Strengthening Social and Emotional Learning in Hybrid Modes of Education: Building Support for Students, Teachers, Schools and Families

A UNESCO-IBE Discussion Paper

Federal Foreign Office

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Foreword

The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated existing and glaring educational inequalities when abrupt closures disrupted learning globally. The urgency for including Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) in school curricula became evident as systems grappled with the multifaceted expectations and needs of learners, teachers, and families. Beyond mere knowledge acquisition, the focus shifted to further recognizing individuals as human beings that participate in society with a full set of competencies. A plethora of innovative responses emerged virtually overnight, creating new opportunities, and shifting priorities. Within this paradigm, the well-being of individuals within home or school-based learning communities took a central role.

SEL, a relatively new term but a deeply rooted aspect of education, is gaining recognition globally. Defined as the process through which individuals manage emotions, empathize, build relationships, and make responsible decisions, SEL is increasingly seen as a core element of education. In a world facing health crises, wars, and natural disasters, SEL emerges not only as a healing tool for pandemic-induced trauma but also as essential for addressing persistent challenges in education. However, it is not often included explicitly in curricula, and this is a situation that the UNESCO-IBE wants to redress.

This Discussion Paper delves into the pivotal role of SEL in the global educational transformation, aiming to magnify its impact on social, economic, environmental, and personal dimensions. It spotlights six critical topics, showcasing global experiences in mainstreaming SEL, especially in the context of the COVID-19 aftermath. Experts from diverse professional roles and academic disciplines related to education contribute perspectives, focusing on socio-emotional and hybrid learning evolution across regions through case-based analysis.

The report aims to inform and inspire change-makers globally, urging the design of robust policies aligned with UNESCO's Futures of Education framework. This call to action aligns with UNESCO-IBE's Hybrid Education and Learning Assessment (HELA) flagship initiative, advocating for flexible and diverse models of hybrid learning. The goal is not only to support learning during crises but also to formulate sustainable educational strategies that align with the transformative vision outlined by the UN Transforming Education Summit (TES).

On the essential considerations of SEL discussed here, UNESCO-IBE has worked hand in hand with Networking to Integrate SDG 4.7 and SEL Skills into Education Materials (NISSEM). NISSEM is a network comprising international academics and practitioners that advocate for integrating Target 4.7 themes and related social and emotional skills into textbooks and educational materials, particularly in resource-constrained, conflict-affected, or post-conflict reconstruction settings. In this paper, NISSEM has joined forces with UNESCO-IBE to update its historic work on comparative pedagogies and curriculum design, development and revision, to build momentum for the much-needed inclusion of SEL into the learning process at all levels.

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Abbreviations and Acronyms

CASEL	Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning
CLC	Community Learning Centre
CBT	Cognitive Behavioural Therapy
CSCL	Computer Supported Collaborative Learning
CVT	Control-Value Theory
HELA	Hybrid Education Learning and Assessment
LMS	Learning Management System
LTLT	Learning to live together
NISSEM	Networking to Integrate SDG Target 4.7 and SEL Skills
NUSR	New Ukrainian School Reform
MOE	Ministry of Education
PIRLS	Progress in International Reading Literacy Study
PISA	Programme for International Student Assessment
RCT	Randomised Control Trial
RELI	Regional Education and Learning Initiative
SAFE	Sequenced, Active, Focused and Explicit
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SEL	Social Emotional Learning
SIDS	Small Island Developing States
STEPS	Strategies to Tackle Examination Pressure and Stress
TES	Transforming Education Summit
TIMSS	Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study

Acknowledgements

NISSEM[1]

Summary

This Discussion Paper focuses on the essential role of social and emotional learning (SEL) in the global movement to transform education and amplify its social, economic, environmental and personal impacts in a rapidly changing world. It explores how the mainstreaming of SEL into educational policies and practices can contribute to realizing future visions of education that are flexible, reflective, innovative, and impactful. Specifically, the Paper focuses on six topics that, as a whole, reflect global experiences in integrating and implementing SEL in its various forms both during and in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. Its main objective is to animate discussion on how to integrate a SEL dimension in hybrid modes of teaching and learning. This introductory overview presents the overall purpose and scope of the Paper, defines its underlying concepts and introduces the topics brought to this forum through the lenses of a diverse group of educators from Africa, the Arab States, Asia, Europe, and Latin America.

Purpose, audience, and scope

The contours of education shifted suddenly in 2020, when the rapid spread of COVID-19 forced schools in 190 countries to close fully or partially, impacting at its height nearly 1.5 billion students. Under this global health crisis, prompting sudden school lockdowns, most countries had no contingency plans to enable students to continue learning, which not only threatened to interrupt their progress academically, but also to impact their emotional and social development. With little or no warning, students, teachers, and administrators were compelled to engage in some form of remote or distance teaching, learning, and assessment while grappling with complex health and social issues. In low-resource education systems, where most schools already lacked the capacity to provide the bare essentials of in-person learning, many institutions simply shut their doors, leaving previously enrolled students with little hope of returning in the foreseeable future (Moscoviz & Evans, 2022). This would add to the already alarming numbers of a perennially underserved group, the estimated 258 million children and youth who were officially out of primary and secondary school before the onset of COVID-19 (UNESCO UIS, 2018). With considerable sums of international aid shifting to health and other prominent issues, the prospects for reducing the numbers of out-of-school children and youth remains bleak unless creative, well-funded solutions are considered, adapted and implemented.

While school closures due to COVID-19 were widespread, their impact was uneven across countries - for example, in lower- and middle-income countries, schools remained closed for an average of 115 days. In some cases, lockdowns of up to two years occurred. While national educational responses to the pandemic varied, all systems were fraught with obstacles, related partly to the persistence of the mindset that prioritizes in-person, brick-and-mortar schooling above all other types of learning. Other barriers stemmed from lack of resources, both human and material, and weak or nonexistent infrastructures to support home-based learning.

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[1] Networking to Integrate SDG 4.7 and SEL Skills into Education Materials. This section was written by NISSEM co-conveners Jean Bernard, Aaron Benavot, Margaret Sinclair, Andy Smart, and James Williams.

The eventual adoption of new remote and hybrid models, including situationally responsive combinations of remote and in-person learning, gave rise to a shift in roles for most students, teachers, schools and families. Increasingly, learners were expected to become more autonomous and to rely on media and digital materials as catalysts for learning. While hastily conceived as emergency responses, many of these recently instituted measures have animated policy discussions ever since. The search for promising practices in both well-resourced and resource-constrained systems, despite serious implementation challenges and uneven student access, continues unabated. Additionally, rising concerns over students' health and well-being, triggered by conditions of forced isolation, emotional distress and other pandemic-related factors, have crystallized the urgent need to embed social and emotional learning (SEL) into all aspects of the curriculum while extending focused support to students, families, and teachers in need.

The urgency of the need for SEL in the school curriculum was made painfully clear as systems and schools sought to address the complex needs of learners, teachers and families not only as recipients of knowledge and technical skills, but as human beings. Therefore, among the questions to be asked in the post-pandemic period: What hybrid practices have specifically included SEL in their fundamental conceptual design? How are SEL competencies such as empathy, emotional self-regulation, and autonomy understood as a part-and-parcel element of SEL? How can SEL be assessed using hybrid model tools? What kinds of support for teachers and families can be offered? In a world threatened by recurring health crises, ongoing wars and natural disasters, SEL is increasingly viewed as critical not only for addressing and healing the trauma of Covid-19, but also for helping education systems to cope with the entrenched challenges of providing quality education to all learners, even in 'normal' times. This Paper seeks to stimulate reflections and action-oriented discussions among policy makers and practitioners. It specifically asks: What can we learn from contextually sensitive and SEL-inclusive innovations in remote and hybrid models, initiated during periods of school closure, which have continued to evolve since schools have reopened?

The six contributions to this Discussion Paper draw upon the unique perspectives of experts working in different professional roles and academic disciplines related to SEL and hybrid learning. They focus on the evolution of socio-emotional and hybrid learning in different regions, with particular focus on how the pandemic sparked radical departures from traditional 'bricks and mortar', school-based learning. These reports are intended to inform and inspire change-makers around the globe to design robust policies and capacities both to support learning in times of crisis and also to develop longer-term educational strategies in line with UNESCO's Futures of Education framework and the goals of the UN Transforming Education Summit.

While the Paper focuses on SEL and hybrid learning approaches in formal education settings during school closures and the return to in-person schooling, there are clear implications for social and emotional dimensions of education in the broadest sense, regardless of where, how and by whom it is accessed. We trust that the combined experiences and reflections contained herein inspire systemic change in curricular design, learning resources and teaching practices to make quality education more accessible, equitable and inclusive. The Paper concludes by inviting change-makers to share their visions of what should happen next—not only to prepare for future crises by means of traditional and emerging technologies, but also to embed related lessons that the pandemic has highlighted: that shocks to the system reveal the nature of the system; that resilience is based on strengthening connections among all actors within the system; and that improving equity carries with it the potential for improving the quality of the system overall.

What is social and emotional learning (SEL) and how does it vary by context and over time?

A growing recognition

Social and emotional learning (SEL) as an explicit component of the formal school curriculum is a relatively new phenomenon, albeit one with deep historical and cross-cultural roots. Defined generally as a process through which people of all ages learn to manage their emotions, feel empathy for others, establish and maintain healthy social relationships and make responsible decisions, SEL is increasingly recognized and embedded in teaching and learning internationally. For many education stakeholders, SEL is not only an essential component of the implemented curriculum, but is the 'real core' of education (Shriver & Buffett, 2015). Indeed, the 'success of education depends almost entirely on the strength of the social and emotional dimensions of the relationships' (Ibid) that are nurtured in purposefully inclusive learning environments. Yet, in many national education systems, SEL is not an explicit component of the official intended curriculum nor is it addressed through planned teaching interventions. Therefore, learning outcomes related to SEL are rarely assessed. Instead, SEL is facilitated only through the 'hidden curriculum' and transmitted silently through the 'grammar of schooling' (Tyack & Cuban, 1997).

The discourse around SEL competencies in education intensified in the curriculum of North American schools in the early 1990s, partly in response to alarming dropout rates and weak academic performance (Elias et.al., 1997). Early interventions drew on previous educational practices such as 'character education' and 'whole child development' with the aim of developing a more systematic and comprehensive framework for action. The umbrella term, SEL, was minted when educators and scholars from diverse fields—mainly from psychology, public health, child development, and neuroscience—convened in 1994 as the [Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL)](). CASEL's aim was to promote SEL in schools, identifying key skills and competencies they felt students need to acquire in order to become knowledgeable, responsible and caring adults.

Since the turn of the 21st century, modern iterations of SEL in formal education have gained traction in a wide variety of Western as well as non-Western contexts. For example, the New Ukrainian School Reform initiative launched in 2016 introduced an 'ideology of change', stressing values education for the purpose of "bringing up a well-rounded and happy personality with competencies to succeed in the 21st century" (New Ukrainian School Reform [NUSR], 2016, p. 18). The Regional Education and Learning Initiative (RELI) in Eastern Africa promotes the teaching, learning and assessment of values and life skills throughout the region. Examples of how SEL has been conceptualized, contextualized and practiced in Japan, Brazil and Peru, among others, are featured in Volume III of the [NISSEM Global Briefs (2022)]().

There is, among researchers and practitioners alike, a growing recognition of the deep connection between SEL concepts and skills as viewed through the lenses of 21st century educators, and the aims of traditional education across the globe, including in pre-industrial and indigenous communities. For example, Mosha (2020) describes the primary goal of teaching and learning among the Kagga people of Kenya as a process designed to educate the whole person in mind, body and spirit, while Hewage (1986) characterizes the main objective of education in Asian cultures prior to colonization as promoting the welfare of both the learner and the society: "Knowledge that had no relevance to desirable human behavior was not given priority in the content of learning" (p. 44). In a different location and across several centuries, Fafunwa (1974) identifies the development of character, respect for elders and promotion of cultural heritage, among the holistic goals of formal education in Nigeria.

Many educators view a SEL-focused curriculum as a driver of increased quality and inclusion. Approaches to interpreting the original CASEL framework are as diverse as the cultures where it has been implemented under various names and through multiple channels (Smart & Sinclair, 2022). They include, for example, infusion into content across the curriculum, classroom interactions 'added on,' and teachers' pedagogical toolkits designed to help students concentrate, manage their emotions and treat each other with kindness and respect. Different lists of specific SEL skills and how they should be categorized have emerged over the years, but most frameworks include at least these three. In designing activities and materials for SEL, research supports practices that are SAFE–that is, Sequenced, Active, Focused and Explicit. Using these principles, students know what skills they are learning and how the skills apply to their own lives (Durlak et al, 2011).

When supported by school leaders, families and communities, structured and systemic SEL can play a key role in creating school cultures that are inclusive, healthy and caring, which in turn foster students' full and active engagement in learning. A growing body of research confirms that, rather than detracting from students' cognitive development, SEL substantially boosts academic performance while nurturing their well-being and helping them acquire the skills necessary for respecting diversity, resolving conflicts and building strong social relationships (Durlak ibid; UNESCO MGIEP, 2020).

Connections across time and space

The range of competencies falling within the 21st-century definition of SEL varies widely, as do the names used in different settings. Since SEL is taught by reference to real-life interactions, it often surfaces as 'life skills', for example in East Africa and India, each of which has its own range of definitions and approaches to integrating and assessing the prioritized skills into successive levels of teaching and learning. Given the importance of norms and values, the terms 'values education' and 'character education' may be adapted in some settings. In countries affected by conflict, various initiatives may continue to fall under the term 'learning to live together' (LTLT), established in the Delors Report (Learning: The Treasure Within, 1996) as the fourth pillar for education in the 21st century, which prioritized skills such as conflict resolution and practicing respect for others as pathways for building peace, both locally and globally.

In other contexts where preparing for the world of work is an explicit goal, SEL may be labeled as generalized 'soft skills', as contrasted with specific vocational skills. The concept of '21st century competencies' is often employed in such settings. More recently, the application of SEL to societal and environmental challenges as well as personal well-being has gained attention under the notions of 'transformative education', 'transforming education', and education for sustainability and global citizenship. Another widely used term, 'transversal competencies', emphasizes the need to prioritize the teaching and acquisition of SEL skills and their application across diverse content and subject domains in the formal curriculum.

Descriptions of SEL in geographically and culturally diverse contexts suggest considerable conceptual flexibility, allowing for differentiation in how SEL competencies are understood and prioritized. For example, in some contexts the focus is on inculcating traditional ways of being in and interacting with the world, while others conceptualize SEL as a path toward developing mindsets that promote global peace, intercultural communication and sustainable development. As societies change and the world faces new challenges and opportunities, it is likely that SEL applications will flex, evolve, and be known by different names. What they will likely have in common is their role in expanding and transforming educational purposes beyond foundational literacy, numeracy and technical skills. Other hopeful impacts of a more robust role for SEL remain open questions; for example, will the integration of contextually grounded SEL at all levels of education be a significant factor in building 21st century skills? And, will the inclusion of SEL practices usher in a new era in which learning is no longer assessed solely in the form of high stakes examinations?

In resource-rich countries, where SEL has become more widely practiced as a component of the primary and secondary curriculum since the 1990's, scholars and researchers from multiple fields – including psychology, public health, child development and neuroscience – have banded together to identify key skills and competencies that are necessary for students to flourish in school and life. Even in countries facing huge challenges due to ongoing conflicts, poverty, and weak financial capacity, SEL has gained wide recognition as a driver for improving education quality and inclusion. Up until the abrupt closure of schools during the COVID-19 pandemic, various initiatives for integrating SEL into basic education—for example, India's Happiness Curriculum, SEL Kernels in Brazil, and Colors of Kindness in refugee camps in Bangladesh—made significant headway in both high- and low-resource settings as well as in migrant communities across the globe. These initiatives, along with many others that have sprung up during and in the wake of the pandemic, have established SEL as an ever more critical dimension of learning for life and work in the 21st century.

What is hybrid learning and what is its potential for transforming education in times of crisis?

A big umbrella

Broadly defined, hybrid learning encompasses any combination of learning interactions that take place both face to face in a fixed physical space, and remotely, at a distance between source—a teacher, a programme, a video, a book—and participants. The fixed space may be a dedicated school building, a community learning centre (see UNESCO's CLCs), a place of worship, a boat or a shady space under a tree. On-site facilitators may be parents, older siblings, community elders or formally trained teachers. Interactions mediated at a distance may be synchronous, between a live teacher or facilitator and learners, or asynchronous, making use of any form of learning media, including printed texts, pre-recorded television or radio episodes, and computer-based learning modules (on- or off-line). This broad definition of hybrid learning reflects the complex learning realities that a diverse array of technologies have made possible (Harte & Howarth, 2022). Designs may include, for example, different configurations of 'blended learning', the locus of which is in-person and which requires access to broad-band Internet and personal, high-capacity laptops; but also includes distance education models that rely on combinations of print and less sophisticated technologies, such as educational radio and television. It also applies to recent, post-pandemic models that use a combination of computers and audio-visual equipment to virtually 'bring' remote learners into an in-person, teacher-facilitated class.

Older technologies, older models

Prior to the widespread availability and use of computer-aided instruction, several long standing and successful models of hybrid learning have existed. These include combinations of intermittent periods of on-site gatherings and lessons delivered at a distance through radio, television, and/or course packets complete with assignments to be returned to a central hub. Many of these models were initially designed to serve isolated, nomadic or semi-nomadic populations, such as the Australian 'Schools of the Air', which originated in the 1950's using two-way radio, satellite telephones and correspondence to reach primary and secondary children in remote farming and ranching communities spread over thousands of square kilometers. Teachers conducted daily live sessions remotely with small groups of connected students, who spent most of their learning time with print materials, guided and supported by parents and older siblings and visited intermittently at home by tutors for additional academic and psycho-social support.

Emergent but less widely available models

Current models of hybrid learning have continued to evolve from purely remote solutions into various combinations of in-person and distance learning. These are essentially outgrowths of earlier prototypes practiced mainly in higher education contexts, adapted to primary and secondary education during school lockdowns. For example, in technology-rich contexts with reliable infrastructure, hybrid classrooms allow for a mix of students who are physically present to interact with those joining the class virtually. In blended learning environments, students spend designated periods of time participating in video meetings via Zoom or similar platforms and the rest of the time completing teacher assigned tasks, which may include, for example, textbook reading, listening to lectures, writing, or searching the Internet for specific, topic-related information. Thus far, hybrid learning designs have been largely driven by classroom-based pedagogies and assessment tools rather than by their potential to foster a fundamental shift in the delivery of education. In all cases, hybrid learning models are enabled and shaped by the availability of more or less sophisticated technologies. These are essentially new generations of earlier technology-enabled prototypes—from Gutenberg's press to smartphone apps—and depend on the skill of designers and teachers to deliver them.

The COVID-19-induced disruption of student learning in well-resourced systems has been widely documented (Moscoviz & Evans, 2022; Kohfeld, Soland & Lewis, 2022). The resulting 'learning loss' is partly viewed as the perceived failure to prepare remote and hybrid learning opportunities to replace in-person schooling. The sudden switch to remote learning in the early days of the pandemic was not designed to help students isolated at home to 'keep up' with the prescribed pace of building foundational literacy and numeracy skills, nurture healthy relationships, and achieve academic outcomes. At the other end of the spectrum, many school systems lacked the infrastructure and capacity to provide accessible alternatives at all. The technologies and strategies that began to take hold as a result of these disruptions have inspired forward-looking approaches aimed at serving all learners, including those in unreached or underserved populations. From the perspective of making quality education for all a reality, rethinking the delivery of education, including through remote and hybrid models, has only just begun.

