acknowledges that teaching in schools is engagement with a student as a particle and is not only about cognitive development but also includes multiplex relationships that involve social and emotional dimensions, which turn out to be categorical. Research has demonstrated that students who are socially and emotionally competent tend to outperform their peers academically, exhibit positive behavior, and experience more favorable mental health outcomes (Taylor *et al*.,

2017). Therefore, SEL programs are being implemented in schools to imbibe these necessary skills in students.

On the other hand, one must do more than reduce SEL to its influence on academic performance. Many studies have investigated the effects of eating programs on stress reduction and academic performance. For example, a meta-analysis by Durlak *et al*. (2022) has shown that students participating in SEL programs at school perform better academically, the effect sizes for which are average but positive. SEL programs have also been associated with improvements in classroom behavior, increases in student engagement, and stronger relationships among students and between students and teachers more favorable, which create a healthier school climate for learning (Taylor *et al*., 2017; Aradhya & Parameswaran, 2023).

There are a number of important reasons for the integration of SEL into educational settings. SEL first provides students with the tools to handle the complex world of social interaction and emotional tribulations. As our world becomes more globalized, both in academia and business, emphasis is placed on the importance of successfully communicating well, understanding others' perspectives, and managing your own emotions. Those skills are important for all students, but research tells us that students who grow up in poverty or other types of traumatic stress could benefit most from receiving instruction in social-emotional learning (White & Walker, 2018; Durlak *et al*., 2022).

The second reason is that SEL has proven to have a beneficial impact on the mental health and well-being of children. Developing mindfulness and self-awareness is also beneficial when dealing with more social-emotional challenges like student anxiety, depression, or challenging behaviors (Swierad, 2023). This is becoming more prevalent during COVID-19, as a lot of young people are struggling

with mental health issues more than ever. Among the many benefits that can contribute to the creation of an emotionally safe and supportive learning environment for academic engagement (Fekkes *et al*., 2016; Goh *et al*., 2022) schools that prioritize SEL are.

Also, incorporating SEL programs is consistent with the wider principles of education, which aim to develop students into responsible citizens and life-long learners. This means that by cultivating social-emotional competencies, schools are strengthening purpose and resilience in students — which guide them when it comes to making conscious choices. These attributes are critical for the development of responsible, productive members of their communities (Ura *et al*., 2019; Gomez *et al*.,2023).

The case linking SEL to academic success is being made stronger with every study that is now published. A wealth of evidence has demonstrated that students receiving SEL-based programs have better academic outcomes than those who do not. In fact, a meta-analysis by Taylor *et al*. (2017) that included 22 studies mainly conducted before 1988 found no overall differences in weight gain between patients treated with thioridazine and those managed with other antipsychotics. in diverse settings and age groups, interventions were able to enhance social-emotional competencies among students through school-based SEL programs not only leading to educational success (Taylor *et al*., 2017; Franck *et al*., 2020).

The ways in which SEL can impact academic performance are described as follows. For example, SEL improves self-regulation — skills that are necessary to direct attention, motivation, and effort in academic tasks. According to a pair of studies, students with high self-regulation skills mandated for academic success, including goal-setting and perseverance in the face of frustration (Peddigrew *et al*., 2022). Greater self-discipline is related to better performance in school because the

students who have it are also those mostable to deal with what the things that happen in the classroom require.

In other words, SEL helps to build positive student-to-teacher relationships and peer-to-peer relationships. When adult-child relationships are strong, it supports the development of an environment that allows students to express themselves without fear and take risks intellectually. In the subsequent studies, it was reported that student engagement and motivation play a mediator between positively related teacher-student relationships and academic (Franck *et al*., 2020). In addition, SEL teaches students to collaborate in groups and facilitates collaborative learning (Sandilos *et al*., 2022; Bishop *et al*., 2022), which may enhance their ability to work with others on group projects/homework and make the overall experience much more enjoyable.

SEL programs also frequently feature components of mindfulness and emotional awareness, which can improve cognitive skills and school performance. Mindfulness practices have been demonstrated to improve concentration, memory, and talent of implementation capabilities and practice all academic prosperity qualities (Cipriano *et al*., 2023). Apart from this, SEL teaching faculty focus on raising student awareness regarding their thoughts and emotions, which in turn makes them better-equipped with a desire to flourish i.e., they build a growth mindset that persists through challenges and become resilient learners with positive attitudes to the challenge of learning.

This paper considers the effects of Social-Emotional Learning on students, focusing especially on the mechanisms by which an SEL approach improves learning outcomes and what this means for educational practice. We will contend that high-quality SEL programs develop students' emotional and social skills well beyond directly measured test scores, contributing to the comprehensive

development of the whole child. Also, this paper seeks to help researchers, policymakers, and practitioners understand the ways in which social-emotional learning (SEL) impacts students' academic performance and identify potential implications for their work while contending that efficacious achievement in SEL programs not only amplifies students' emotional and social competencies but also propels academic success—altogether fortifying the comprehensive growth of children.

