

Social and emotional learning and academic achievement in Schools

The inclusion in 2018 of “Personal, Social and Learning to Learn” as part of the eight key competences for lifelong learning has underlined social and emotional education as a key priority area in education. However approaches across countries today are diverse and fragmented and one of the arguments against SEL is that it takes precious time away from academic learning in an already overcrowded curriculum. From this perspective, SEL may be seen as having little currency in the face of pressures to increase measurable educational outcomes and the demands of the labour market. It is not surprising that many teachers find it difficult to promote SEL and student wellbeing, either due to time constraints or the lack of support from both the school management and parents alike, who are often primarily focused on academic results.

Recent research, however, shows that this superficial dichotomy of mind vs heart, academic vs social and emotional learning, does not hold. It shows that academic and social and emotional learning are **inextricably linked** and that SEL supports academic learning and enhances academic achievement. This is also supported by research from neuroscience which shows that learning is a relational and emotional process and that classroom relationships and emotional processes impact on how children learn.

Research evidence



students exposed to SEL scored 11 points higher in academic achievement than students who did not receive SEL

Durlak et al (2011)
review of over 200 studies on SEL



a focus on SEL, in contrast to classroom management, was the only component associated with an improvement in academic motivation and engagement

Korpershoek et al. (2016)
meta-analysis of 54 classroom management/SEL interventions



SEL has a positive effect on reading, mathematics and science

Corcoran et al (2018)
review with 40 studies on SEL



SEL is a strong predictor of school grades across students' background, age and cities, with persistence and curiosity strongly related to higher performance

OECD (2021)
study in 10 countries with 11 and 15 year olds

Wiglesworth et al (2020)
review of 34 studies on SEL



3.5 years following SEL programming, SEL students' academic performance was 13 percentiles higher than non-SEL peers

Wiglesworth et al (2020)
review of 82 studies on SEL

What schools can do

facilitates the development of competences, such as academic self-efficacy, problem solving skills, persistence and working collaboratively with and learning from others

helps learners to feel safe and connected to school and learning, building closer relations with teachers and peers, with sense of belonging associated with academic motivation and achievement

helps learners develop positive learning skills such as maintaining attention, controlling impulses, task completion, goal setting, and critical and analytical thinking

reduces misbehaviour and time spent on classroom management, thus creating more time for quality teaching and learning

How to actively promote academic learning through SEL?



Academic learning may be promoted through a **SEL curriculum** delivered through a skills-based approach, which includes such key competences such as self-awareness of strengths and needs, self-regulation, positive academic self-concept and self-efficacy, goal setting, good problem solving skills, attention, making good choices and responsible decisions, and working collaboratively. To acquire a shared understanding and a common language on the “Personal, Social and Learning to Learn” competences EC developed in 2020 the LifeComp, a conceptual and non-prescriptive framework that can be used as a basis for the development of curricula and learning activities fostering personal, and social development. The framework describes nine competences that are structured in 3 intertwined competence areas: personal, social and learning to learn.



The SEL curriculum may be effectively **implemented by classroom teachers** and other school staff, thus ensuring that the requisite competences become integrated and embedded in the other content areas of the curriculum and the daily life of the classroom.



Curricular SEL needs to be complemented by a **classroom climate** based on caring and collaborative relationships and positive classroom management, with opportunities for learners to observe and practice social and emotional skills in their daily classroom and school life. A sense of security, relatedness and collaboration, and the consequent sense of belonging to the classroom, are related to positive student academic and social outcomes.



Teachers need **adequate and continuing education** both in delivering SEL in the curriculum and in creating a positive and caring classroom climate with a particular emphasis on relationship building, conflict management, positive behaviour management, and constructivist, experiential, culturally responsive and collaborative pedagogies.

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RESOURCES AND FURTHER READING

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- European Commission (2022) *European School Education Platform: TOOLKIT*
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