What is the added value of integrating SEL in addressing the global education crisis and transforming education for sustainable futures?

Facing new realities

Among the discomforting realities that the pandemic brought into focus is the fact that approaches to online learning, hastily conceived when schools were forced to close, have deepened existing learning disparities, partly due to inequalities in digital literacy, and in access to computers, appropriate software and the internet. At one end of the scale, learners were able to simply power up their laptops to connect to digitally-savvy teachers working in schools with readily available technical support. At the other end, children living in crowded homes with intermittent electricity, shared devices, patchy phone service and no Internet connection were often left waiting for the delivery of appropriate learning materials, to be collected and returned at regular intervals. With or without access to digital media, learners with disabilities and from underserved communities and neighborhoods were particularly hard-hit, having lost access to daily structured interactions with well-trained and caring teachers. In even more dire circumstances, as in the case of Uganda (Athumani, 2022), school doors were summarily shut with no assurance as to when they would re-open, and with no alternative plan of any kind in place.

A second reality arose when teachers and students were in isolation. In many contexts around the world, school closures and subsequent social distancing measures had a devastating impact on children's and young peoples' mental health. Even for children in well-resourced schools, who had ready access to advanced technologies and full parental support, prolonged isolation intensified emotional distress for many, resulting in an increased prevalence of depression, anxiety and hopelessness, especially among adolescents (CDC, 2020; 2022). Likewise, for many, the return to in-person schooling has not been a smooth transition, even as schools have struggled to put adequate health and counseling services into place.

Innovative efforts were deployed by teachers and counselors to address students' well-being during the pandemic. These ranged from allocating a period of time at the beginning of a daily Zoom meeting to inviting students to express their emotional state on a scale of happy to sad on a 'mood meter' app, to assigning collaborative team projects in which students would need to be in regular contact with each other in preparing the required output. Some teachers, with access to transportation, made pre-arranged daily circuits to the homes of their students, waving and holding signs to boost children's mood and strengthen families and maintain the all-important 'human connection', while in rural areas buses were converted to vans delivering lessons, books and meals. In countries without reliable digital infrastructure, lower tech solutions were quickly put into place including radio, television, and mobile phone networks. For example, in India, 51,000 WhatsApp groups for sharing text, voice and video among students, teachers and parents were created within two months of school lockdowns (Barron, Rodriguez & Cobo, 2021). Recognizing the growing distress experienced by students during the pandemic, some schools prioritized SEL over academic expectations and encouraged teachers to make weekly phone calls to students and parents (Miller, Castañon & Filiss, 2022). These, along with many other initiatives for supporting children's social and emotional health during the early phases of the pandemic, offer a rich repertoire of valuable resources for building back better in the post-pandemic era.

Embracing new opportunities

Both older and newer models of hybrid learning offer unique opportunities for strengthening and integrating social and emotional learning within their methodological designs. The in-person component offers opportunities to grow both emotionally and socially through teacher-led, explicitly SEL-oriented activities.

Activities may also be student-led, supporting student autonomy and intrinsic motivation, and where teachers adopt a student-focused attitude and interpersonal tone (Reeve & Cohen, 2021). Some hybrid models encourage the building of caring relationships between teachers and students' families. In the updated version of Australian Schools of the Air, for example, teachers travel long distances to pay regular physical visits to students and their families, thereby establishing close personal ties and channels for ongoing support. A similar model designed to train teachers in the Caribbean Small Island Developing States (SIDS) in the use of online tools and resources for engaging their students during the pandemic enabled them to introduce hybrid learning solutions, including professional development for teachers in the use of digital tools. In some 'flipped classroom' arrangements, more in-person time is devoted to classroom discussions and building social relationships while individual learning activities take place remotely. Flexible schedules allow students in need of additional support to access help from professional tutors and counselors as needed.

In planning and realizing hybrid learning models, as with innovations for integrating SEL into in-person schooling, context matters (Smart & Sinclair, 2022). The design and choices of media can only facilitate quality learning when it is clearly and openly responsive to social and cultural priorities of local communities. There is no one-size-fits-all construct for hybrid learning that can respond to the educational aims, pedagogical practices and environmental aspects that shape national and local school cultures. But approaches that are capable of adapting to changing circumstances are best poised to become successful tools for transforming education.

Advancing global imperatives for transforming education

Equitable access to quality education has long been understood in the international community as pivotal for the achievement of shared goals and aspirations, including those aimed at promoting peace, human rights and environmental sustainability. The UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, adopted by all Member States in 2015, presents a global blueprint for peace and prosperity. Targets, mechanisms and accountability processes are detailed for achieving the 17 inter-related UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030, with the overall aim of eliminating poverty, improving health and education, reducing inequality and mitigating the effects of climate change. Goal 4, the 'global education goal', calls on countries to "ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all". Of the 10 Targets elaborated under Goal 4, Target 4.5 prioritizes elimination of gender disparities in education and ensuring equal access to education and training for vulnerable groups, including persons with disabilities, indigenous persons and children in 'vulnerable situations.' Target 4.7 challenges systems to create curricula, training and materials that equip all learners with the "knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development", and further specifies areas under the sustainable development umbrella as those that promote (1) human rights, (2) gender equality, (3) cultures of peace and non-violence, (4) global citizenship, and (5) appreciation of diversity and of culture's contribution to sustainable development. Progress toward achieving all 17 SDGs and 169 Targets had been sluggish and uneven up until the onset of the pandemic (2019 SDG Report), with persistently high numbers of out-of-school children, low levels of proficiency in foundational skills and growing educational disparities. Together, these factors led many to proclaim that we had entered a full-blown global crisis in education well before the onset of the pandemic (e.g., World Bank, UNICEF)

Of the approximately 1.5 billion children impacted by the school closures, the 2020 SDG Report on SDG 4 estimates that 500 million were excluded from the distance-learning solutions put into place over the following two years. The great majority of children and young people without access lived in the world's poorest countries. As the report points out, only 11 percent of households in Africa owned a computer, contrasted with 78 percent of European households. Low levels of digital literacy among teachers and parents effectively put learning out of reach for those who were already struggling. Distance learning solutions that did not rely on computers, such as the use of solar-powered radios, television, physical books and smartphones, fared somewhat better in countries where these innovations were successfully put into place, often by coalitions involving UN agencies, education ministries and private enterprises. By the time students and teachers returned to school, the world was in full agreement that the education crisis had grown far worse, having reversed progress in access, quality and equity that had been achieved up to that time.

UNESCO-IBE's Hybrid Education and Learning Assessment (HELA) initiative has framed and informed the continued development of flexible, diverse models of hybrid learning, each with the built-in capability of adapting to changing circumstances. The constant feature in the design of these models is that they combine aspects of remote and face-to-face modalities for learning and are intended to "... articulate and offer a robust set of competencies and knowledge that makes explicit the why and what to teach, which are common and binding for all educational centres (IBE 2021)." This aligns HELA with UNESCO's broad vision for transformative education and casts the multiple forms of hybrid learning as optimal tools capable of integrating social and emotional learning in ways that enhance the health and well-being of learners while supporting their cognitive development, socialization and skill acquisition for work and life.

Looking ahead, a dazzling array of global initiatives as well as national and local education stakeholders hope to further energize and extend remote and hybrid solutions emerging during the COVID-19 pandemic to previously excluded populations. In the words of UNESCO's International Commission on the Futures of Education (2021), transforming education means "making good on the unfulfilled promise to ensure the right to quality education for every child, youth and adult and fully realizing the transformational potential of education as a route for sustainable collective futures." Thus far, the Commission warns that digital technology without a clear purpose does not bring about transformation. Indeed, poorly designed technology routinely excludes underprivileged groups, including women and linguistic ethnic and racial minorities and children with disabilities. The challenge to designers of hybrid learning models that incorporate new digital media is to harness the power of technologies to empower and connect learners and teachers in a common effort to transform education in ways that will contribute to a peaceful and sustainable future.

Similarly, the UN Summit on Transforming Education (September 2022) issued a call to action to assure 'quality public digital learning for all.' To do this, it is necessary to use three keys: (1) high quality, curriculum-relevant content, (2) strengthened capacity and (3) connectivity. Reaffirming digital learning as a public good, the Gateways Initiative aims to establish and support national platforms for learning that will be 'free for all users and complement and support teaching and learning that happens in school.' While SEL is not specifically mentioned, the Summit's overarching lines of action emphasize that curriculum must build the knowledge, skills, values and attitudes to be resilient, adaptable and prepared for an uncertain future while contributing to human and planetary well-being and sustainable development. To fulfill the promise of Agenda 2030, education systems are charged with 'building back better' in ways that do more than reinstating outdated, unequal and underperforming structures and processes.

Cross-cutting themes

In conceptualizing this project, NISSEM and IBE identified three cross-cutting themes for the Discussion Paper:

- The roles of teachers, learners and families in hybrid learning contexts: how their relationships have changed during the pandemic and will doubtlessly continue to evolve in the future, and expanded roles and new expectations for teachers to quickly learn how to design and manage hybrid strategies.
- Assumptions about desired competencies of learners in terms of SEL skills such as self-regulation, autonomous thinking and action, empathy, problem solving, and other SEL and life skills, including learning to cooperate and collaborate in teams on projects using accessible technologies.
- The impact of emergent models of hybrid learning on teaching, learning and assessment: what positive lessons have teachers, students and parents learned from their experiences with hybrid education, and what are the implications of remote instruction for the social dimensions of learning?

Reflections on country and regional experiences

In their reflections on the efficacy of infusing an SEL dimension, contextually defined, into remote and hybrid learning models that began to emerge during the pandemic, each contributor to this Paper was asked to focus on one of six overlapping topics:

1. **In The social and emotional dimension of learning: Evidence, challenges and new directions**, Reinhard Pekrun, David Putwain and Michael Wigelsworth take a broad and deep look at the conceptual frameworks underpinning curriculum-based SEL programmes, particularly those that have emerged since the 1990's and more recently in culturally and geographically diverse contexts around the world. The comprehensive explanations, multiple examples and related empirical evidence on the 'why' and 'how' of embedding SEL into school curricula draw the reader into a deeper understanding of its growing prominence, especially in response to the impact of the Covid-19 school closures on students' mental health and general well-being. Following a detailed description of the different models of remote and hybrid learning, Dr. Pekrun invites policy makers to consider the full range of possibilities for using educational technology to enhance SEL in online and remote formats and proposes ten guidelines for making it happen.

2. **How to strengthen SEL during the post-COVID era: Strategies, experiences, challenges and lessons learned,** by Michelle Guzmán, brings key insights from Latin America gained from experiences with different forms of hybrid learning that were introduced during school closures. Strategies for promoting various combinations of in-person and remote (both synchronous and asynchronous, whether using new or old technologies that show promising avenues for twinning quality and equity) are discussed, acknowledging challenges and showcasing opportunities for integrating and assessing this dimension more systematically into remote, hybrid and in-person forms of teaching and learning.

3. Based on visits and interactions with over 100 schools during the three years of the pandemic, Kai-Ming Cheng's contribution, **Social and emotional learning under the pandemic: The Hong Kong story**, draws upon various local examples in Hong Kong as a proxy for describing shifts in the ways school curricula are expanding in communities across China to address social and emotional development of learners and their families. The paper also highlights the general professional principles that underpin the development of these innovations along with the technology that helps to facilitate them. These grassroots initiatives undertaken at school and community level as steps toward a 'quiet education reform' with SEL at its centre.

4. In **Building Caring communities: How to support the expanding roles of teachers**, Maha Bali candidly shares experience from her own practice as a teacher educator as well as from her role as a public scholar and mother during the school closures in Egypt. In her contribution to the Discussion Paper, she offers models of practical strategies for integrating SEL into remote and hybrid learning environments that can be adapted to multiple educational levels and in contexts with variable access to technology. Based on these experiences, Dr. Bali lays out a set of generic guidelines for enhancing in-service teacher training and pre-service education curricula in preparation for future emergencies as well as over the longer term.

5. **Leading the way: Exploring the vital role of school management in fostering social and emotional learning** by Maurice Nkusi, describes the expanding roles of school managers as promoters of the well-being and welfare of all members of a learning community. Specific actions that can be taken, such as the creation and maintenance of safe and healthy learning environments, encouragement of positive relationships, providing resources to support at-risk learners and building strong relationships with families and communities are discussed. Illustrations of how management has supported the integration of SEL into school and community settings in South Africa and Namibia are included, along with a vision for how artificial intelligence (AI) and the fourth industrial revolution (4IR) can align with SEL to inform education management strategies and roles in the near future.

6. **Mainstreaming of SEL and well-being in hybrid modes of education: Insights from India**, by Aakanksha Agrawal, Sreehari Ravinranath, and Vishal Talreja, of Dream a Dream, brings into focus the multiplicity of innovative ways SEL has been applied and supported during the pandemic in India, including in poor communities during the height of the crisis. These experiences underscore the ongoing imperative to overcome disparities in access, connectivity and digital skills and to address challenges facing teachers, for example the need to support teachers' own well-being, especially during times of unprecedented change. Lessons learned from pandemic-era innovations are critical to the development of hybrid modes of education that respond more effectively and equitably to the needs of all learners.

The way forward

Each of the six contributions summarized above suggests ways that education policy makers, school leaders, teachers and parents can seize opportunities for positive change created during the COVID-19 pandemic. These opportunities are driven by two major forces – first, the momentum built around recognizing the need to address students' well-being alongside their cognitive development; and second, the rapid expansion of new distance and hybrid learning models made possible in part by emerging technologies. While the pandemic is no longer at its peak, the need to integrate social and emotional learning, contextually understood and applied, has become even more pressing, not only as an end in itself, but as a cornerstone for building healthy, peaceful societies.

It would be unwise to view SEL and hybrid modes of education only as part of a temporary response to school closures. Rather, new approaches and models that were put into place during the closures stirred new interest in the potential for applying these to the challenges to education systems that continue to loom in a post-pandemic world. In this sense, the pandemic of 2020-2023 was a 'wake-up call' for education. The big question is: 'How can we ensure that SEL is successfully and equitably channeled into educational methods, materials and media in ways that support and expand quality learning for all?' The answers, drawn from the experiences and recommendations of the six contributors, fall into three categories:

1. Fully integrate SEL into hybrid modes of education

Contributors recommend aligning SEL approaches with major policy aims and ensuring full integration, visibly and concretely, into and across the existing curriculum, not just as a stand-alone subject. They see an urgent need to systematically embed SEL in profusion of remote and hybrid models, both high and low tech, that were born of necessity during the school lockdowns. In designing such interventions, contributors note that SEL is not a universal concept or programme; it needs to be adapted to different educational contexts and cultural traditions. As such, conceptual frameworks, strategies and priority skills are best developed, selected and prioritized locally, regionally and/or nationally. A comprehensive plan for integrating SEL into hybrid models of education should support continuous upgrading of relevant teachers' skills, including community outreach and digital literacies, as well as attention to educators' own social and emotional growth. It should also develop new, evidence-based approaches to assessing SEL and its impact on the other dimensions of learning that feature low-stress methods and tools. Based on the observation that most SEL happens outside the formal school curriculum, especially in family and community settings, contributors also suggest that such a comprehensive plan should include training and support for promoting and assessing SEL outside school walls.

2. Build on pandemic-era innovations

Remote and hybrid modes of learning, including those making use of sophisticated technologies and plentiful learning resources, were largely based on existing pedagogical models, conventional outcomes and assessment tools.

The general trajectory of innovation in both resource-rich and resource-constrained systems during this period offered a kind of laboratory for trying out new ways of activating SEL through varied models and for raising awareness of this dimension of education. Based on the rich diversity of experiences reported in this collection of papers, contributors strongly recommend that teams involved in the design of emergent models seize the momentum created by these innovations to further strengthen and systematize SEL in and across the curriculum.

Pandemic-era strategies for embedding SEL in remote, hybrid and blended learning can inform the design of platforms and integrated tools to promote teacher and student autonomy, individualized pacing, and collaborative learning. Applied to data gathering and analysis, such tools can also be deployed to measure individuals' progress toward SEL outcomes, reach out to parents and monitor the social climate of the learning space.

3. Ensure equitable access

In virtually all countries where schools were fully or partially closed during the pandemic, it was widely reported that inequalities in access to quality learning soared almost overnight, in many cases completely shutting out learners with disabilities and those living in less affluent communities. Contributors suggest that this is something of a paradox: during the same period that new online learning platforms meant to reach out to previously excluded learners were being developed at warp speed, only schools and schools and families with reliable broadband connectivity and the required hardware were able to gain access. While the infrastructures needed to make use of online digital tools may be a longer-term project in low-resource systems, SEL-infused innovations in remote and hybrid learning models using existing technologies, including radio, television and print can be supported and expanded to broaden access. The consensus among contributors is that emergent models of hybrid education grounded in the pandemic experience can also be repurposed to address the learning needs of previously underserved students–including those with disabilities, overage and socially excluded children, refugee and migrant populations and adult learners. For this to happen, governments must be committed to increasing their education budgets, building and strengthening connectivity, particularly in rural and impoverished areas, and enabling teachers to diversify their pedagogical skill sets to better respond to the needs of all learners.

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Abstract

Since the 1990s, scientists and educators have developed curriculum-based programmes to promote social and emotional learning (SEL) in the classroom and for all students. These programmes aim to prevent mental health problems and to facilitate the development of self-regulatory, emotional, and social competencies that help students to pursue a healthy, fulfilling, and productive life. By developing these competencies, the programmes also aim to support students' academic learning and the attainment of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals at regional, national, and global levels. In this policy document, we first review conceptual frameworks underpinning these programmes and students' SEL more generally, as well as related empirical evidence. We then discuss the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on students' SEL and consider possibilities to use educational technology to enhance SEL in online and remote formats. Based on these considerations and the existing evidence, we conclude by proposing guidelines that policymakers can consider for promoting effective SEL.

Conceptual foundations

Classifying social and emotional competencies

Social and emotional learning' is an umbrella term that has been used to cover a broad variety of competencies. In education, the classification proposed by the Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL) in the US in the 1990s may be best known. This conception comprises five major categories, denoted as self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. As defined by CASEL (2020), each of these categories includes 7-9 more specific competencies (40 overall). For example, self-awareness is defined to include "integrating personal and social identities"; "identifying personal, cultural, and linguistic assets"; "identifying one's emotions"; "demonstrating honesty and integrity"; 'linking feelings, values, and thoughts'; 'examining prejudices and biases'; 'experiencing self-efficacy'; 'having a growth mindset'; and 'developing interests and a sense of purpose'.

However, there are various alternative labels for social and emotional competencies and their development, such as 21st century skills, non-cognitive skills, social learning, emotional education, personal education, character education, etc. There are also various alternative frameworks for grouping these competencies (for an overview of conceptions used in EU countries, see Cefai et al., 2018). For example, Cefai and Cavioni (2014) proposed a 2 x 2 taxonomy that takes up the categories proposed by CASEL but organizes them more systematically. This taxonomy distinguishes between self-related and social competencies, on the one hand, and awareness versus management, on the other. Crossing the two dimensions yields four categories (self-related awareness and social awareness, self-management and social management), with each category comprising various single competencies.