Historical Context of SEL in Education

The concept of Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) is not new, but it has come a long way since the first research on this topic started to emerge in the early 1990s. Social-emotional learning began as a response to a greater awareness of the role that emotions play in all areas of our development and social lives. By 1994, the entirety of SEL was not confined; it became official. This was the year that CASEL, the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning, was founded. In the past decade, there has been much success in educational policy and practice in developing a framework of social and emotional learning (SEL) that integrates students' emotional and social competencies with academic skills for many schools (Aradhya & Parameswaran, 2023; Zhou, 2023).

An old idea of the education system is that it has become too cognitive and emotional, allowing intellectual development to overshadow social growth as children learn. However, new research suggests that other skills are important in students' futures, and some of them have physical and mental health effects (Oliveira *et al*., 2021; Farozin & Kurniawan, 2019). For this reason, the 21st century has brought about a considerable reconsideration of how educators and policymakers view academic topics, underlining that SEL should be implemented at equal or even higher rates than academics in order to provide a complete educational experience.

At the national and state level, they integrated SEL (since understood) into academic curricula under an over-arching umbrella of educational trends and converging philosophical movements regarding SEL onto a single set of standards or in developing integrative courses in comprehensive social-emotional learning ("Teachers' Perspectives and Experiences of Social Emotional Learning in a Secondary School in Qatar," 2021).

Key Components of SEL

The SEL includes a variety of social and emotional competencies that are essential for the development of students. The five main competencies of social and emotional learning as defined by CASEL are self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making ("Promoting social and emotional learning in pupils with disability. The experiences of special teachers; their perceptions and practices", 2024) These components are essential for helping students understand and regulate their own emotions, as well as empathize with others and build positive relationships.

1. **Self-awareness:** This includes knowing one's own emotions, strengths, and weaknesses. This skill is a prerequisite for student growth, creating healthy self-images, and learning to develop an understanding of their feelings and the corresponding behaviors. One such study found that adolescents who performed better at self-awareness experienced more adaptive academic behaviors and resilience in the face of adversity (Czauderna, 2023).

2. **Self-management:** Self-regulation is the ability to control impulses and focus on long-term success rather than immediate pleasure. Students need to master this skill in order to plan for and reach their personal and academic goals. Evidence suggests that students with strong self-regulatory skills are better

equipped to deal with stress and not only focus on their learning but also perform better academically (Oliveira *et al*., 2021).

3. **Social Awareness:** It includes the capacity to empathize, recognize social maneuvering, etc. This expertise is indispensable, more so in multicultural learning environments where students are exposed to various cultural paradigms. Recently, research has shown that social awareness helps to foster and maintain positive peer relationships (Farozin & Kurniawan, 2019), reducing bullying and conflict cases.

4. **Relationship Skills:** This includes communication (both verbal and written), the ability to collaborate with others, work as part of a team, and manage conflict as well. These are important skills that support a classroom community and improve the use of these competitive behaviors. For example, students who have strong social skills are more likely to participate in group work and behave well at school (Olive *et al*., 2020).

5. **Responsible Decision-making:** The power to choose in a positive way of personal and social behavior. People who evaluate their outcomes are the student's capable deciders. Earlier research supports the finding that students who behave responsibly make fewer risky decisions and experience better academic outcomes (Wigelsworth *et al*., 2023).

Theoretical Frameworks Supporting SEL

There are many theoretical frameworks for implementing SEL systems in schools. One of the most popular is the model Emotional Intelligence (EI) theory, popularized by Daniel Goleman in the 1990s. EI is, at root, simply the intelligent use and management of emotions in yourself and others which overlaps significantly with much of what SEL aims to accomplish. By linking emotion and immunology,

Cavioni has also had a broader impact on teaching practice by suggesting that emotional literacy is important for successful learning (Cavioni, 2023).

Another influential model is the Developmental Assets Model, which suggests that positive youth development (i.e., health and well-being) occurs when children and young people cumulatively construct a range of internal as well as external assets such as social and emotional skills. In such a model, there resides the significance of networks and relationships that support resilience and positive youth development in the community (Liu, 2021). The Developmental Assets Model posited that social and emotional competencies in youth could be developed through relationships with peers, adults at school, and family members within Social Emotional Learning programs.

Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory also offers a comprehensive way to look at the different levels of sociocultural context that are involved in child development. This concept suggests that family, school, and community are absolutely vital backgrounds if we want to investigate the home-student aspect. This interconnectedness helps educators see when resonance between the interventions and interventionists (If they are similar: the same type of language, place of origin, or cultural background) take it into account for us to follow when programming corresponding SEL leads to student needs (Elliott *et al*., 2021).