In the OECD's Study on Social and Emotional Skills (see Kankaraš and Suarez-Alvarez, 2019), five 'big domains' of competencies ('skills') are distinguished, including:

- task performance: self-control; responsibility; persistence
- emotional regulation: stress resistance; emotional control; optimism
- engaging with others: energy; assertiveness; sociability
- open-mindedness: curiosity; creativity; tolerance
- collaboration: empathy; co-operation; trust

In addition, the OECD conception considers self-efficacy and achievement motivation as separate competencies.

When comparing these various frameworks, two problems become obvious. First, some competencies are included across several frameworks, such as emotion regulation and empathy. Others are less frequently considered, even if they are arguably no less important (e.g., open-mindedness; Wigelsworth et al., 2020, 2022). Second, as aptly argued by Wigelsworth et al. (2020), there are various jingle-jangle fallacies with these conceptions. Often the same term is used to denote different constructs (a jingle fallacy). An example is self-management which has been used in a variety of different ways, from executive functions in working memory (e.g., cognitive inhibition and flexibility) to employment of learning strategies. Alternatively, different terms are used to denote the same construct (a jangle fallacy), such as self-concept, self-efficacy, and expectancy of success denoting a belief in one's abilities (Marsh et al., 2019). From the heterogeneity of constructs, it follows that the terms used in this field cannot be taken at semantic face value. Rather, to understand the terms, and educational programmes that employ them, it is necessary to attend to their concrete usage. For an in-depth understanding of specific competencies, it is useful to consider what they mean within a given theoretical framework and to inspect the measures that are used to assess them.

Understanding the development of social and emotional competencies

It is important to understand that different social, motivational, and emotional competencies are intertwined in human development, and that their development is closely linked to academic learning and the development of cognitive competencies. To illustrate these relations, we will use emotional development as an example, and will employ the control-value theory (CVT) of emotions as a theoretical framework. CVT explains the origins, functions, and regulation of emotions. In its original version, the theory focused on achievement emotions, such as enjoyment of learning, hope for success, fear of failure, shame about a failed exam, or boredom during class (Pekrun, 2006, 2018). The current version also explains other types of emotions, such as epistemic emotions (i.e., emotions related to knowledge generation, like surprise, curiosity, and confusion), social emotions, and health-related emotions (Pekrun, 2021; Pekrun and Goetz, in prep.; Pekrun et al., in press).

According to CVT and the existing evidence, emotions and psychological wellbeing cannot be explained by objective circumstances alone. Rather, it is personal perceptions of the circumstances that shape our emotions. For example, people's happiness is not simply determined simply by their objective economic situation. It is the interpretation of this situation relative to the situation of others, and relative to one's aspirations, that determines happiness (e.g., Kahneman et al., 2006). Similarly, the objective demands of an exam are not sufficient to explain students' anxiety before the exam—rather, it is students' appraisals of the difficulty of these demands, and the personal relevance of the exam, which determine whether they are anxious or not. Across different emotions, two types of appraisals are especially important: (1) perceptions of one's control over one's own activities and their outcomes, and (2) perceptions of the value (or importance) of these activities and outcomes. Different types and combinations of these appraisals instigate different emotions and impact emotional wellbeing.

For example, students can enjoy learning if they feel competent to master the material (high control) and if the material is interesting (high value). If they feel unable to understand the material, or are disinterested, learning is not enjoyable. When preparing for a test, students may be fearful if they doubt whether they can pass it (low control) and if the test is deemed important (high value). If success is subjectively certain, or if the test does not matter, then there is no reason to be nervous. Similarly, teachers can enjoy teaching a class if they feel competent to manage the class and deem the class important, and they may be afraid of teaching if the class is important but seems unmanageable.

Students' and teachers' control-value appraisals are direct antecedents of their emotions. Factors within the person and the environment that shape these appraisals also influence the emotions (Pekrun et al., 2023a). Gender, goals, and learning-related beliefs are examples at the person side; the classroom environment, family context, and cultural values are examples at the side of the environment (Figure 1). Immediate learning environments are embedded in broader institutional, economic, and socio-cultural contexts (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Emotions, in turn, influence students' and teachers' learning and performance. For example, effects of students' anxiety on their academic learning are due to the impact of anxiety on attention, motivation to learn, use of learning strategies, and the self-regulation of learning.
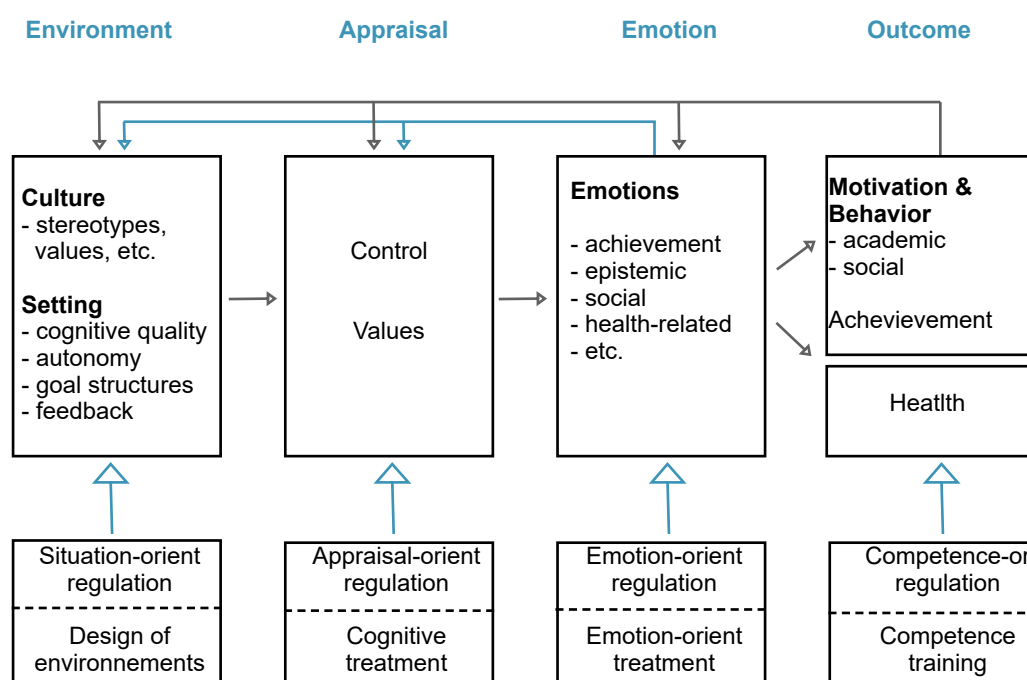

Figure 1: Control-Value Theory: Principles of Emotional Development

To understand these effects, it is important to know that positive (i.e., pleasant) emotions do not always have positive effects, and negative (i.e., unpleasant) emotions do not always have negative effects. For instance, students' enjoyment of learning promotes their task performance. In contrast, positive emotions triggered by events outside of class can distract from learning. Conversely, negative emotions are not always detrimental. For example, confusion that is not resolved undermines students' motivation, but confusion that leads to solving problems can support learning (D'Mello et al., 2014). Teachers need to understand that emotions do not follow a simple black-and-white schema, and need to help students leverage the potential of both pleasant and unpleasant emotions.

Emotions, their outcomes, and their antecedents are typically linked by reciprocal effects over time (Pekrun et al., 2023b). For example, enjoyment of learning can promote successful performance, while success, in turn, further strengthens enjoyment. The reciprocal nature of these links implies that emotions can be regulated by targeting various elements of the resulting cyclic feedback processes (Pekrun and Stephens, 2009). Similarly, emotion-oriented educational interventions and classroom practices can target different components of these processes (Figure 1). Four broad classes of managing emotions can be distinguished and used by teachers, schools, and parents to promote students' social and emotional development:

1. **Response-oriented strategies.** Emotions can be managed by expressing, suppressing, or accepting them. Suppressing the expression of emotions can help to reduce the experience of negative emotions but often comes with high costs, such as increased physiological arousal that jeopardises health through compromising the immune system and chronic secretion of stress hormones. Using measures that reduce physiological arousal, such as relaxation techniques that are part of many SEL programmes, is better suited to mitigating high-arousal negative emotions like anger and anxiety.

2. **Appraisal-oriented strategies.** Emotions can be regulated by reappraisal, that is, by changing appraisals of the situation, such as beliefs about control and value. Many successful educational interventions and psychological therapies focus on reappraisal. An example is cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT). Appraisal-oriented regulation is especially important for students who hold unrealistically negative beliefs about their competencies, or excessive beliefs about the importance of achievement (e.g., that catastrophic consequences will follow failure; Perry et al., 2014).

3. **Situation-oriented strategies**. Emotions are caused by appraisals, but appraisals are not arbitrarily formed by the human mind. Rather, they are in-part shaped by situational contexts. As such, emotions can be managed by selecting or changing situations. For example, parents and students can select or change opportunities by choosing an educational programme that best fits the students' profile of interests and capabilities. Similarly, teachers, administrators, and policymakers can change curriculum, classroom practices, and policies to promote students' emotional and social development.

4. **Competence-oriented strategies**. Finally, a critically important pathway to promote emotional wellbeing is to strengthen the competencies needed to master task demands and to reap the positive emotions that come with mastery (Zhang et al., 2020). Students can improve their emotional wellbeing by investing effort in studying in order to attain mastery and a successful academic and occupational career. Teachers can promote students' wellbeing by facilitating their learning. Similarly, they can promote their own wellbeing by engaging in opportunities for professional development.

Conclusion

Understanding emotional and social development has several important implications for SEL. First, students' emotional and social wellbeing has downstream consequences for further outcomes, including academic attainment as well as physical and mental health. Second, causation also flows the other way around: Academic (cognitive) competencies impact students' emotions and, through emotions, on their social relationships and health. Third, there are several pathways that education can leverage to activate students' SEL. Programmes that are designated to promote SEL focus on fostering response-oriented and appraisal-oriented emotional and social regulation. These two modes of regulation are important. However, there are other pathways that are equally important, such as strengthening students' academic learning; changing educational practices in the classroom and in the family; and changing educational policies.

Pathways to supporting social and emotional development

From the above principles of human development, it follows that there are several main routes for schools and educational policy to support students' social and emotional competencies. Social and emotional learning can be implemented as an explicit part of the curriculum. This is at the core of classic SEL programmes, with a focus on strengthening students' positive beliefs and competencies to manage emotions and behavior. However, classroom practices can also more broadly be changed in ways that promote SEL, and educational institutions and policies can be designed to support SEL. These different routes are complementary and not mutually exclusive. Importantly, each of these routes may not be effective if the others are not considered as well. In fact, non-supportive classroom practices can undermine any positive effects of even the best SEL curriculum.

SEL programmes and related interventions as part of the curriculum
Many programmes that promote SEL use the label 'SEL' as proposed by CASEL (especially in the USA). However, there are also many programmes that target SEL but do not use this label, such as cognitive-behavioral training (CBT), mindfulness training, mentoring, service learning, outdoor adventure, or programmes to reduce test anxiety (e.g., Gutman & Schoon, 2015; Putwain et al., 2022). We will first discuss designated SEL programmes and then alternative interventions using other labels.

SEL programmes

 From the 1990s, researchers have developed programmes based on conceptions of emotional intelligence and CASEL's framework of SEL. These programmes are called SEL programmes in the literature, despite the fact that there are other programmes promoting SEL that are based on alternative theoretical conceptions. As a general rule, programmes that have adopted the SEL label share the following core features. First, they focus on prevention and promotion. Given that (primary) prevention is intended to take place before problems develop, and that promotion aims to help everybody, SEL programmes are conceptualized as universal interventions. The term "universal" signifies that all students in a given institution are included rather than only students at risk (in this context, "universal" does not denote that the programme is universally applied to students in a country or worldwide). Second, SEL programmes have their own curricula and are typically delivered as recurring lessons, such as one hour per week over one term. Third, SEL programmes typically aim to promote several SEL competencies that are addressed in CASEL's conceptual framework. Finally, the programmes use a mix of didactical formats, such as direction instruction (lecturing), scenarios, self-assessments, role play, etc.

These features of SEL programmes represent a number of strengths but also pose problems. Universal delivery implies that SEL instruction is not personalized and may not sufficiently consider the diversity of students. Delivering SEL in lessons that are separate from lessons in other subjects implies that transfer may remain limited. These two problems can be overcome by personalizing delivery within classrooms (while still delivering to all students), and by including elements of SEL in lessons across school subjects. Covering multiple competencies and using multiple didactical formats is potentially advantageous because it might lead to broader effects across various competencies, as compared with programmes focusing on single competencies or a single didactical format. However, in reality, SEL programmes differ widely in the competencies and formats addressed. The resulting heterogeneity of programmes makes it difficult to draw general conclusions about effectiveness that are valid for all programmes, and the multiplicity of components makes it difficult to reach conclusions about the specific contribution of each single component to overall effects. Given their heterogeneity, it is critically important to attend to the specifics of available programmes when reaching decisions about implementation.

Among the competencies considered, effective programmes do not equally focus on all 40 competencies currently included in CASEL's conception. A content analysis of programmes by Wigelsworth et al. (2020, 2022a) has shown that a few competencies gain most of the attention, including self-perception, identification of emotions, empathy, communication, relationship building, impulse control, and problem solving.

Among the competencies considered, effective programmes do not equally focus on all 40 competencies currently included in CASEL's conception. A content analysis of programmes by Wigelsworth et al. (2020, 2022a) has shown that a few competencies gain most of the attention, including self-perception, identification of emotions, empathy, communication, relationship building, impulse control, and problem solving.

There is robust evidence from more than one hundred original studies, including high-quality randomized controlled trials (RCTs), and several meta-analyses that SEL programmes have small to moderate positive effects (averaged across programmes and students; the effects can vary considerably). Most of this evidence pertains to immediate outcomes including self-beliefs, emotional skills, emotional wellbeing, social behavior, and academic performance (see Gutman et al., 2015; Wigelsworth et al., 2022b). However, beyond immediate effects, there is also evidence supporting small, but statistically significant positive long-term effects half a year to several years after programme completion (Durlak et al., 2011). Programme delivery by trained experts generates stronger effects than delivery by teachers, but the effects of teacher-led programmes are still substantial. In addition, the evidence suggests positive average effects across students differing in gender and family background (e.g., Yang et al., 2019).

There is also evidence on features that distinguish successful SEL programmes from less successful programmes. These features include (1) using a sequenced, coordinated step-by-step approach, (2) employing active forms of learning, (3 focusing time on skill development, and (4) providing explicit definitions of learning goals, together rendering the acronym SAFE (Durlak, 1997). As these features describe any successful curriculum, the evidence implies that SEL curricula best follow the same basic rules as school curricula more generally.

Furthermore, as with any educational intervention, the quality of the implementation is critically important to secure success (Dowling and Berry, 2020). For example, England introduced a nation-wide SEL programme in 2005-2007 ('Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning,' SEAL). The programme was implemented in the majority of elementary and secondary schools in the country. However, schools were given considerable autonomy in using the programme, which led to heterogeneity in implementation. As summarized by Gedikoglu (2021), the SEL provision through this programme was patchy, and its impact was not monitored systematically. As a result, the programme was not very effective. In contrast to positive findings from early-stage, small-scale trials (Ofsted, 2007; Smith et al., 2007), a subsequent larger evaluation of the programme found no significant effects on students' social and emotional skills, social behavior, and mental health (Wigelsworth et al., 2012).

An important limitation in the SEL programme literature is that most of the existing studies evaluated programmes in an early stage of development under optimal conditions rather than after having been scaled up to regional or national levels. A second limitation is that most studies evaluated programmes as they were implemented in the US. The transferability of SEL programmes to other countries, and especially to middle- and low-income countries, remains an open problem (Catalano et al., 2012). In the meta-analysis by Wigelsworth et al. (2016), programmes were overall more effective at early stages of development and when delivered 'at home.' Some programmes that had significant effects in the USA showed null results even in the UK, which has a relatively similar cultural context. Transferring programmes from the US to schools in non-Western countries may be even more difficult.

A prime reason for the differences between early-stage and scaled-up trials is likely implementation quality. It is often the case that more resources are invested when first trialing a programme, and the staff delivering the programme may be more highly motivated and better trained, than after having rolled out the programme at the country level. Regarding the 'at home' versus 'away' difference, both lack of implementation fidelity and insufficient adaptation to another cultural context may be contributing factors. As they are conceived in CASEL's framework and the mainstream (Western) psychological literature, some of the social and emotional competencies may be more naturally aligned with Western than non-Western cultural values. For example, conceptions of self-management and self-beliefs, as well as ways to promote these competencies, may differ between Western contexts emphasising independent self-construal and individual pursuit of happiness and cultural contexts foregrounding interdependent self-construal and collectivist values.

Other programmes promoting SEL

In the literature on positive youth development, educational interventions, and stress and coping, various programmes have been developed that support social and emotional learning, but do not use this term or CASEL's conception of competencies. *Mindfulness interventions* aim to promote students' emotional and social awareness and wellbeing by fostering their ability to focus attention on the present moment, in a nonjudgmental way (Kabat-Zinn, 1994). *Classroom-based Yoga interventions* have been used to promote students' self-regulation of mind and body. *Cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT)* focuses on changing dysfunctional appraisals, emotions, and behaviors. CBT was originally developed for professional therapy with adults, but has been adapted for use with children and adolescents, and for universal delivery by non-psychological staff such as teachers.

Mentoring programmes typically are targeted (i.e., non-universal) programmes that focus on at-risk children and adolescents. However, they can be scaled up to universal delivery. A current example is tutoring for all students in higher education institutions in the UK. *Outdoor education and adventure programmes* seek to promote students' sense of autonomy, open-mindedness, physical activity, and psychological wellbeing through providing experiences in nature (see, e.g., Dettweiler et al., 2022). *Service learning programmes* are universal programmes that seek to foster self and social awareness through community-related practice experiences outside of school.

Similar to designated SEL programmes, all of these interventions seek to promote a broad range of social and emotional competencies, and each of them has been evaluated in numerous studies. They differ in theoretical frameworks (with CBT offering an especially well-founded theoretical rationale), didactical formats, and the profile of outcomes considered. In two systematic reviews, Gutman et al. (2015) and Šouláková et al. (2019) synthesized the evidence from multiple meta-analyses based on several hundred original studies. The findings show significant positive effects of all these programmes, with effect sizes varying from small to strong. Especially strong were the effects of mindfulness intervention on students' academic attainment (Zenner et al., 2014, based on 24 independent studies from North America, Europe, Australia, and Asia).

In addition, there are also universal programmes that target a more focused range of outcomes, such as specific emotions (e.g., test anxiety) or behavioral problems (e.g., bullying; see Marsh et al., 2023). One example is the STEPS ('Strategies to Tackle Examination Pressure and Stress') programme developed by Putwain and colleagues in the UK. This programme aims to reduce students' test anxiety, which is a global problem in schools around the world. Excessive test anxiety undermines students' academic attainment, self-beliefs, health, and long-term development. The programme uses CBT principles to support students in managing and reducing their anxiety. In several studies including two randomized controlled trials, the STEPS programme showed moderate to strong effects in reducing test anxiety (Putwain et al., 2022).

Conclusion

Three key messages follow from the literature summarized above. First, the good news is that there is a broad variety of programmes available today that have been shown to be effective. This was not yet the case 30 years ago; tremendous progress has been made since the 1990s. However, each of the programmes represents a unique combination of components. It is not sensible to assume they are exchangeable simply because they are grouped under the same label (such as SEL). In choosing among these programmes, it is critically important to attend to their specific profile, their effectiveness at large scale, their feasibility in a given country (as a function of resources, teacher training etc.), and their adaptability relative to cultural context and existing classroom practices. Second, whenever a programme is transferred to another context, it is likely necessary to carefully adapt it to the new context, which may amount to launching a new version of the programme. Third, if we want to avoid failure at large scale, then we need to consider that programme adaptation, cultural differences, and differences in implementation make it necessary to evaluate—and possibly further revise—the adapted programme before scaling it up to regional or country levels.

Changing educational practices and educational policies

Programmes that are just one part of the curriculum cannot be expected to fundamentally change students' development if they stay isolated from other parts of the curriculum, or if they are counteracted by general educational practices and social climates in the school and the family. Similarly, SEL can be jeopardized if not sufficiently supported by educational policies. Overall, changing practices and policies in effectively sound ways may be even more important to promote SEL than including SEL lessons in the curriculum.

Educational practices. Teaching that is overly teacher-centred and controlling, goal structures that focus on performance goals (i.e., performing well relative to others), and assessment practices that use high-stakes tests and normative grading can undermine students' emotional and social development. Similarly, even if these practices are avoided at school, students' development can be jeopardized if parents use them. The CVT framework presented above, and the empirical evidence on classroom teaching, suggest that the following ways to teach may be most suited to foster students' SEL (Linnenbrink-Garcia et al., 2016; Pekrun, 2014).

Cognitive quality. High-quality instruction that is well-structured and uses clear explanations and examples promotes students' acquisition of cognitive competencies (knowledge and skills). Successfully learning these competencies strengthens students' self-confidence and sense of control, thus fostering their enjoyment of learning and reducing their fear of failure. For high-quality teaching, matching task demands to students' prior knowledge is also critically important. Mismatch can result in over- or under-challenge leading to anxiety, boredom, and lack of motivation (Goetz et al., in press).

Affective quality. Educators convey messages about the value of learning, which also influences students' emotions and motivation to learn. Direct messages inform students about the value of learning for their current and future life, which can be supported by using authentic tasks based on students' interests (Hulleman and Harackiewicz, 2009). However, direct messages about importance can be a double-edged sword; fear appeals reminding students about the importance of exams have been found to exacerbate their anxiety (Putwain and Best, 2011). Indirect messages are sent by teachers' own motivation and emotions as they display them in the classroom. Teachers' enthusiasm in teaching can be contagious and spark students' enjoyment of learning (Frenzel et al., 2018).

Student autonomy and collaborative learning. Providing students with the discretion to choose and modify learning tasks, and using collaborative forms of learning (group learning), meets their needs for autonomy and social relatedness (e.g., Su and Reeve, 2011). In this way, a sense of competence and autonomy, self-regulatory skills, and social competencies can be developed, thereby fostering students' positive achievement emotions, social emotions, and social behavior.

Social expectations and classroom goal structures. Similar to a mismatch between task demands and competencies, expectations that are overly high (or low) can be detrimental. Expectations that cannot be met by students can prompt fear and hopelessness. Expectations are conveyed by teacher and parent messages, but also by the goal structures in the classroom. If goals to outperform others prevail, then the classroom climate can be dominated by competition undermining emotional wellbeing in many students. Mastery-oriented goal structures are better suited to promote SEL.

Assessments, feedback, and consequences. Assessments and feedback about achievement can use different standards of achievement, based on task mastery (criterion-referenced), individual improvement, social comparison (normative grading), or group performance. Feedback about mastery is better suited to promote SEL than normative grading on the curve that can exacerbate competition and fear of failure. However, one caveat is that mastery-based feedback that is made public can unfold similar effects as normative grading if there is broad variation between students in levels of mastery. In addition, the consequences of achievement are critical—making educational career decision dependent on feedback can increase the importance of exams and resulting test anxiety. As such, it is recommendable to avoid high-stakes testing wherever possible.

Educational policies. Curricula, teacher education programmes, and the funding and institutional structures of schools largely depend on policy decisions in most countries. Some of these decisions have direct consequences for SEL, such as decisions about the inclusion of SEL in the curriculum or admissible formats for individual student assessments as considered above. Other decisions have consequences that are indirect, but may be no less important for SEL. An example is decisions about tracking.

School systems that use between- or within-school tracking aim to create more homogeneous student groups that are thought to be easier to teach. However, tracking comes with a cost for SEL. Especially students in high-track classes may suffer from reduced self-confidence given that it is more difficult to succeed relative to others when being surrounded by high achievers (this has been called the 'big-fish-little-pond effect': It is better to be a big fish [a high achiever] in a little pond [of medium or low achievers] than a small fish in a big pond; Marsh et al., 2020). Reduced self-confidence leads to reduced emotional well-being (Pekrun et al., 2019) and is not reliably counteracted by positive effects on academic learning (Dicke et al., 2018). As a consequence, tracking also leads to reduced student achievement across countries (see Parker et al., 2018).

Educational systems that make use of testing for purposes of accountability may also have unforeseen negative effects (Nichols & Berliner, 2007). Teachers may inadvertently act as a conduit between the top-down pressures on schools to reach targets and their students. For instance, teachers may make use instructional practices that restrict student autonomy ('teaching to the test'), emphasize performance goal structures, and use fear appeals when reminding students about the importance of exams (Putwain & von der Embse, 2018). Such practices work in opposition to, and can undo the benefits of, SEL programmes. This leaves a paradoxical situation whereby educational policy gives with one hand and takes with the other. Educational policy-making should consider ways to allow different policies to work synergistically rather than antagonistically.

Challenges: Lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic

Mental health and academic learning during the pandemic. Mental health in the populations of countries around the world declined after the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in early 2020. Most of the available studies focused on adults; however, there are also studies that included children and adolescents. Although the results are not fully consistent, they suggest that average mental health declined in children and youth as well (see the reviews in Newlove-Delgado et al., 2022; Stavridou et al., 2020).

For example, using data from a longitudinal study, De France et al. (2022) reported that anxiety and depression were significantly higher in a Canadian sample of adolescents during the pandemic. Similarly, Duan et al. (2020) found elevated levels of anxiety and depression in a sample of Chinese children and adolescents after the outbreak of the pandemic. Hussong et al. (2021) conducted a longitudinal study with American parents and children. After the outbreak of the pandemic, when the children were 12-14 years old, their mental health deteriorated. However, children with higher self-efficacy and problem-focus coping styles were better able to maintain their mental health.

Vulnerable students with neurodevelopmental disorders in rural areas and from low-income families have experienced especially pronounced difficulties. Burke et al. (2022) found that COVID-related suicidal ideation was frequently reported by psychiatrically hospitalized adolescents after the onset of the pandemic. In a longitudinal study with Israeli children and adolescents, Shoshani and Kor (2022) found greater anxiety, depression, increases in video game, Internet and TV screen time use, and decreases in positive emotions, life satisfaction, social media use, and peer support during the pandemic, especially in participants with higher baseline mental health problems. Kuhlmann (2021) reported that greater COVID-19 impact was associated with more anxiety, depressive symptoms, sleep disturbance, and proactive aggression. COVID-19 impact and psychiatric symptoms were unrelated among youth reporting high self-enhancing humor and cognitive reappraisal. McFayden et al. (2021) reported that 87% of students in rural Appalachia in the US were not receiving the recommended amount of direct remote instruction, and that a majority of school services received pre-COVID were not continued during remote learning. Emotional problems related to problems with remote learning and better coping abilities related to better learning.

A few groups of children with specific mental disorders may have experienced improved mental health during the pandemic. An example is children with excessive social anxiety who may have benefitted from being allowed to avoid the stress of physically meeting teachers and peers. Apart from these exceptions, and even if largely based on small-scale cross-sectional studies, the evidence suggests that students suffered a decline in their wellbeing and mental health after the onset of the pandemic. However, the evidence also suggests that competencies such as self-efficacy and coping skills buffered the effects of social isolation and lack of learning opportunities. By implication, programmes promoting these competencies may be helpful to increase students' resilience in dealing with the stress caused by a pandemic like COVID-19.

Due to school closures after the onset of the pandemic, academic learning was dramatically impacted as well, across countries (e.g., Carmen, 2022). At the height of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, more than 190 countries closed schools, affecting 1.6 billion children and youth, or 90% of the world's student population (UNESCO, 2020). Because testing was interrupted as well, it is difficult to know the exact impact on academic achievement. However, data in a few countries make it possible to derive estimates. For the Netherlands, which underwent a relatively short two-month lockdown and features an equitable system of school funding and the world's highest rate of broadband access, Engzell et al. (2021) still estimated a learning loss of a one-fifth of a school year (for similar estimates for Canada, see Aurini and Davies, 2021; see also Grewenig et al., 2021; Hanushek and Woessman, 2020). As with the impact on mental health, not all students were affected in the same way. Students with low achievement and from disadvantaged backgrounds suffered the most, thus further widening achievement gaps in the student population.

Conclusions. After the onset of the pandemic, schools were closed down, and curriculum-based learning occurred remotely (if at all) for at least two months due to lockdown in countries around the world. As such, can we conclude from the evidence on the negative impact of the pandemic on mental health and achievement that remote learning is less effective than on-site learning? The answer is no, for two reasons. First, lockdowns have multiple effects, not only including school closures and remote learning, but also social isolation, health risks, and increased stress on caregivers and life at home. Any observed differences in mental health and learning from before to after a lockdown can be due to multiple causes associated with the lockdown. The existing evidence does not allow us to de-confound these various causes.

Second, curriculum-based learning was transferred to remote modes, but was rarely delivered in sufficient quantity and quality, due to lack of online learning materials, teacher-training for online teaching, technological infrastructure in families, etc. As such, the evidence on the impact of the pandemic does not reveal how academic learning and mental health would be affected by high quality remote instruction. However, the evidence does inform us that strengthening social and emotional competencies (self-beliefs, coping skills etc.) could help to promote vulnerable students' resilience in times of stress.

New directions: SEL in remote and hybrid modes

To understand remote and hybrid learning, it is important to note that remote learning and online learning are not the same. Online learning, and technology-based learning more generally, can occur both in the classroom and out of school. Furthermore, remote learning can be online, but can also use offline learning materials (books, TV, radio, videos, etc.). By implication, the remote component of hybrid modes of learning can also use online or offline ways to learn. Curriculum based learning is traditionally organized in a hybrid mode by including both classroom instruction and homework—just that the remote component (homework) traditionally used offline materials. In the following, we focus on online learning, as this adds a broad range of instructional options to the use of offline SEL materials.

There is currently a dramatic increase in individually delivered online interventions aiming to improve SEL, as can be seen from the increase of e-health apps focusing on mental health (also see Newbold et al., 2020). In contrast, curriculum-based, teacher-delivered online SEL is slow to emerge. For example, after the onset of the pandemic, there have been calls in various states in the US for schools to keep in contact with caregivers about the social-emotional needs of their children (Yoder et al., 2020), but a transfer of SEL curricula into online modes has been largely lacking.

Three questions need to be answered to make headway in developing online and remote modes of SEL. First, what are possible advantages and disadvantages of online modes of delivering SEL? Second, is it advisable to use online SEL in a remote fashion? Third, if the answer is yes, what would an effective balance of on-site and remote learning look like? Answers to the second and third questions depend on answers to the first. From the perspective of effective SEL instruction, online learning offers advantages, but also has disadvantages. The nature and balance of advantages and disadvantages depend on learning contents, materials, and instructional practices. Some offline SEL materials and formats can be directly replicated in an online format, such as teacher-delivered lectures and videos. Other offline practices can also be transferred into an online format, such as scenarios and role play, but need to be adapted (for collaborative role play, see the literature on computer-supported collaborative learning, CSCL; Chen et al., 2018).

Moreover, online learning can use technological advances that are based on artificial intelligence and not available offline, such as augmented reality, virtual reality, complex simulations, and intelligent tutors (see Azevedo et al., 2022; Lajoie et al., 2020; Loderer et al., 2020). Some of these options offer exciting prospects for use in SEL that need to be more fully explored. Examples include simulations of medical emergency situations or medical operations used to develop both students' medical skills and their emotional and social competencies to work in teams (e.g., Grewal et al., 2022).

However, there also are practices and experiences that cannot be fully realized in an online format. At least at the current stage of technological development, online social interaction with peers and teachers cannot fully replace the experience of direct interaction with physical presence.

Given these pedagogical prospects and constraints, combinations of offline and online components may be most effective for many programmes, as for school-based learning more generally. These combinations can be realized in hybrid formats or fully on-site in the classroom. For each single programme, the definition of the best online/offline balance, and the best on-site/off-site balance, may depend on the profile of components in the programme. There may even be interventions that can be fully transferred to offsite formats, such as Yoga interventions using videos. For these types of interventions, the online role of teachers could be reduced to prompting students to use the materials, monitor their participation, and provide feedback about progress.

To evaluate return on investment, costs need to be considered as well. Online SEL needs to be developed, teachers need to be trained to use it, and schools and families need to be equipped with technological infrastructure. In terms of staffing, more teachers may be needed for hybrid teaching including extensive off-site components, given that successful off-site teaching requires more one-on-one teacher-student time than on-site instruction in the classroom. Furthermore, as with all SEL programmes, opportunity costs in terms of reduced time to learn in academic core subjects need to be considered.

Conclusion. Research is needed to develop high-quality online and remote modes of curriculum-based SEL. This can include a transfer of components of existing programmes into an online mode, but can also include the development of new programmes to make use of advanced educational technologies. Following initial stages of programme development, additional research will be needed to investigate feasibility (including feasibility at scale), requirements and modes for high-fidelity implementation, and costs in terms of investments into staff training and the infrastructure in both schools and homes. However, for programmes that strongly rely on physical presence, and for countries with budgetary constraints at state and family levels, implementing on-site SEL using traditional offline materials may remain the prime way to implement SEL programmes.

Guidelines for policymakers

From the existing evidence and the above considerations, a few general principles and guidelines can be derived that can inform educational policymaking how to make best use of SEL.

1. **SEL is effective.** The evidence summarized above documents the existence of curriculum-based programmes that are effective at large scale, and both short-term and long-term, in promoting students' emotional competencies, social behavior, mental health, and academic learning. As such, make sure to include effective SEL components in the curriculum across K-12 institutions as well as higher education.

2. **Selection of programmes.** The existing programmes are based on various theoretical conceptions, include different compositions of contents and didactical formats, and differ in costs and return on investment. Carefully select or adapt programmes that match policy aims, budget constraints, and the values of stakeholders, and that are efficient in terms of keeping opportunity costs at bay.

3. **Adaptation of programmes**. Do not expect that existing programmes developed in another socio-cultural context and language can simply be translated for using in your country as is. For programmes developed in another country and cultural context, carefully adapt and revise selected programmes to be effective in your country and its cultural contexts.

4. **Implementation.** To make programmes effective, ensure high quality implementation. This includes adequate training and motivation of staff delivering the programme, investment in infrastructure (especially with technology-intensive programmes), involvement of other stakeholders (caregivers and community), implementation support from experts, and monitoring of the implementation. Including SEL in teacher education programmes and continuous professional development of teachers may be especially important.

5. **Trialing, evaluation, and revision.** Do not expect that programmes should be immediately implemented at large scale. Implement and evaluate selected and adapted programmes in smaller trials before scaling them up. This can involve several rounds of revision of evaluation. Once scaled up at regional or country levels, continue monitoring the effectiveness of the programme, similar to continuous monitoring of the effectiveness of academic learning.

6. **Online, remote, and hybrid SEL**. Launch research programmes to adapt and develop online SEL that can be used in remote and hybrid learning. These programmes should also explore development, implementation, effectiveness, and costs of advanced technological learning environments (e.g., using artificial intelligence) to support SEL. When implementing these programmes, make sure that teachers are trained for online delivery and students provided with the necessary technology.

7. **Educational practices**. Most of students' SEL at school happens outside of designated SEL curricula. Support educational practices that promote SEL, including high quality instruction, development-adapted student autonomy, collaborative learning, and use of mastery goal structures and mastery-oriented assessments, and motivate schools to avoid practices undermining SEL, including normative grading and high-stakes testing.

8. **Educational institutions and systems.** Secure sufficient funding and affectively sound institutional structures. Reduce structures that undermine SEL and academic learning, such as tracked school systems and accountability by high-stakes testing. Include SEL in teacher training and further education programmes.

9. **Stakeholders: Communities, economy, and the family**. SEL cannot work if it is undermined by practices in students' out-of-school environments. Support schools in reaching out to communities, the economy, and caregivers to collaborate in supporting SEL.

10. **Use of scientific expertise**. Commission centres for educational research and development, or develop new centres, to support development, selection, adaptation, implementation, evaluation, and revision of programmes to promote SEL. Make sure that the centres are sufficiently independent to support, but also critically analyse, policies at government, regional, local, and school levels.

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Abstract

The COVID-19 crisis brought a new wave of attention to the role of social and emotional learning (SEL) worldwide. Before the crisis hit, Latin America was already facing challenges in education, such as access and quality of education. However, despite the fact that systems were unprepared to face the challenges as the health crisis caused by the pandemic intensified, countries in the region made great efforts to continue providing education services to students. As a result, the pandemic taught us, or reminded us, that social and emotional learning is an essential component of students' learning. Therefore, this paper intends to showcase some of the strategies some countries have implemented to foster SEL for students as well as for teachers, with the aim of guaranteeing the right to education that every child and adolescent deserves. Also, lessons learned from these experiences, such as 'Te escucho docente' from Peru, are included as an example of why it is important to value the decisions taken in the past in order to prepare for better SEL implementation in the future throughout the region.

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought a new wave of attention to the role of social and emotional learning (SEL) in students' academic learning and development. Therefore, promoting an understanding of the integral role of SEL in a holistic approach to learning is significant for students' education and development beyond the pandemic (Yorke, et al., 2021) and beyond a narrow focus on academic learning. For instance, there was an evident need for stress management, adaptability, or empathy skills to cope with the crisis in different settings and contexts. SEL provides individual students the opportunity to develop skills that can help them to manage their emotions, foster positive relationships, and maintain their wellbeing through learning strategies in order to navigate their daily lives in a healthy and fulfilling way. As an additional benefit, SEL can shape how individuals manage their personal and collective experiences both during and after a major crisis such as a global pandemic that impacts education systems around the world in similar ways.

Key issues and challenges

Although SEL is essential for individual success in different aspects of life, only a few Latin American countries mention SEL in their curriculum, including Peru, Colombia, Ecuador, Argentina, and Uruguay (Burgin, Coli, & Daniel, 2021). A study by Arias, Hincapié and Paredes (2020) found that social and emotional skills are integrated into the curriculum of these education systems in different ways. . For instance, in Argentina and the Dominican Republic, the learning standards define between 6 and 7 fundamental skills that fall within the SEL domain, such as problem-solving, critical thinking, and communication. In Costa Rica and Uruguay, SEL is named as one of between 3 and 4 overall dimensions of learning. Peru's curriculum defines 31 competencies, of which at least two skills relate to SEL, such as self-regulation of emotions and coping with conflict in a positive way.

In sum, one of the challenges the region faces is the need to define and prioritize those SEL skills that need to be developed in each education system so that social and emotional learning can be concretely and explicitly present.

Findings from a study by Yoder, et al., (2021) in 45 states of North America showed the main challenges to making SEL a priority during the pandemic. Two of these challenges are also found in Latin America, namely the need for more teacher training in how to implement SEL, and the need for more data on student SEL or SEL practice.