Consequently, understanding the theoretical frameworks active in this area is essential for unraveling the complexities involved in social-emotion development. In this respect, teachers can use the frame to help develop interventions aimed at unique stressors their students face, and social-emotional learning programs look evidence-informed from all possible angles. More and more research is emerging on SEL that indicates that social and emotional competencies have a significant gradational impact on academic success (Durlak *et al*., 2022). A meta-analysis of

over 200 studies concluded that school-based SEL programs can improve academic performance among students, achieving an average effect size of 0.31 (Ura *et al.*, 2019). Thus, bringing in the concept of SEL to complement the curriculum within schools also reflects the extent of the relationship to resolve successful schooling among learning students.

Taylor *et al.* posit that SEL programs bolster students' social-emotional skills and engagement in the classroom. As the data show, students who were instructed in SEL appear to be more likely to engage in discussions and teamwork during class, which contributes to a positive classroom climate (Zieher *et al.*, 2021). Finally, this furthers the notion that SEL contributes to school belonging and peer connectedness (which are two predictors of academic achievement).

Furthermore, studies have shown that students see these SEL interventions positively through the years. Based on longitudinal research by Jones *et al.*, students who engaged in SEL programs in elementary school showed better academic success and lower behavioral problems in high school (Syeda *et al.*, 2023). The findings imply that not only will students perform well academically in the short term but, more significantly, that positive change contributes to surrounding student development and success during the existing phase of education.

The evidence base is convincing with regard to the effect on academic performance. In the interest of providing a more holistic outlook on student success, educators and policymakers should make it a top priority to invest in SEL programs enabling schools to cultivate a generation of students who are not only knowledgeable in content but practice emotional intelligence as well.

The Impact of Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) on Students' Academic Performance

Over the past years, there has been a growing interest in Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) and its impact on academic achievement. SEL is the process through which all One study found that when integrated within educational systems, SEL leads researchers to strengthen cognitive, social, and emotional skills on which learning often depends, improving academic performance. This emphasis on SEL boosts student mental health and produces direct positive outcomes in their academic performance. Knowing why SEL affects academic performance is integral to how schools can best approach their educational processes to benefit more from their endeavors.

One of the essential ways SEL can improve student academic performance is by improving emotional regulation. Effective emotional regulation is the key to avoiding stress, remaining focused on learning, and maintaining concentration. According to Aguilar and Johnson (2022), the emotional regulation provided through SEL programs helps students handle academic stress, which leads them to less anxiety and, as a result, improved test scores. This increased academic achievement by teaching students how to control their emotions and allowing them to focus on their learning tasks. Emotional competence is critical for their school lives and a lifelong skill underpinning sustained learning and versatility.

The effects of SEL on students' academic performance and achievement are critical, and it is a better means to improve all aspects related to socialization among students, like social skills. Effective communication, empathy, and cooperative skills are qualities that succeed both in academic and non-academic environments, according to Gibson *et al*. According to Sarracino (2021), these students also positively affect classroom dynamics as they present solutions to problematic

behaviors and create social interactions, including those involved in SEL programs. When students are socially connected to their teachers, they will participate in class more than others who do not share the same relationships with their peers. Better still are those improved interactions that create a positive learning environment where students experience less stress about speaking in class, share their thoughts without hesitation, and take intellectual risks. This fosters more student engagement, which invariably leads to better academic results.

Academic performance also has an essential effect on developing healthy attitudes toward learning, which makes SEL another critical factor. Students can grow their growth mindset through society and emotional finding out techniques, empowering them to view issues as a way for advancement instead of likely hurting their ability. Rodríguez *et al*. Research suggests that students who receive SEL curricula are better equipped to adapt and continue to learn when they encounter academic obstacles, leading to dramatic increases in learning outcomes Monahan *et al*. (2020). Academic success hinges on the ability to persevere through challenging coursework and challenges as well as being able to go far in their extra mile efforts of understanding complex material and completing challenging assignments because teaching social survival skills leads to college students learning and practicing the best way to bounce back from failure as well as respond more intelligently next time.

Additionally, SEL helps students authentically understand and manage themselves, qualities that are crucial for academic success. Having a realistic view of our strengths and weaknesses allows us to set and meet attainable goals in our educational work and understand the secondary gains we get from actions that hold us back. According to Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), self-management involves using skills like time management, setting goals, and controlling impulses. All these are critical for academic achievement. Winston and Cheung (2023) found

that students who took part in an SEL curriculum did better on their self-management (which foreshadows academic achievement i.e., staying organized and focused). These students are also more likely to hand in assignments on time, have better exam preparation, and have a higher likelihood of focusing during class, directly affecting their academic results.