There is no doubt that the teachers' role has gained more importance in terms of developing the students' SEL development process in addition to the academic support they provide to students. It follows that there is a significant need to support teachers to develop and sustain their own SEL skills, including providing opportunities for them to participate in teaching practicums and model these skills to their students (Arias, Hincapié, & Paredes, 2020). Since teachers have a central role in the implementation of programmes to strengthen these skills in students, it is necessary to promote spaces for their own wellbeing (Llambí, 2021). Therefore, teachers need to be provided with the necessary tools to implement SEL programmes as expected at every stage of their development process.

Academic standards are mostly clear in the region, as are measurement processes. However, there is little systematic measurement or data about the state or development level of students' social and emotional skills (Arias, Hincapié, & Paredes, 2020). It is not said that socio-emotional measurement has to be as rigorous or equal to academic standards. However, data is always a tool for teachers in every domain of students' development. Such diagnoses will enable teachers to establish objectives and activities in different modes of education and to monitor students' progress over time.

On the other hand, before the COVID-19 crisis, Latin America was already considered one of the most unequal regions of the world in terms of the development of opportunities (CEPAL, 2021) access to a quality education, health, and income, among others. As expected, these gaps increased during the pandemic. One of the region's biggest challenges is the scarcity of internet access and technology devices and, as mentioned before, these devices were necessary for remote access to education. As cited by CEPAL, Dress-Gross and Zhang (2021) stated that less than 50% of the region has connectivity to the Internet. Therefore, hybrid education models that require online learning platforms are only possible for those with Internet access and high-technology devices (tablets, laptops). In addition, there was an evident need for building digital competencies for both teachers and students. There was also a need for building these competencies for families too, who during this time supported their children's education from home.

The use of technology in different modes of education, whether online learning or hybrid modes, is still one of the biggest challenges faced by the region's education systems (García Jaramillo & Insua, 2022). In addition to this challenge, the pandemic revealed weak social and emotional skills and a lack of technology for autonomous learning (CEPAL, 2022). This last challenge was present even before the pandemic. A CAF (Development Bank of Latin America and the Caribbean) working paper written by Marchioni (2016), found that, in relation to cognitive skills, students are also in need for SEL development. As a result, the region needs to continue amplifying its efforts to integrate this dimension into the teaching and learning process of each student.

Innovations, evidence and lessons learned

Strategies implemented in the region to address social and emotional aspects of learning during COVID-19 that could be implemented in the post-COVID-19 era include:

1. Working closely with students and families

In Chile, the Center for Improvement, Experimentation and Pedagogical Research (CPEIP) developed digital resources to strengthen social and emotional support to school communities in the context of the pandemic. These resources complement the guidelines developed by the Ministry of Education and its School Coexistence and Social and Emotional Learning Plan. This plan has three key points: understand, plan and support. These resources are addressed to students, teachers, principals, families and other actors involved in the learning process. The activities planned in each resource booklet can be implemented through online or hybrid modes of education. Also, having these resources available for hybrid education support the affirmation that teachers and parents commit to becoming familiar with digital technology, get to understand new forms of communication, and find the right space for meditation in the students' learning process at home and at school (Chávez, Torres, & Cadenillas, 2021).

The Ministry of Education in Costa Rica published the 'Return Guide' for when students and the school community returned to in-person instruction (Fig. 1). This guide contains specific guidelines and actions specifically for the social. emotional and pedagogical dimensions of the educational community. The guide considers strategies to strengthen the distance education process as well as risk factors for those with greater social and educational vulnerability (Ministerio de Educación Pública, 2021). It suggests aspects to consider in the acompañamiento[2] process, such as: (1) anyone can become a great support when they listen and are interested in other people's struggles; (2) social and emotional support is a fundamental component of the educational process; (3) constant communication with families and students should be strengthened, creating new strategies according to students' needs and community participation.

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[2] Acompañamiento is a word in Spanish that refers to when you are hand in hand with another person. It is when you are there to support someone to overcome obstacles, to guide him/her and to provide orientation when needed. It is used in several contexts. The priority of SEL acompañamiento is to listen, validate student's thinking and feelings aimed to promote the integral well-being of the student.

Figure 1
The 'Return Guide' Cover. Image taken from https://www.mep.go.cr/sites/default/files/Guia-momentos-Regresar.pdf

Commensurate with the importance of listening as a form of acompañamiento, Elboj-Saso, et al. (2021) conducted a study around dialogue as a form of acompañamiento in times of COVID-19. As a result, families found that the acompañamiento 'improved the quality of life of their children, making them feel loved and accompanied' (p.12), meaning that acompañamiento in digital and in-person contexts can improve students' emotional growth as they feel loved and respected, and their emotions and feelings are important beyond the academic aspects of learning. Therefore, acompañamiento strategies for social and emotional development are crucial for the success of the process of transitioning to different learning environments, whether a return to physical classrooms and practices or to new, hybrid arrangements. Furthermore, synergies with the educational community are established to support students in different ways and to constantly seek additional support networks for the students.

The 'Return Guide' recognizes that social and emotional learning is a fundamental component of every student's learning process and that content is better internalized when people are emotionally well supported and accommodated. The Guide is based on legal statements regarding children, adolescents and people in vulnerable conditions, according to the Costa Rican regulatory framework and international standards. As such, the publication includes a chapter that addresses populations with social and educational risk factors, such as people without electronic devices, migrants, people with refugee status or with refugee applications, adolescent mothers, fathers or pregnant adolescents, indigenous people, people living in poverty, people with emotional conditions, among others. This chapter highlights the point that they need to be considered in the planning and implementation of intervention routes.

In the Dominican Republic, UNICEF and USAID collaborated with the Ministry of Education to review and update the 'Retorno a la alegría' or, in English, the 'Return to Joy' programme to support post-pandemic psychoaffective processes in students when schools reopen in September 2021 (El Nuevo Diario, 2021). The programme's manual for dynamic facilitators (Fig. 2) was adapted with the aim of supporting students during the first two weeks of school during the pos-pandemic period. This manual focused on activities that facilitate students' expression, strengthen their resilience after the experience lived after the confinement due to pandemic, among others.

The 'Return to Joy' was aimed at all levels of formal education (Preschool, Elementary and High School). The Dominican Republic brought experience to implementation of this programme, since before the COVID-19 crisis, this recovery programme was implemented after natural disasters such as the flood of the Blanco River in Jimaní in 2004 and after the Noel and Olga storms in 2007, among other experiences (MINERD, 2021). Overall, this is a programme that responds to the needs of every student affected by disasters or emergencies; and its methodology is systemic, participatory, and experiential.

Figure 2.
The "Guide to Return. Manual for Dynamic Facilitators" Cover. Image taken from https://www.unicef.org/dominicanrepublic/informes/manual-para-facilitadores-ludicos-retorno-la-alegria-adaptado-la-covid-19-2021

All activities designed for this programme are connected to the progress indicators of the fundamental skills of all levels and education curricula. Moreover, the activities are designed to be carried out either in person or online. Among the topics addressed in the programme are: Culture of peace (school climate and positive discipline), social and emotional skills, study habits, and identification of situations of vulnerability. This recovery programme strengthened children's and adolescents' resilience through teachers' support and family involvement (MINERD, 2021). In September 2021, this support guide was ready to be implemented in schools nationwide, with a total of 2,102,000 expected to benefit (El Nuevo Diario).

2. Supporting teachers

Social and emotional learning is widely conceived of as "a set of skills and dispositions/essential life habits that can be built developmentally if we do so with intentionality, focus, and continuity (Durlak, Weissberg, & Gullotta, 2010, p. 81). Hence, to strengthen students' SEL competencies with intentionality, it is necessary to strengthen adults' SEL competencies. Mena and Puga (2019) cite Schonert-Reichl et al's. study, which suggests that when teachers receive training on emotional and behavioral factors, it can positively affect the classroom and school climate and teachers can model social and emotional learning in a positive way for their students. Teachers feel better equipped to promote this climate when trained in these factors. In response to this call, the Ministry of Education in Peru created Te escucho, docente or, in English, "Teacher, I hear you". This online platform includes tools and resources for teachers' social and emotional care. Resources are designed to attend to social and emotional care and health, and include videos, text documents, webinars, and audio to strengthen the emotional health of teachers so that they can give their very best in the classroom and every aspect of their lives. According to García Jaramillo & Insua (2022), the 'Teacher, I hear you' website had received 955,000 visits from Peru and other countries as of July 2021.

Initiatives like those above are necessary to create an adequate environment and provide tools for teachers to feel empowered, valued and supported. They also provide different opportunities for them to collaborate with colleagues and families to build solid relationships and develop their own social and emotional skills, thereby enabling them to better support students' social and emotional development (Yoder, Dusenbury, Martinez-Black, & Weissberg, 2020).

Another example of a teachers' social and emotional education programme is 'Siento, luego aprendo' or, in English, 'I feel, then I learn' implemented in Uruguay by Gurises Unidos with the support of ReachingU within the project Siento, luego aprendo (Gurises Unidos, 2017). The second round of this project in 2019 to familiarize teachers and educators with theoretical and practical content related to social and emotional learning to be applied in their schools (Gurises Unidos, 2019). A finding from the first project implementation was that the intervention model of the project had its starting point in teacher teams. As a result, it led to an improvement in the dynamics and relationships among the rest of the members of the team. Another finding by Gurises Unidos is that according to the results of the monitoring and evaluation tool and from the perspective of teachers, students improved their performance in all targeted dimensions. In fact, motivation towards learning had grown by 54.3% in one of the studied schools and by 48/5% in the other school.

Lessons learned

1. Value what already exists

Experiences such as the one in the Dominican Republic exemplify this statement. In the past, the 'Retorno a la alegría' programme was implemented as a response to education in emergencies or disasters. When schools reopened, both face-to-face and hybrid instruction were provided as ways of attending to the needs of the school population. After the pandemic, this programme was quickly updated and adapted for implementation in both modes of education (MINERD, 2021). Another opportunity to value what already exists is the example of Costa Rica and its 'Return Guide. This guide was based on the legal statements regarding children, adolescents, and people in vulnerable situations that the Costa Rican government had already implemented. In addition to this, Costa Rica already had an SEL dimension of learning included in the national curriculum. Hence, these two factors were the starting points for creating a protocol that responded to the Costa Rican context, statements about education and the imperative to ensure people's human rights. To value what already exists, there is no need to have a specifically developed programme as the Dominican Republic had. What is necessary is the intention to remain attached to the main objective, in this case, to guarantee the quality of education for the return after COVID-19. Also, it is necessary to know the population and its needs to find that starting point that will provide a clear direction according to every single reality.

2. Social and emotional skills must be strengthened in teachers first

To support students in developing their own social and emotional skills, teachers and adults involved in this process first need to strengthen their own so that they can model social and emotional skills and behavior positively. Peru's 'Te escucho, docente' initiative showed how to provide emotional support to teachers nationwide through a phone line and online resources. If teachers have the tools at hand to manage their own social and emotional behavior in a positive way, they will be better able to meet students' social-emotional needs and maintain a positive classroom climate to promote student learning (Mena & Puga, 2019). As a result, teachers will be able to help their students to increase self-awareness, to improve academic achievement, and to develop crucial competencies for the student's life success.

3. Acompañamiento is an essential part of the development process

As in every learning process, the acompañamiento ensures an effective response to students' needs. The adult, whether teachers, parents or school support staff, guides and attends to the students' demands to support their development. Being accessible, responding, and listening is part of this strategy, which promotes proximity and humanity to the student's learning process. Costa Rican experience with its "Return Guide", highlighted that teachers need to count on tools to acompañar[3] their students in the socio emotional, as in the pedagogy attainment. Acompañar, as an action and essential part of the development process, must be linked as a humanizing action that places the student in a safe environment to learn from his or her own process and experiences. The student is valued, his or her feelings are validated, and his or her thinking is valued as well. Acompañar is an intention that enriches the teaching and learning processes in all its forms.

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[3] acompañamiento conjugated in infinitive.

Recommendations

1. Expand SEL into the curriculum

Even though several countries in the region incorporate SEL in their curriculum in one way or another, some still need to clarify what social and emotional skills need to be developed in the classroom (Arias, Hincapié, & Paredes, 2020). Hence, teachers need to have a clear idea of what competencies to focus on at every level of education (Preschool, Elementary School, Middle School and High School) or according to the student's specific need and according to his or her stage of development. It is likely that most countries can create, strengthen or adapt existing frameworks and or taxonomies for SEL to guide schools' leaders and teachers to integrate this dimension into the curriculum in a detailed and precise way. Findings by Clarke, et al. (2021) showed that SEL reduces symptoms of anxiety or depression and enhances social and emotional skills in a short timeframe. Furthermore, SEL is integral to human development as it also increases students' academic performance and prepares learners for meaningful learning. Hence, integrating SEL in the curriculum, visibly and concretely, provides opportunities for teachers to create experiences for students to develop skills that will guide them through their academic and professional trajectory, as well as in their personal life.

2. Continue to strengthen teachers' social and emotional skills

Delimited spaces are needed for these skills to be developed. Teachers must also count on alternatives and different options to look to when seeking emotional support. This help can come from the Ministry of Education as happened in Peru with the Te escucho docente initiative, in which teachers could easily access a phone line for emotional support and /or support groups. Defining concrete spaces for dialogs with experts is a way to support teachers when needed. Besides, universities' study programmes for teachers must include SEL in their curriculum to foster these skills, from teachers' initial training to their service and other in-service learning opportunities. This also includes acompañamiento strategies for teachers, such as follow-up strategies after sessions with experts or emotional support phone calls or creating specific dates and times for support groups to be implemented in the school calendar.

3. Increase access to technology and develop digital competencies for teachers, students and families

As mentioned above, one of the challenges the region faces is equitable access to quality hybrid modes of education for the whole population. CEPAL (2021) emphasizes that education must integrate face-to-face and distance modalities to meet the needs of all students. During the pandemic, 40% of the poorest countries struggled to implement remote learning to support at-risk students (Yorke, et al., 2021). COVID-19 brought us closer to the need to use technology as a tool to enrich and enhance learning experiences for each student, as well as to respond to students' specific needs and demands. García Jaramillo and Insua (2022) cited Aristas (2020), stating that the number of students logged in to the learning platforms increases according to the socioeconomic and cultural contexts. . Evidence such as this indicates that the digital gap has increased, which translates into unequal access or possibilities for education since most families do not necessarily have digital connectivity, devices or digital skills to support their children in hybrid modes of education that rely on online learning. However, it is not said that technology is the answer to overcome every educational challenge. Technology is just a door to limitless tools that enrich the teaching and learning process, as well as to increased opportunities and access to education, as it was shown in the experience during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Hence, broadened access to technology (adding a better Internet system nationwide and / or providing devices to students and teachers) must come with training strategies and acompañamiento for students and teachers. With this action, teachers will be able to improve their digital competencies to adapt their practicum and respond to a changing technological ecosystem. Teachers will be able to foster students' social and emotional skills for autonomous learning and motivation in every mode of education, and, as a result, reduce students' dropout. These kinds of initiatives need to be amplified, with access and connectivity, as well as learning opportunities to foster digital skills in the whole school community (teachers, leaders, parents and students).

4. Develop better tools for diagnosis, monitoring and use of data

First, it is essential to determine where the students are in their social and emotional growth to help them further develop and strengthen these skills. To achieve this, it is necessary to create tools to diagnose students' SEL skills and to monitor their progress. Therefore, there is a need to create assessment tools that will provide information or data to help students strengthen and foster their social and emotional skills. In addition, teachers need specific tools for using data in the decision-making process to benefit the integral development of each student. Observation is a clear tool, for example, as well as rubrics or anecdotic diaries. This data will also be crucial for the students' acompañamiento according to the needs of each student, considering that the acompañamiento takes place as a safe space for the student to be listened, valued (feelings and thinking), to regulate their emotions and is guided to overcome specific challenges in the socio and emotional area (in this case), but also applies to every other learning domain.

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[4] It is important to note that this paper is limited to sources of information attached to articles, documents, books and websites. No surveys or interviews were developed. Therefore, probably some relevant information wasn't reached to incorporate in this writing piece.

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Abstract

This paper is based on several visits to and interactions with over 100 schools during the three years under pandemic restrictions in Hong Kong. It tries to delineate the advancement of SEL during this period of suspended in-person schooling using various examples in Hong Kong as a proxy for situations in greater Chinese communities. In this context, attention to SEL started before the pandemic but prospered during the suspension of schools. The paper attempts to explain the overall change in society, which explains the emergence of SEL. It also highlights the general professional principles that underpin the development of innovative ways to promote SEL, among others, and suggests that, in a way, a quiet education reform is taking place at the grassroots level, as an experiment towards the future.

Introduction

COVID-19 attacked Hong Kong in early 2020, starting on the 25th of January. School suspension started immediately. There was intermittent resumption of classes over the course of the pandemic for very short periods, but it was only in September 2022 that students were able to return physically, when schools were open half-days (in order to avoid meals). It is safe to say there were almost three years of abnormal operations, when schools turned to online learning most of the time. This does not include the school suspensions in 2019 because of the social unrest. Overall, Hong Kong educators have been forced into on-line learning for a very long period of time. Yet, SEL has prevailed in some form in almost all schools. According to a survey by a charitable foundation, Beishantang, 46% of schools in Hong Kong have newly included SEL in their School Development Plan. This is perhaps something that will not be reversed, even long after the pandemic.

Education as history

The school systems almost all over the world, operate today under an economic rationale. But there were schools in ancient times, and some of them still remain, such as the Buddhist schools in Southeast Asian countries such as Myanmar, Cambodia, and Laos that follow an ancient tradition, and even with a modern curriculum, they aim at 'purifying' lives. There is also the Madrasa system, often located beside mosques in most Central Asian societies, now again with a modern curriculum, which aims at fostering a relationship with Allah. Both of these aim at cultivating people as whole human beings.

We can also mention the public schools in the UK, established in the 15th century for children of the elite - officials, military people, businessmen, sailors, church ministers–in order to foster elite successors. These schools included in their curricula not only knowledge and skills, but also plenty of extra-curricular activities and even community services, in order to develop the whole person. This has been the model in many private schools, particularly in English-speaking countries.

China had no school system, but had a very rigorous examination system – the Imperial Civil Examination–that promoted reading and writing. However, its entire purpose was for selection of civil servants, a system that spread to other parts of the world. It emphasized competition and hard work but was basically a system of selection, nonetheless.

The above overview of past "education systems" highlights the change produced by the coming of the Industrial Era. The school system we now have, as a whole-society endeavour undertaken by the government, admittedly started in Britain in 1870 with The Elementary Education Act. It was due to demands from industrialists, who feared that Britain's competitive status in world trade, manufacture and improvement was being threatened by the lack of an effective education system. This was the first time a government took on the running of a school system. The underpinning rationale was an economic discourse. If we look at the descriptions of schooling during this time, discipline in classrooms prevailed as the prime concern, imitating what happened in factories.

The economic discourse was further reinforced after the Second World War. The huge difference between the recovery in Europe and in Africa led to the emergence of the powerful Human Capital Theory (Becker, 1964), which convinced people that education is an investment, not a consumption. Almost all governments and international organizations became convinced to invest in education as a promise of economic prosperity. This has led to the mushrooming of schools all over the world, especially in less developed economies, where there was an even stronger economy-oriented discourse. If we look at 'educational planning' of the 1960s and 1970s (Coombs, 1970), it is all about enrolment ratio and demographic calculations. There is little beyond knowledge and skills.

To date, almost all schooling systems around the world still function under this economic discourse. Although there has been no lack of SEL in the education traditions of almost all societies, the emergence of contemporary schooling has carried with it a strong economic objective: the production of manpower for all sectors of the workforce. Hence, the emphasis on classification and sifting. Education has become a means where human beings are turned into human resources.

However, society has changed. Mass production has given way to individualized, personalized, tailor-made products. Huge pyramidal institutions are no longer a necessity and are being replaced by much smaller, more flexible, more fragmented organizations. Labour statistics in Hong Kong, Shanghai and the US, as examples, show that the largest percentage of business and industrial organizations are small enterprises. Even in large, modern organizations, employees work in small deal teams, account teams or project teams. Accordingly, the relationship between individuals and organizations has also become more short-term, if not fluid. Frequent changes of jobs and careers, preferences for self-employment, intermittent voluntary unemployment, and so forth, have become commonplace.

In a nutshell, individuals are increasingly working in small units, directly facing their clients, who are often new clients. They have to deal with partners of all kinds or be a member of a small team. They have to face problems and design solutions, run risks, be innovative, and face all kinds of ethical challenges and temptations. In a traditional industrial society, all of these would be tasks for the boss or leader of the organization.

It is in this context that SEL has become a necessary preparation of individuals for the workplace. As people now often say, our students have to face a volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous world. No longer can one plan to stay in a stable job or even in the same career, which would require education credentials only and which, in turn, would focus only on knowledge and skills.

Hong Kong before the pandemic

SEL began to emerge in a few pioneering schools in Hong Kong long before the arrival of the pandemic. However, it has now become a territory-wide phenomenon where almost all schools have certain versions of social emotional learning.

There could be two reasons for this: the first has to do with a tradition in Chinese culture (Cheng, 2011), where education is often considered in five dimensions: moral, intellectual, social, physical and aesthetic. The moral dimension often refers to the development of the self, and the social dimension refers to one's being in a social group. Therefore, as a tradition, most schools had two deputies to the principal: the Prefect of Studies and the Prefect of Discipline. The latter reflects the reduction of the moral and social aspects of education to discipline. The term Prefect of Discipline has evolved over time into Prefect of Moral Education, and in recent years to Prefect of Counseling.

The second is due to the British influence. The first schools in Hong Kong were started in the mid-19th century by Christian and Catholic missionaries. The most prominent of these were modeled after grammar schools in the UK. They trained the children of the elite with a strong emphasis on both the intellectual and spiritual or character development. What is special in Hong Kong is that these church-run schools were the first to receive government subsidies. They are known as Grant Schools (Chiu, 2013). Such a model of schooling was duplicated in the 1970s when the Hong Kong government expanded the public sector to include the majority of schools. The character building (if not spiritual) dimension of learning was sustained. This is rather different from some other systems, where the popularization of schooling is often seen as a mechanism for transmission of knowledge and skills for economic development, as discussed above.

Combining these two historical facts, it would not be faithful to reality to say that there was total absence of SEL before the pandemic, albeit in different forms and with different labels. However, the intensity and variety of SEL that emerged during the pandemic was unprecedented. It has to be added, nonetheless, that most of the emergent forms of social emotional learning–including positive education, character education, growth mindset, student well-being, compassionate communications, and mindfulness–came in packages or schemes that were often developed in the West. Certain local modifications, some of them very innovative, are discussed below.

At the same time, before the pandemic, the use of technology in education in Hong Kong was minimal. This might seem ironic, given that the people of Hong Kong have always been quick to catch up with the use of advanced technologies. Ownership of electronic devices in Hong Kong has always been high. However, any form of e-learning involving digital devices was infrequent, if not rare. There has been no official survey, but it was widely reported that only 15% of all schools–secondary, primary and kindergartens–ever engaged in e-learning before the pandemic.

Meanwhile, the few schools that became involved in e-learning were very often prompted by a partner who was one of the big information technology (IT) providers. I have seen schools with a magnificent artificial intelligence (AI) laboratory, sponsored by a particular IT provider.

Furthermore, Hong Kong has always been ranked rather high in international comparisons such as PISA, PIRLS and TIMSS in basic education. Fortunately or unfortunately, indicators in such comparisons do not directly measure the application of technologies. Indeed, there was a concern whether Hong Kong could maintain such a high standing as the use of technology spread. Indeed, starting in 2015, PISA now requires on-line testing.

In sum, before the pandemic, Hong Kong ran a school system which was seen as among the highest-performing in the world, with some kind of traditional forms of SEL, yet with very little engagement in the use of digital means in pedagogy in general, let alone SEL.

Dramatic changes during the pandemic

Hong Kong schools were first hit by social unrest in 2019, when street violence forced schools to close for two full months. At that time, school suspension was seen as temporary because it was commonly believed that the violence would not go on forever.

When the pandemic forced the government to close schools on 25 January, 2020, teachers and parents were unprepared. People in Hong Kong remembered SARS (Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome), another pandemic in 2002-03 which had taken some time to recede. However, the initial wait-and-see; sentiment did not last long. By the end of March the same year, all schools without exception had started teaching online, which quickly multiplied from a few schools to all schools. The changes were dramatic.

First, the hardware problem emerged as prominent. Although Hong Kong is generally seen as an affluent society, in which technology hardware should not be a problem, there are pockets of deprivation where students would suffer if they were to study at home. There had been a BYOD– Bring Your Own Device–programme in which the government funded each student to own their own 'large screen' device (computer, laptop or tablet). Those schools who at first chose to ignore the programme soon joined in. This was to ensure that no student would be deprived of an electronic device. Internet coverage was another problem for some corners of the territory. Charitable bodies soon came to help and provided needy students with free SIM cards, which enabled them to log on from home.

Second, teachers became quick learners themselves. In a matter of two or three weeks, almost all members of schools managed to learn the basics of the required technologies. They learnt from peers, with little regard to age and seniority within schools. They learnt across schools, from volunteer helpers from other schools. 'What would otherwise require a five-year training has been accomplished in a few weeks,', as one policy-maker remarked.

Third, learning to use the technologies was no longer monopolized by the major providers. Teachers tended to use whatever technologies were available, of their own choice. In fact, they became masters of the technologies. At the time of writing, almost three years later, it is quite common to see a school using 20-30 different platforms or apps, for use at teachers' discretion. This has paved the way for all kinds of innovations in blended learning, SEL included.

Fourth, almost all schools started with the intention to reclaim the lost hours due to class suspension. Such intentions changed over time, because it was soon clear that online learning from home can only partly replace face-to-face activities in physical classrooms. They belong to different modes, contents and target goals of learning. That said, it does not mean that they should give up the attempt to cover the conventional syllabus as much as possible. Teachers almost naturally transformed from 'instructors' into 'designers of learning'. The focus of attention has changed from students' immediate responses under close monitoring to using their own initiative at a remote site. All of this concerns students' emotions and sentiments. SEL has crept in.

Fifth, it has become understood that online learning creates new opportunities for student interactions and new ways of forming learning communities. Increasingly, with the addition of individual dialogues online, teachers have developed even closer relations with students. Among other consequences, the social and emotional dimensions have become necessary if not essential.

Explosion of SEL activities

There has to date been no formal study of the dramatic 'explosion' of SEL activities that occurred during the pandemic. Principals recall that their initial intention was to reduce or prevent students' depression, as a kind of therapeutic motive. However, this rather negative sentiment soon turned into a positive move to improve students' well-being in general. The following examples serve as illustrations.

Before introducing the examples, it is perhaps necessary to preface them with two pieces of contextual information. First, schools in Hong Kong are highly decentralized. Hong Kong practices a 'school-based' model of school governance. Apart from a few government schools and a small number of private schools, the large majority of schools are 'aided schools'–financed by the government but managed by voluntary bodies (charitable organizations, religious bodies, alumni associations, etc.). They have discretion in appointing principals, recruiting teachers, deciding on the administrative structure, designing their own curricula and choosing their preferred textbooks. The government lays down only the basic legal provisions and general framework for the curriculum. Schools are therefore run according to their respective visions. That said, much of the formal learning in schools is still dictated by the public examination, which is crucial for entrance to higher education. Anyway, the introduction of SEL is a school-based decision. The government does publish policy papers on topics related to SEL–moral and civic education, for example. Schools do not need to ask for the government's permission to introduce new elements, such as SEL. Nor do they have to wait for government directives to launch new initiatives.

Second, apart from the voluntary bodies that run schools, other agencies also focus on education. The largest is the Hong Kong Jockey Club which, making use of its gains through horse racing, sponsors projects involving a large number of schools. Other private foundations host or carry out SEL-related research. Newly emergent NGOs, often run by young people, work on SEL-related programmes. There are also semi-business / semi-voluntary organizations working on SEL as well as university centres and individual academics devoted to the study and promotion of SEL. Hence, SEL initiatives from schools are often partnered with agents in the community who support them with their expertise.

Example 1. Understanding one's own emotions

School A, a primary school, started positive education by leading students to understand their own emotions, using cards with specific emotional faces (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Emotion cards (By courtesy of Hong Kong Jockey Club Positive Education 'Ascend and Radiate' Project.)

During the pandemic, when schools were suspended, the school continued to ask students to tell the class their emotions of the day (Figure 2). This was part of a positive education programme. There is a belief that knowing and handling one's own emotions is a good starting point for positive thinking. Positive education, also known as positive learning, has extended its influence to all aspects of school life–from the pedagogy of formal lessons, to extra-curricular activities, to experiential learning outside schools and team-building among teachers, as well as school-parent relations. It has become a comprehensive model of positive thinking.
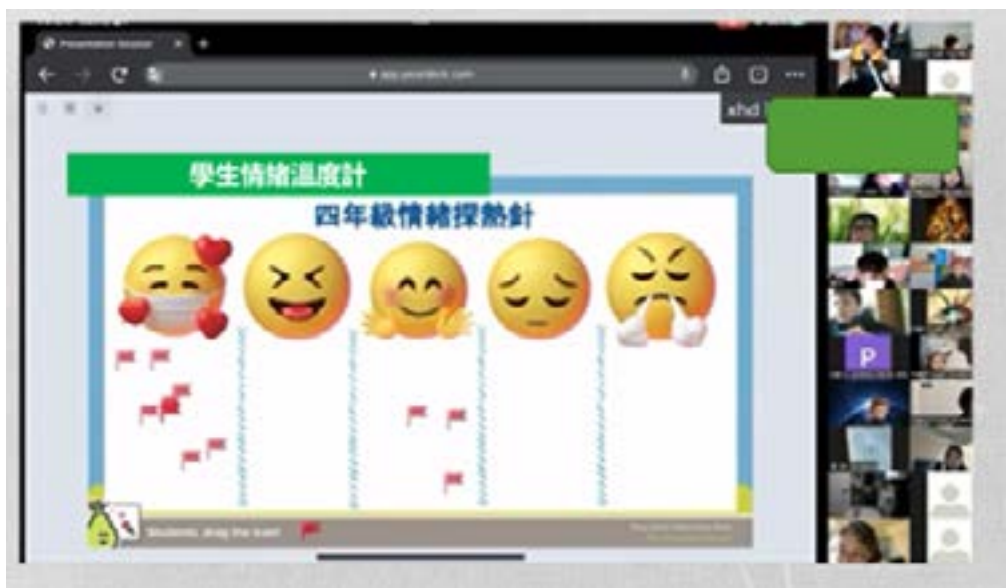
The teacher who initiated the whole movement in this school now hosts occasions in which she shares her experience with teachers in other schools. Some of the activities are duplicated in other schools.

Example 2: Mindfulness

Quite a few schools introduced mindfulness during the pandemic. The movement towards mindfulness is largely initiated by an academic team from the University of Hong Kong. In some schools, students learned to do five minutes of meditation at the beginning of each lesson. Contrary to all expectations, primary school children found it interesting and actively asked to do it. The five minutes of mindfulness have changed the entire atmosphere of the class, either online or physical, and students are now more prepared to concentrate. This has continued now that physical classrooms have re-opened (Figure 3).

Figure 3: Mindfulness and meditation space (By courtesy of Po Leung Kok Chong Kai Ching Primary School)

In School B, in a Place-Maker programme, a space is turned into a meditation room, where students can enjoy a moment of tranquility and self-reflection.

Example 3: Positive Education

Positive education is quite widespread among Hong Kong schools, following the model designed by Martin Seligman (Seligman, 1990), but it flourished even more during the pandemic.
The leading institution is Beishantang, a charitable private foundation which sent teachers to training sessions in Australia, and also sent an academic to take an additional degree in positive psychology. Over 200 schools now follow their programme, most of them joined during the pandemic.

Another private foundation, the D.H. Chen Foundation, collaborated with St. James Settlement and created SOWGOOD! for designing programmes and training teachers for positive education. There are also centres at City University of Hong Kong, which works towards giving Positive Education a local meaning.

Example 4: Comprehensive SEL

Some schools have completely changed the idea of a campus. School C is situated in a small-town area where the highway crosses a river. The school defined a circular area 1.5 kilometres in radius, with the school at the centre, as their greater campus. In the past years, despite the pandemic, they have become a community centre, helping the local community to tackle air and water problems and working with people in the locality.

Senior people in the community have almost become members of the school. They also conduct economics lessons for owners of the local shops. Although it is in an urban area, it is almost like a rural village school. Students share all the social and emotional dramas of the 1.5 kilometre circle. Despite the pandemic, student learning experiences have been enormously enriched.

Example 5: Student well-being

The term well-being is widely used in the education community to indicate the all-round development of students. In School D, the entire primary curriculum has been re-organized with 'subjects' giving way to learning activities according to an all-round education framework. It fully exploits the advantages of on-line learning, with elements of SEL built into the re-organized curriculum. This has given teachers the flexibility to tailor the curriculum during the pandemic. Project Well-being is a large, three-year programme, sponsored by the Hong Kong Jockey Club, which started during school suspension in about 20 schools. Schools follow a broad framework and develop their own programmes, leading to a great variety of SEL activities, including an innovative 'place maker' that creates new space for students' non-cognitive activities, to enhance their self-confidence, attention to the environment, student-initiated service learning, and so forth. The project has a strong research component, both qualitative and qualitative.

Example 6: Individual care

The Principal in School E managed to interact with all 600+ students in small groups of 10. A teacher in another school identified a student who never turned on his camera, only to discover his appalling home condition in a congested and chaotic mini-flat. Another teacher talked to a student who never looked at him during online lessons, and revealed that the boy had only a cup of noodles for all three meals. Many teachers had similar experiences, which had never occurred to them before the pandemic, where all students at school seemed identical in their identical school uniforms. These teachers became more aware of the social disparity in which their students live, and learned to be more mindful of students' family conditions.

Example 7: Cross-cultural harmony

Hong Kong's predominantly ethnic Chinese population is changing. There are now locally born non-Chinese, many from South Asia, as well as new immigrants working as laborers or free-lancers. It is now common for schools to have students of non-Chinese ethnicity, which was unknown ten years ago.

Online learning that flourished during the pandemic has created a new mode of community, where all students are equal on the screen. Teachers also found that cross-cultural relationships are more natural on the screen.

School F, situated in a traditional village in the suburb, celebrates local festivals involving South Asian students. Meanwhile, Pakistani students express their own culture through songs and dances. These occasions are easily recorded and shared in an online setting.

School G, a traditional Catholic school, has admitted quite a few Muslim students. It has created a special prayer room and special arrangements during morning assembly so that Muslim students can have the option of a moment of silence during Catholic prayers. Principals believe that equity in schools paves the way for equity in society. Respect for other cultures, friendship among different ethnic groups, and ways to resolve cultural differences are all part of the schools' responsibility.

They found that the online activities have, by design, put everyone on an equal footing and helped to enhance harmony among cultures.

Example 8: Home-school relationships

When students were forced to study at home, the role of parents changed. Often, they had to monitor their children's learning progress and even take on extra workloads on top of their own work, at home or in the workplace.

Most schools organized parent sessions, for discussions or training. These have significantly changed the relationship between schools and parents. Teachers and parents have developed a comradeship in supporting the children's learning (Figure 4). This is particularly true in the case of kindergartens and lower grades. It is the first time that teachers have felt the need for parental help, and when parents have felt sincerity from teachers. It is safe to say that the pandemic has transformed a previous 'mutual complaining' situation.

Figure 4: Local parents with South Asian parents—how to help non-Chinese students learn Chinese

The study-at-home situation has also increased the closeness between the children and the parents while also leading to more opportunities for conflict. Many schools therefore conducted programmes to help students improve relations with their parents. Thankfulness is a common theme in many schools, which includes thankfulness to parents.
In School H, students are each asked to note down one good point about his or her mother. Students were at first puzzled but soon fell into deep thought. At a parents' gathering, when reading their children's remarks, mothers burst into tears. They felt closer to their children.
Example 9: 'Just Feel'

This sketch of the SEL scene in Hong Kong would not be complete without mentioning the mushrooming of NGOs that were started by young people, all hoping to help students grow beyond formal knowledge.

students back to the physical campus, and to help students to adapt themselves to their new environments. Just Feel is now working with over a dozen schools. Their stories are widely propagated through the media.

The above are just a few brief examples. It has to be remembered that all of these happened during the pandemic when schools were suspended and 100% (yes, 100%) of the Hong Kong population wore masks during the pandemic (which ended only on 1 March, 2023). From these examples, one can see that SEL is not a separate subject, but is a dimension of learning that runs through the entire student life, regardless of the physical conditions.

Discerning the causes

The pandemic caught everybody unprepared. The suspension of schools for almost three years is unprecedented. Therefore, the changes that took place were not part of any planning. Even during the pandemic, situations changed every month if not every week, and schools were unable to engage in any forward planning. Improvisation is perhaps the only word that could explain the daily routine during the three years. Yet, the school system has stayed intact. And, in particular, the gain of experience in SEL during the period is unexpected but precious.

It is therefore useful to discern the underlying causes for the changes, even if in hindsight. The pandemic, as unfortunate as it was, created unusual opportunities for Hong Kong schools and teachers to experience learning activities online. Although people had thought that without physical connections, SEL would be impossible, the Hong Kong experience seems to tell a story that learning online can create another mode of learning, even in the realm of SEL.

First, the slogan 'Schools suspended, Learning continues' (停課不停學) was shared among the Chinese communities of mainland China, Hong Kong, Taiwan and Macao. With no prior exchange among these four systems, this shows a surprising consensus that emerged almost as a matter of course in all four societies. This consensus is perhaps deeply rooted in the understanding of the notion of education. These are all societies that place high value on education, which is common to all the 'chopsticks cultures' if we include Japan, Korea and Vietnam, all vaguely labeled as 'Confucian societies' (Cheng, 2011). However, the slogan contains an important message that schooling is not equal to learning. It is, rather, an answer to the question 'What is education?' In the broadest sense of the term, education is about students' learning, in which schooling is only one of the mechanisms. When schools are suspended, it is the responsibility of society to provide alternatives to engage students in learning.

Second, the flourishing of SEL despite school suspension is also a reflection of teachers' professionalism. Professionalism is first and foremost devotion to the 'clients' (Hoyle, 1980), in this case students. In common with teachers all around the world, school suspension prompted all teachers to find alternative ways to connect with their students. The natural tendency was to use online tools as a replacement for physical classrooms. Such a replacement is valid only to a certain extent, hence the cry over 'learning loss'. Teachers' professionalism keeps them sensitive not only to the substance of the formal curriculum, but also students' well-being as a whole. It is this concern that brings SEL into the picture.