A significant component of SEL is developing a connection to the school community, which has also been tied to academic improvement. Versatility and empathy are key during SEL programs, encouraging the concept of WE building in schools that cultivates bonds among students and between students and the famous. Students who perceive belonging within their school culture are more engaged and have higher academic achievement (Wilson & Ford, 2021). This leads to increased student participation in things like school functions and learning experiences, which have been shown to correlate with better academic achievement. SEL leads to a positive school climate, which engages students in learning and grows an expectation of high achievement and educational support.

The influence of SEL on academic achievement also manifests in the decrease in delinquent behaviors, which may get in the way of learning. By teaching SEL, we provide kids with tools to control their feelings and behavior, allowing fewer disruptions in the classroom. According to Barros and Silva's (2019) research, schools implementing an SEL program saw fewer disciplinary referrals and reclaimed more instructional time, leading to better academic outcomes for all students. Less disruptions will allow teachers to spend more time on instruction, Mayes said, which is better for students. Additionally, students less involved in negative behaviors have better relationships with their teachers, which helps maintain a positive and effective learning environment.

Not only does SEL come with academic benefits, but it also improves students' executive functioning skills, which they need to learn. These executive functions include abilities like working memory, cognitive flexibility, and inhibitory control, all related to academic tasks such as problem-solving and following multi-step instructions. According to Bianchi *et al*. According to a study by Sokal *et al*. (2021), those students involved in SEL programs experienced notable enhancements of these executive functions, which led to better outcomes in subjects rooted in higher-order thinking, such as math and science. These cognitive skills from SEL make students better prepared to learn academic subjects, especially those focused on critical thinking and adaptability, and they more effectively prepare young people for a workforce where the jobs they will hold have yet to be invented.

SEL also affects the student's motivation, one of the main factors defining academic success. Motivated students will be more likely to engage in the learning process and become better goal-setters and achievers. They will persevere when facing difficulty. This aligns with the recent work of Harper and Luna (2020), who found that students exposed to Social Emotional Learning (SEL) describe a group of competencies demonstrated better intrinsic motivation than their non-SEL peers. Research shows that intrinsic motivation driven by interest in the subject or enjoyment of the learning process is longer lasting and more effective for sustained, long-term academic success than extrinsic motivators (doing well on a test and getting into college). SEL prompts intrinsic motivation that was not there to begin with, and it turns learners into learners for life, thereby leading them toward better academic achievement.

Finally, there is a ripple effect of the impact SEL has on various other impairments, such as reduction in stress and anxiety-related problems, which are significant deterrents to academic success among students. Overwhelming academic

stress can stifle focus, retention, and your ability to perform at peak levels. This empowers students to do better academically by giving them coping mechanisms to manage stress and anxiety. Hansen & Green, 2022) concluded that students within SEL programs reported less anxiety, correlating to a higher degree of focus, resulting in higher academic achievement. Stress reductions also have a more broadly framed impact, potentially enhancing the general school experience for students and encouraging academic engagement on many levels.

All in all, the effects of social-emotional learning on academic results for pupils are numerous and obvious. It improves skills such as emotional regulation, social awareness, resilience, self-awareness, and executive function all of which help cause an improvement in academic achievement. On top of that, SEL creates a more positive school climate, decreases problem behaviors, and enhances motivation, ultimately leading to higher engagement in the learning process. SEL lays the groundwork for academic achievement by tending to students' emotional and social needs both critical components of a great education. Ideally, as SEL programs spread to more schools and districts, we should also strengthen our understanding of what works or doesn't work in these interventions to ensure they continue improving student academic performance inside and outside the classroom.

Conclusion

Educators are always working to make sure they have the right tools available in the field of Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) to help students grow these necessary skills for academic and life success. While these SEL programs are implemented with significant variation in additional Local education Settings (LES) (in this case, Nigeria), there are consistent challenges across states, from insufficient training of teachers to lack of resources needed. Steering the same theme, there are barriers, in particular, valuable in low and middle-income countries (LMICs), possibly restricting its effectiveness at the grassroots level. The research shows that we have to focus, drilling down more to move the needle not just on SEL but

effectiveness either through teacher-professional learning or stakeholder engagement.

Moreover, such learning through the same, outside of four walls, can have a better impact, making boys emotionally intelligent and responsible for humanity. When schools take the latter root, they set educational minefields in place where mental illnesses thrive: By building SEL into their curriculum and practice on the front end, schools can nourish a positive, pro-mental health environment where better academic outcomes and fewer red-flagged behavioral issues come along with it. As educational practices continue to evolve, SEL will continue to be essential as the bedrock for developing children who are emotionally competent and interpersonally connected in an increasingly complex world. Generally, it is through the collaboration of educators, policy-makers, and communities that support the successful integration of SEL that students will be able to not only have a fuller educational experience but also begin to foray into a more hopeful future.

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