Third, school walls are becoming blurred in two senses. On the one hand, the physical campuses are now augmented by activities in the digital world, which has no limit. On the other hand, as can be seen in the examples above, many of the SEL activities take place outside school campuses in the community. As hinted in the OECD Scenarios of Future Schooling (OECD, 2021), schools still maintain their role as a centre of learning, but they have also become hubs for learning, where they provide connection, coordination, selection and organization of students' learning experiences in the wider society.

However, all of these are only possible with the understanding and support from the community at large. Such a tendency emerged earlier, at the turn of the century, but it has now gained a general consensus among non-educational organizations in the community. The support from the non-educational sectors has evolved from philanthropic donations or involvement in school teaching to providing experiential learning opportunities, which is different from career-oriented internship.

Fourth, as reflected in the above narrative, what is happening is a move towards more active and constructive learning among students. This is a significant step towards 'students as active learners', which has long been dreamt of by education reformers. During the pandemic, the best we can say is that this has been a great experiment. Teachers were trying out all kinds of possible means whereby students can learn, with the hope that students would learn to learn on their own initiative. However, as is with all experiments, there are successes and failures. Teachers and schools are entering a totally new world of learning. One would not expect total successes in all these new ventures. It is already a miracle that there were no disastrous outcomes due to the experiments, beyond the pandemic.

Looking forward

As this paper is being written, the pandemic has yet to totally leave us. It may just stay with us. However, the Hong Kong experience hints at the future of education, if we look forward.
First, the experience of school suspension during the pandemic may serve as an experiment on two fronts at the same time. On one front, the development of SEL for all students, in which the tide of SEL across the globe is a reflection on the perceived need to embrace a fragmented and individualized society. On the other front, online learning and the advancement of technologies is inevitably leading to a blended mode of learning among our students.
Both fronts are essential indications of the future. Therefore, the experiences during the pandemic indeed could be seen as a prelude to the future (although such a prelude emerges at one of the most unfortunate moments in the history of humankind).

Some may argue that 'the future is now'. Indeed, fundamental changes in society and the advancement in technology are no longer a matter of speculation. They are already happening all around us. Education has been rather slow in sensing the changes and reacting to the developments outside education. The school suspension has been a wake-up call. It reminds us that the schooling we are used to is not the only way for student learning, and certainly not the desirable way to face the future.

Second, although online learning was almost the only option during the pandemic, blended learning will stay as education systems continue to evolve. In a way, at least where technologies allow, every individual now lives in two parallel societies–the physical and the virtual. Education cannot be exempt. In OECD's Four Scenarios of Future Schooling (OECD 2020), the fourth scenario—'learn as you go—'is already happening in our daily lives. People turn to search engines for information or knowledge which is needed but not known. This has not yet happened in most education systems, particularly in schooling. In basic education, it is not common that teachers may turn to online sources for student learning.

However, this does not mean that students, on their own initiative, do not learn from the virtual world– numerous platforms and social media. We hardly know how their lives in the virtual world have shaped their emotions, attitudes, ethical standards, principles in social relations, self-images, and their value systems in general.

For example, social movements around the world involve young people, sometimes including students. We have little knowledge about how they were motivated, which is well beyond what they might have learnt from schooling in the physical world.

During the pandemic, with online learning, SEL provided an entry point to understanding students' learning online in the non-cognitive dimension of their personal development. Such an entry point should not be abandoned, which might easily be the case when the pandemic is finally over.

Third, unlike learning in the formal curriculum, SEL goes well beyond being a separate syllabus. SEL, by nature, is about oneself and one's relations with other people. Learning in SEL takes place in processes that are not particularly designed for SEL. Such interactions happen in schools, but more realistically outside schools, in society.

There is also the question of assessment. Students progress at different paces and often in different directions, even though they have been exposed to the same learning experiences. Moreover, much of SEL may not bring immediate or visible outcomes at a certain point, as we may otherwise see in mathematics, language, science and other subjects. So, how do we assess SEL? This is not so much a challenge to SEL as to the entire notion of assessment in learning.

Fourth, at the level of macro-policies, if blended learning is the future, then the experience in Hong Kong demonstrates that there needs to be a revamp of the resource strategies for education. To date, in almost all systems around the world, education resources emphasize schooling and stay at the school level. However, if blended learning is going to become a reality, a substantial part of learning will be undertaken by students at home. Therefore, the centre of gravity of education resource-allocation should be lowered to the level of the individual student. In Hong Kong, there is a Quality Education Fund which is a rather handsome funding source that schools can apply to for school-specific projects. However, the funding is available only to schools. There is little, apart from charities, that could benefit individual students when they are put into a study-from-home situation.

There is also the need for a new kind of 'social work', where students in difficult home situations, either because of poor living conditions or because of family disharmony, may receive realistic assistance.

Concluding remarks

It is of both practical and theoretical interest to observe how things happened during the pandemic and the school suspension. As can be seen from the above, it was not a top-down model, where government initiatives took the lead. Nor was it a bottom-up model because there was no intention at the time to cause any systemic policy change. Yet, SEL has flourished in almost all schools, at a time when teachers might otherwise have been expected to find themselves helplessly standing by and watching 'learning loss'.

Nonetheless, there is a real worry that when the pandemic is over, and schools resume full-day operations, things will go back to what they were before the pandemic. All the positive changes during the pandemic may be abandoned and forgotten. All the splendid experiments would be wasted. After taking such a bold step into the future, this would be a very unfortunate retreat.

For the time being, such a sign of retreat is not on the horizon. Instead, there is an emerging call that the post-pandemic era should not be the same as the pre-pandemic times. Indeed, it would not be realistic to assume that societies could simply return to a time before the pandemic. This applies to all walks of life, and education is no exception.

When the Hong Kong case has been presented to international colleagues, some have remarked that a silent reform in education has apparently taken place. Indeed, teachers have changed their perceptions about education, which is no longer limited to knowledge and skills. They have changed their role in relation to students, and schools have changed their relations with parents. Community agents have entered education, and new agents are mushrooming. All of these changes are unprecedented.

All over the globe, there are cries for transforming and reimagining education (UNESCO, 2021), but success stories are yet to flourish. As yet, few governments could claim success in their education reforms. Is it possible that the pandemic might have provided us with a hint, and allowed us to imagine changes in education in a way that we could never previously have dared hope for?

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Abstract

Teachers around the world needed concrete strategies to respond to the heightened socio-emotional needs of learners during the pandemic period, and many of these strategies needed to work in online and hybrid modes. This chapter includes strategies for checking in regularly on learners' socio-emotional well-being, raising learners' well-being awareness and levels of self-understanding, reflective activities, and strategies for cultivating peer support. In order to equip teachers to better support learners' socio-emotional well-being in online and hybrid modes of education, teacher training and professional development should integrate an understanding of the importance of socio-emotional learning, concrete strategies that work for different age groups and contexts, and a foundation of digital literacies, as well as nurturing an attitude of agility in responding to uncertainty in education.

Introduction and rationale

This chapter offers concrete strategies for promoting socio-emotional well-being in classrooms, many of which were developed or adapted for online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic, a time when physical distancing and anxiety around the pandemic heightened learners' socio-emotional needs. For example, a 2020 JAMA Pediatrics meta-study of worldwide data on children under 18 shows that "rates of clinically significant generalized depression and anxiety doubled over the course of the pandemic, with one in four youth experiencing depression and one in five anxiety" (cited in UNICEF, 2021, p. 102).

Many educators, particularly in higher education but definitely across the board in Egypt and the MENA region, tend to not be 'trained' in socio-emotional care for learners. More importantly, much of the research on online learning prior to the pandemic focused more on the Community of Inquiry model, focusing on cognitive, teacher, and social presence, but the later work of Cleveland-Innes & Campbell on integrating 'emotional presence' was much less frequently used (as an example of the scale of this, the most frequently cited Community of Inquiry model article is cited over 2000 times, whereas two emotional presence articles combined have been cited around 500 times).

An awareness that the socio-emotional needs of learners intensified during the pandemic did not automatically equip teachers, many of whom were teaching online for the first time ever, to promote socio-emotional well-being in their classes. Therefore, a demand for concrete strategies, along with potential adaptations to different contexts, became a global need.

Key issues and challenges

Although there were some common challenges and opportunities posed during school lockdowns, it is important to be aware of broad contextual differences within a country such as Egypt that has (mostly) free education, K-16, but struggles to offer quality education to all. As Table 1 below shows, publicly funded schooling and higher education have a very different context compared to private education, which is often much better resourced.

Table 1: Differences in context between Egyptian public and private higher education and schools.

Context criteria	Private Higher Ed (e.g., AUC)	Public Higher Ed	Private School (variety)	Public School
Class sizes	Smaller (15-40)	Larger (100+) lectures and smaller sections	Smaller (10-30)	Unimaginable (70+ sometimes)
Infrastructure	High	Low/variable	Medium-high	Low
Software/ platforms	High & familiar	Patchy across faculties	Medium, training given	Low
Tech capability of student population	Mostly high	Varies greatly	Mostly high	Varies

Challenges and opportunities posed during lockdown

Among the major challenges faced in Egypt, similar to other emerging economies, was variability in:

● **access to 'own devices'** in households where there were multiple young people in school or university, possibly sharing devices with siblings;

● **internet bandwidth** in homes, affecting learners' abilities to access high-bandwidth learning activities involving video streaming or video conferencing, especially when there were multiple users in one household;

● **learners' abilities to connect via video conferencing,** especially in terms of opening cameras when bandwidth was low or privacy at home was difficult to achieve;

● **digital literacies and skills of learners**; variability in learners' capacities to manage their time for asynchronous learning;

● learners' **readiness to learn autonomously** via reading or watching videos without direct connection to teachers;

● variability in learners' capacities to focus and learn **without direct contact** with a teacher and colleagues;

● **anxiety** caused by the uncertainty of the pandemic or actual illness for themselves or family members, leading to difficulty focusing on learning

The fact that all teaching and learning had to happen remotely (whether interactively online or using tools like TV for broadcasting) did pose an opportunity for everyone, teachers and learners alike, at all educational levels, to enhance their digital literacies in order to make the most of what was possible in the digital world. Other opportunities arose for learners with certain disabilities who struggle to attend classes physically, or those who are shy or anxious when learning in a classroom with others, as the online learning context allowed them to participate from their own homes.

Why strategies to promote social and emotional learning in online and hybrid modes of learning?

When the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in government closures of educational institutions all around the world, the focus of schools and universities was to find ways for learners to receive content for learning, and to adapt assessment methods for remote/online instruction. Very few efforts were made, especially at the policy level, to enhance learners' well-being. There was no clear directive on how to ensure that students who were learning in this new way remained motivated, no discussion of how the involuntary physical distancing in their academic and social lives might affect their ability to learn, and no strategy to alleviate the stress and anxiety learners faced due to the health crisis, economic instability and overall uncertainty. Nor were parents given sufficient support to enable them to facilitate their children's learning and socio-emotional well-being at home. Moreover, there was no recognition of the variability in learners' readiness for online learning in terms of their access to their own devices with good internet bandwidth, or to their digital literacies in general, as well as to their readiness to autonomously manage their own learning.

As an educational developer, public scholar, university professor and mother, I had different perspectives on the pandemic situation which led me to recognize an urgency to develop approaches to promoting socio-emotional learning in remote/online education.

First, as an educational developer, I saw student and educator feedback within my institution on how teachers and students alike were struggling with physical distancing and the pandemic's impact on anxiety. As a teacher myself, I had many conversations with my students on how they were feeling. And, as a public scholar, I blogged and tweeted about a 'pedagogy of care' and was frequently invited to give workshops and keynotes on this topic. This alone was a strong indicator of the worldwide need for strategies to show care for students and enhance their well-being. Finally, as a mother of my own child (who was eight years old when the pandemic started), I observed and had conversations with her on how she was feeling during the pandemic, and of course I also saw the impact on her friends.

How the strategies in this chapter were developed?

I felt compelled to develop and share strategies on building community online in order to support others who had no experience with doing so, given how urgent the need was during the pandemic. Some of the strategies were ones I developed myself and tried out with my students, my child, or asked other educators to practice. Other strategies were developed for different contexts, such as Liberating Structures (Lipmanowicz & McCandless, 2013), which I learned to adapt for educational purposes and transfer fully online. I participated in workshops by others who were experts in these strategies and then learned how they might be adapted for not only online learning but also for online learning with different parameters for example, for synchronous versus asynchronous, Zoom versus other platforms, students with cameras on versus off. Most of these strategies are ones I have used in workshops with educators at my institution, students in my classes, with my own child, and very often in workshops and invited talks with regional or global audiences composed of students and educators.

How curricula for educating teachers need to change going forward?

It has become clear that three things are needed in order to prepare teachers for uncertain situations like pandemics:

1. Better preparation for integrating socio-emotional well-being into courses for learners of different ages and teachers of the whole range of content areas, from preschool and foundational skills through university courses. This may entail a need for teachers to learn about trauma-informed pedagogy, including how to design a learning environment that meets basic socio-emotional needs and avoids exacerbating stress or anxiety, and to recognize when a learner may need professional help beyond what can be done in class. Training in Universal Design for Learning (UDL) to create a more inclusive learning environment may also support this goal as it better enables diverse learners to succeed. UDL aims to design learning experiences that 'reduce barriers and maximize learning opportunities for all learners' in order to "meet the needs of all learners" (CAST, 2022a), with guidelines to offer choices to learners along three dimensions: 'multiple means of engagement' to recognize diversity in the "why" of learner motivation; 'multiple means of representation' in 'what' educators show to learners; and '"multiple means of action and expression"', in 'how' learners represent their learning to teachers (CAST, 2022b);

2. Better preparation for converting teaching strategies to different modalities, if needed, so that teachers know how to achieve the same learning outcomes and values regardless of whether they are meeting learners in-person, or online or hybrid, and whether the learning is occurring synchronously or asynchronously. This entails an overall improvement in digital literacies that would give teachers a breadth of knowledge of available digital tools, the skills to use existing ones, learn new ones, and more importantly, the judgment to choose the most appropriate tools for their designated purpose each time;

3. Better preparation for agility and adaptability, what Adrienne Maree Brown (2017) calls 'intentional adaptation', which allows teachers to calmly modify their lesson plans as needed when context changes.

Innovations, evidence and lessons learned:

The particular strategies shared in this section have been curated by the author of this chapter in collaboration with global educators, for use in fully online learning at the higher education level at the American University in Cairo, a private institution which is well-resourced and where the majority of students were either privileged or supported by the institution if on scholarship. However, every activity can be adapted for different age groups and for different contexts, such as asynchronous, low-bandwidth approaches, or hybrid simultaneous learning. Some of these adaptations are presented in the examples below.

Creative ways to check in regularly

Checking in regularly with students, to ask how they are feeling, is something that many educators do intuitively in face-to-face contexts, whether explicitly by asking or implicitly by noticing their body language and facial expressions as they enter class, or throughout class. However, online, and with so many students preferring to keep their cameras off during live online sessions (whether due to bandwidth challenges, social or psychological reasons), or not meeting the educators regularly because of asynchronous online learning, it is harder for teachers to intuitively know how students are feeling.

Moreover, students who are not used to being asked how they are feeling are likely to just say, 'fine', and not realize that it is a genuine question. Some may not be comfortable being put on the spot in front of others, although this may improve as the community builds over time.

The importance of checking in has been emphasized by Iraqi educator Mays Imad, who asks students 'how is your heart?' (see Imad, 2020) and Lebanese educator, Rima Malek, who says, regarding checking in during the pandemic:

> We have to work on the social and emotional atmosphere because students in their houses are in a very weird condition, they are somehow afraid. So, we cannot open our cameras and tell them, 'Now we'll study this'. We should check on them by asking, 'is everything well?' Most people are dealing with different levels of stress and anxiety…including me.' (Malek, Bernard & Williams, 2020, para 4).

This is why it is important to find creative ways to ask learners how they are feeling, not only to let them know that educators genuinely care, but also to help learners reflect on how they truly are feeling in the moment. Some ways of doing so are included in this video (Bali & Zamora, undated). The most straightforward way is to ask everyone to say how they are feeling by typing in the chat. That way everyone gets to express how they feel and see how others feel. However, this method may make some students uncomfortable as they do not want the entire class to know how they feel–and learners may still say 'fine', if not prompted to dig deeper. Another way is to use a polling tool like Slido or Mentimeter that would create a word cloud of how students are feeling but keep their responses anonymous, so the teacher and other learners get a sense of which feelings are common in the class without knowing how each how each individual feels. This anonymity may encourage some students to be more open about how they feel.

An alternative to these ways of checking in is to use visuals. Show learners a series of pictures, possibly showcasing emotions directly, or abstract pictures that can evoke certain emotions, and ask learners to say which visual resonates with them most or represents how they're feeling right now. This approach can help learners dig deeper into analysing their own emotions in the moment and connecting with others. This kind of activity can be done with the whole class, but can also be done more effectively in small groups, where students speak to one or two others and take their time discussing how the images represent how they feel. Alternatively, learners can simply annotate on the slide in some form to highlight which of the images represent how they feel, and it would be visible which images appealed to more students. Another way to use annotation is to have a simpler spectrum or diagram showing different emotions and invite learners to annotate and show where they feel along the spectrum. It is also important sometimes to invite learners to say they are feeling more than one emotion at the same time (e.g., feeling physically tired but mentally excited).

In any of the methods of 'checking in', the more regularly they are used, the more likely it is that learners will be honest about how they feel, especially towards the middle of an academic term when they are likely to start feeling more stressed. As with in-person learning environments of all constructs and at all ages, it is important for educators to acknowledge the mood in the virtual room and respond to it.

Although the activity is showcased in the video as a synchronous activity, it can be done asynchronously and the educators can respond asynchronously as well. For example, in between meeting times, the teacher can ask students to share how they are doing in anonymous or named ways, via surveys or discussion boards, for example, or by inviting them to post images or emojis expressing how they are feeling.

Well-being awareness activities

Where possible, educators can help learners become more aware of ways that can enhance their well-being. Educators can encourage learners to do things like gratitude journaling, meditation, recognizing things that bring them joy or delight in their daily lives, or inviting them to create an imaginary 'wellness gift basket' for a friend. Some of these activities can happen outside of the classroom/meeting context, and some can be done as a five-minute warm-up activity for a class. In my experience, starting class with something like this is well worth the time it takes because it boosts the learners' mood for the rest of the class, and it also helps them through challenges throughout the semester or term. It is important to offer a variety of activities such as these, because while gratitude journaling may work for one person, meditation may work better for another. When each learner shares with colleagues what works for them (not the content of a gratitude journal, for example, but their reflection on the experience), it helps encourage others to try new approaches.

Semi-synchronous third places for community building

One approach that supports social connection and support amongst students is to have a less formal space where all students can connect with each other semi-synchronously, such as a WhatsApp group, Slack team or similar. Educators may create those spaces themselves where it is possible, or students may create them and invite teachers. They may be within the Learning Management System or exist in social spaces outside the classroom that students prefer, such as WhatsApp. Educators can encourage learners to use these spaces to ask questions and answer each other, and they can also be used for more fun activities such as sharing jokes, or GIFs, music or such. This allows students to connect with each other as human beings and not just as colleagues, and where teachers are willing to also connect in this way, it can promote a warmer and more inclusive atmosphere.

Activities for promoting self-understanding

Helping learners reflect on their goals in life can help them prioritize activities that motivate them to learn and enhance their well-being. Examples of such activities are Ikigai ([Bali, undated a](#)) and Live, Love, Learn & Leave a Legacy ([Bali, undated b](#)).

Ikigai

In this activity, inspired by a Japanese approach to finding purpose in life, we ask learners to answer four questions:

1. What am I good at?
2. What do I love?
3. What does the world need?
4. What can I be paid for?

The intersections of each of these can help you find your mission, passion, vocation or your profession, but if you find something that is the intersection of all of these things, that would be your 'Ikigai'. Learners can reflect on the first three of these questions and the last one can be modified for an educational purpose, like 'What can I do my writing project on?' or 'What can I create an art piece for?' depending on the course being taught. This is an activity that would ideally be done individually, but for some learners, interviewing each other in pairs might help them discuss these questions more deeply. The order of answering the questions might also be more appropriate for some contexts versus others.

I have done this activity successfully with undergraduate students, adults, and with my own eleven year-old child. The key outcome here is that by reflecting deeply about what they love and what they're good at, then connecting those two things the world or their teachers value, learners can find intersections of things they enjoy doing that they can do for class. It is important to pair such an activity with giving learners some agency over the directions they take with upcoming projects or schoolwork.

Live, Love and Leave a Legacy

In 'Live, Love, Learn and Leave a Legacy', we use an activity from Stephen Covey's (1995) book, *First Things First*. You begin by encouraging learners to imagine their 80th birthday or their funeral, and think about what everyone in their life is saying about them in terms of the ways they have lived, loved, learned and left a legacy. For younger learners, we use the '80th birthday' as a more positive approach. Learners may need prompts to help them imagine what constitutes each of the four L's, and then some more prompting to think about how to write about their mission in life by merging all four of these. The key thing here is that by articulating their mission in all four dimensions, learners can rethink their priorities in their lives and how they choose to spend their time when time is tight, as it often is. It is also important when using this activity to encourage learners to keep coming back to their mission and revising it as their roles in life evolve, and as their priorities change and new ones emerge. This also gives them a chance to pause and, check against how they have been living their lives, and whether they are keeping their missions in mind as they go through key decisions over time.

Reflective activities

Encouraging students to reflect on their learning, and how they feel about what they have been learning, can also support their socio-emotional development. Activities such as Spiral journal, Roses, Thorns and Buds, and Two-minute Paper can help evoke such reflections.

Spiral Journal

Spiral Journal, a Liberating Structure in development (Bali, undated c), invites students to use pen/cil and paper, spend some time focusing on drawing a spiral while listening to music or just silence, and then use four quadrants on the piece of paper to answer four prompts. The prompts can all be intellectual reflections on what they have learned, but educators can always make one of the prompts about how they feel about what they have just learned, for example. Or to reflect on which parts of the past two weeks of learning they found most enjoyable. After students finish responding to the prompts on the Spiral Journal, they can either share one thing that stood out for them in small groups, or to the larger group. The key element of Spiral Journal is inviting students to slow down and reflect on their own in writing before they have to share it out with the larger group, thereby giving learners agency to decide what they want to share with the wider group, and not necessarily the entire spiral journal entry. This is an activity that has successfully engaged learners in different contexts, including undergraduate students in Egypt and in Qatar, educators, and K-12 learners. People tend to find it useful to draw the spiral and get their eyes off the screen, and they appreciate being able to write privately before they discuss in small groups.

Roses, Thorns and Buds

In Roses, Thorns and Buds, we encourage learners to reflect on things that have been going well and making them happy (roses), what has not gone well (thorns), and things that have potential for the future (buds). This again can be done in small or large groups, synchronously or asynchronously, anonymously (e.g., with polling) or with student names, orally or in writing. This works really well in higher education as well as with K-12 and within families.

Two-Minute Paper

This activity is a riff off of the Classroom Assessment Technique (CAT) called One Minute Paper (Angelo and Cross, 1988). The original technique asks students to answer two questions: (1) 'What was the most important thing you learned today?' and (2) What remains unclear? In the Two-Minute Paper, students are additionally invited to reflect on what they enjoyed the most in class, and what they would like to see more of in future. This feedback not only lets the instructor know what students learned in class and what needs further revision, but also which teaching approaches learners have enjoyed, and what they can do to make class more enjoyable for learners in the future. As an example, one semester, I found that half of my students enjoyed large group discussions the most, and the other half really enjoyed small group work more. So, I made sure that in every class session I have a little bit of both, so that all the students found the type of activity they enjoyed the most. Learners tend to find this a useful reflective activity, and teachers can track regularly how students feel and what they need.

Activities for promoting peer networking and support

Small group warm up activities such as Wild Tea

Promoting social connection in the classroom and beyond are essential to community building and the development of trust among classmates. Doing small warm-up activities at the beginning of classes regularly can help with this, especially small group activities that will help students get to know one another as individuals and not just as a whole class. One particular activity that works very well online as well as in person is Mad/wild Tea, which is a Liberating Structure in development (Bali, undated f). Online, it can be done by multiple random breakout rooms in rapid succession, which can be very energizing, and works well as long as the teacher is competent in recreating the breakout rooms. It can also be done by using the chat, where everyone participates in response to a prompt, such as completing a sentence or offering a phrase in response to a question. This is also an extremely effective speed socializing/networking activity to do in person and students enjoy it. It is more complex to apply in hybrid mode. The easiest way to do it in hybrid-synchronous mode is to have the remote learners be connected via the phone of someone in the room, and the person who is their partner in the conversation holds the phone and speaks directly to them as they connect either via direct phone call, or via a platform such as Zoom.

Troika consulting

Troika consulting is one of the original Liberating Structures (Lipmanowicz & McCandless, 2013) which can be adapted to a classroom context. This activity reminds learners that they can seek support from their peers, and not only feel that the teacher is the only source of knowledge and support for them. (See Bali, undated g)

In Troika consulting, learners work in groups of three, where one of them pretends to be a 'client' who has a particular challenge they want to seek support on, and the other two participants act as 'consultants'. The activity, as shown in the video above, is timed in a particular way so that a 'cycle' takes 10 minutes, and then learners switch roles in order for someone else to take the role of the client and the other two the consultants. Each person in the trio gets to be the 'client' once, so this activity also enhances self-efficacy and encourages vulnerability, since the relationship is reciprocal: each person supports the other two, and also seeks help for their own challenge. Online, this activity can easily be done in breakout rooms, or learners can meet in trios outside of class time. However, if learners seem to struggle with understanding the concept, the teacher can invite three students to demonstrate it in front of the others, and the entire class can reflect after watching one round of the role-play, before they try it out in their small groups. This activity can also be effective in educator professional development contexts and can be a way for teachers themselves to support each other in the way that is similar to some critical friendship circle techniques.

Recommendations, priorities

Recommended policy measures relate to teacher professional development at compulsory levels of education, along with incentives and infrastructures that support the implementation of this learning in classrooms.

1. Teacher preparation and professional development programmes require curricula that emphasize the importance of socio-emotional well-being in learning, and techniques and strategies to help them integrate this knowledge into their classrooms. Training in trauma-informed pedagogy as well as Universal Design for Learning are essential. Schools and universities will have to support these efforts by rewarding more compassionate approaches to education rather than high-stress pedagogies, as it would be counterproductive to train teachers in compassionate educational approaches and then continue to force teachers to conduct high-stress assessments, for example.

2. Promotion of teachers' digital literacies and constantly renewing these as technologies change. It is no longer sufficient for teachers to learn how to teach in face-to-face mode; they need to learn about the variety of possible modalities including fully online, blended, web-enhanced and in-person, and to develop the judgment of which topics and learning outcomes can be best met in each modality, as well as the judgment to choose between synchronous and asynchronous modes. Again, this can be taught to pre-service teachers but will need to be constantly revised via continuous professional development for in-service teachers at all levels. Teachers will need to be exposed to a variety of digital tools and equipped with the judgment to select the most appropriate tools for each purpose. School and university administrators will also have to involve pedagogical experts, along with IT experts, in decisions related to school infrastructure and software platforms used to support learning. They must also ensure that schools have staff who are equipped with the educational technology knowledge to support teachers as needed. IT departments need to be trained in 'equitable technologies' and to learn how to adapt the technology choices to the resources available in the school, and to prioritize paying for technology that promotes connection and collaboration. Given limited resources in the education systems of emerging economies, perhaps instead of developing original programmes, they can adapt existing Open Educational Resources (OER) on these topics into their local languages and context.

3. Rewarding innovation and agility, and giving teachers freedom and agency to adapt their lesson plans according to what learners need, while creating learning communities among teachers of similar subjects and for similar age groups in order to share good practice with others and support one another as needed. In the absence of financial resources to support this, encouraging decentralized communities of teachers within schools or regions to support one another is possible in most contexts without additional resources—whether these communities meet in person or interact online.

Institutional support and incentives are especially important if such recommendations are to have a real impact, as research by Al-Freih and Bali (in progress) shows how the cultures in higher education institutions and the policies in Saudi Arabia and Egypt can work against the teachers who care to support students' well-being.

Until wider policy changes are made, decentralized and local approaches to enhancing learner well-being can be implemented within schools where teachers can form communities of practice to share resources and support one another with their immediate needs.

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Abstract

Social and emotional learning (SEL) is essential for students' academic success, emotional well-being, and overall development. School management or any learning management process plays a crucial role in fostering SEL in schools by implementing effective policies, providing professional development opportunities for teachers, and creating a positive school culture. This chapter examines the vital role of school management in promoting SEL in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, with a focus on the African school context. The responsibilities of school management, such as developing SEL practices, providing resources, promoting the implementation of SEL policies or frameworks, organizing continuous professional development interventions for teachers, and creating a supportive and inclusive school environment are highlighted. Furthermore, the paper discusses the challenges that school management may encounter in implementing SEL. In addition, it describes strategies for overcoming these challenges, such as building strong partnerships with families and communities, establishing a shared vision for SEL, and creating a culture of continuous improvement.

Introduction

Modern education systems have tended to focus on the cognitive development of learners, but in recent years there has been an increased interest in the prominence of social and emotional learning (SEL) (Maxwell & Peplak, 2022). SEL has become an important way to promote students' adaptation to 21st century learning (Wang et al., 2023). This type of learning, which is designed to promote the development of students' social and emotional skills, was implemented in many schools across the world even before the advent of COVID-19 pandemic. SEL programmes and initiatives focus on building skills such as self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making (Durlak, et al., 2016). These skills not only improve learners' social development and mental health, but strengthen their academic achievement as well (Gedikoglu, 2021).

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, schools and the community in general across Africa recognized the importance of supporting students' holistic development beyond academic achievement, especially through cultural activities and events. For example, Rwanda has implemented a national SEL programme called 'Itorero ry'Igihugu' since 2007. This programme focuses on fostering national values, citizenship, and social cohesion through a comprehensive approach that includes SEL components (Sundberg, 2016). In the case of Rwanda, implementing SEL through fostering peacebuilding and social cohesion in schools aimed to enhance students' emotional well-being, cultural cohesion, civic education, and overall success in school and life (Rubagiza, Umutoni, & Kaleeba, 2016). Furthermore, at global level, the social and emotional impacts of school closures on learners, teachers and parents during the Covid-19 pandemic have further heightened this interest and given rise to a plethora of new innovations tailored to specific educational contexts in different forms of remote and hybrid learning. Some of these have inspired and informed SEL programmes and practices more broadly in the period following school closures, as systems have started to recognize the need to embed SEL in all forms of schooling.

As in the discussion of related topics, SEL in the context of school management is defined as the process through which learners acquire and apply the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions (Black, 2021). Rather than another add-on to the taught curriculum, the concept of SEL not only empowers learners in their learning through the traditional academic setup, but also has a broader integrated approach to support quality education where students are supported in developing skills such as responsible decision-making and social relationship skills. It involves teaching learners the skills they need to be successful academically, socially, and emotionally, as well as to be responsible and productive members of society.

In this paper commissioned by UNESCO-IBE as a contribution to the discussion on strengthening SEL in hybrid modes of education, we focus on the expansion of school management roles, scope and actions toward the implementation of SEL approaches in schools which can be extended to remote and hybrid learning models. Its key messages are aimed at policymakers, curriculum developers, education practitioners and researchers who are interested in expanding their knowledge, overcoming challenges, and creating more prospects for the implementation of social and emotional learning within their educational framework. In the context of Africa, in addition to the example we have already given of Rwanda, other countries like Nigeria have implemented SEL through various organizations and initiatives, such as the projects of hundrED and the LEGO Foundation. These initiatives implemented SEL projects on building leadership skills in public school settings; for example, as described in the case study related to facilitating SEL across different states in Nigeria, aiming to empower young people with life skills, including emotional intelligence and self-awareness (hundrED, 2022).

Key ideas in the expansion of school management roles, scope and action

SEL started becoming a topic of choice globally since the emergence of Covid-19. The pandemic highlighted the importance of SEL skills such as resilience, empathy, self-awareness, and problem-solving. The uncertainty and stress caused by the pandemic triggered the need for students to develop and practice these skills to cope with the changes and challenges in their lives. In addition, the pandemic disrupted students' social connections with their peers, teachers, and other important people in their lives. The fact is that this disruption had negative impacts on students' mental health and well-being. It became critical for educators and schools, in general, to find ways to support students' social connections and help them stay connected with others. Importantly, the pandemic brought mental health to the forefront of discussions around education in that it forced schools and educators to start prioritizing the well-being of the students and to find ways to support them in coping with the stress and trauma caused by the pandemic. Although SEL was already growing in prominence and practice around the world, the Covid-19 pandemic highlighted the importance of integrating SEL into all aspects of education at all levels of schooling. With the need for students to develop social and emotional skills to cope with the challenges of the pandemic on top of other stress related to learning processes, schools and educators have placed strong emphasis on the integration of SEL skills in the curriculum through culturally responsive pedagogy and academic instruction in interactions with students inside and outside the classroom that reflects a range of lived experiences (School Mental Health, 2020).

Due to the resilient approach needed in schools to address issues generated by the pandemic, school management can play a pivotal role in promoting effective implementation of SEL in the curriculum.

Scope of interventions in school management

On top of the specific roles that the school management can play, the overall scope and purpose of its interventions is to create and maintain a positive, supportive, and inclusive school culture that promotes both the cognitive and the social and emotional development of all learners.

1. The role of school management in SEL implementation

School management is called upon to play a critical and expanded role in the implementation of social and emotional learning (SEL). Some of the suggested roles are:

- Creating a supportive and safe learning environment;
- Promoting positive relationships among learners and between learners and staff;
- Providing opportunities for learners to develop and practice SEL skills;
- Integrate SEL instruction into the curriculum;
- Work with families and community organisations to support learners' social and emotional development.

From each of the above proposed roles, the following actions can be considered:

1.1   Creating a supportive and safe learning environment

School management can create and promote a supportive and safe learning environment in several ways by:

1.1.1 Establishing clear policies and procedures: School management can establish policies and procedures that promote a safe, inclusive, and respectful environment and that clearly outline expectations for behavior and consequences for violation of those expectations (PowerDMS, 2020)

1.1.2 Providing professional development: School management can provide professional development for teachers on effective classroom management strategies, how to integrate SEL into their teaching routines and on how to create a safe and inclusive classroom environment.

1.1.3 Encouraging positive relationships: School management can encourage positive relationships among learners and between learners and staff by promoting positive communication, fostering a sense of belonging, and addressing conflicts in a constructive manner.

1.1.4 Providing support for at-risk learners: School management can provide additional support and resources for learners who may be at risk of academic, social-emotional or health difficulties, such as those who have experienced trauma, abuse or who suffer from nutrition deficiency. The support may be in the form of counseling, remedial teaching or tutoring (learner academic support) or physical health interventions (Bouslog, 2021).

1.1.5 Providing resources and support for mental health: School management can provide access to mental health resources such as counseling and support groups, as well as education on mental health and wellness to create a supportive environment.

1.1.6 Building partnerships with families and community organizations: School management can work with families and community organizations to support learners' social and emotional development and create a positive relationship with the community (Bae & Kanefuji, 2018).

1.1.7 Regularly assessing and evaluating the school culture: school management can conduct regular evaluations of the school's culture and climate, and take steps to address any issues that may arise (Elias, 2023).

1.2 Promoting positive relationships among learners and between learners and staff

School management can promote positive relationships among learners and between learners and staff in several ways while supporting learners to build social and emotional skills. To be effective, the following actions can be considered:

1.2.1 Establishing clear communication: School management can establish clear communication channels between learners, staff, and families to foster positive relationships and address any concerns in a timely manner (Beachboard & Wright, 2023).

1.2.2 Encouraging positive interactions: School management can create opportunities for positive interactions among learners and between learners and staff, such as through mentoring programmes, peer tutoring, or community service projects (Sieberer-Nagler, 2015).

1.2.3 Providing conflict resolution training: School management can initiate training for learners and staff on conflict resolution and effective communication skills to help them navigate and resolve conflicts in a peaceful and constructive manner (Waithaka, Moore-Austin, & Gitimu, 2015).

1.2.4 Modeling positive behavior: School management and staff can model positive behavior and respectful communication in their interactions with learners and colleagues.

1.2.5 Building a positive school culture: School management can create a positive and inclusive school culture by promoting respect, empathy, and kindness, and by addressing and eliminating any forms of bullying or discrimination.

1.2.6 Encouraging student leadership: School management can provide opportunities for learners to take on leadership roles and responsibilities, which can promote positive relationships and a sense of belonging.

1.2.7 Encouraging parental involvement: School management can encourage parental involvement in school activities and events, which can foster positive relationships between learners and their families, as well as between families and staff (OECD, 2019).

1.3 Providing opportunities for learners to develop and practice SEL skills

School management can provide opportunities for learners to develop and practice social and emotional learning (SEL) skills in several ways. The following actions are proposed to activate these development and practice of SEL skills:

1.3.1 Creating a supportive and safe learning environment: By creating a positive and inclusive school culture, school management can provide an environment that encourages learners to feel safe, respected, and supported. This is essential to the development of SEL skills among all members of the learning community (Wilson-Fleming & Wilson-Younger, 2012)

1.3.2 Encouraging extracurricular activities: School management can provide opportunities for learners to develop and practice SEL skills through extracurricular activities such as clubs, sports teams, and volunteer work.

1.3.3 Providing counseling and support: School management can provide access to counseling and support services, such as guidance counselors, school psychologists, and social workers, to help learners develop and practice SEL skills (Millacci, 2021).

1.3.4 Encouraging parental involvement: School management can encourage parental involvement in their child's SEL development by providing resources and information on SEL and by working with families to support their children's SEL skills.

1.3.5 Assessing and evaluating student progress: School management can establish school-based systems for assessing and evaluating learners' SEL skills and use this information to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of SEL programmes and to provide targeted tailor-made support for learners who may need it.

1.4   Integrate SEL instruction into the curriculum

School management can initiate the integration of social and emotional learning (SEL) instruction into the curriculum in several ways, for example:

1.4.1 Developing a comprehensive SEL plan: To begin with, school management can develop a comprehensive SEL plan that outlines the school's goals, objectives, and strategies for promoting SEL that is reviewed and updated regularly (CASEL, 2016)

1.4.2 Incorporating SEL into existing teaching practice: School management can promote SEL instruction by infusing SEL content into the facilitation of learning and by providing teachers with the resources and support they need to integrate SEL instruction into their daily classroom practice. This aspect is possible in cases where the curriculum decentralization is implemented throughout the education system (Srinivasan, 2019).

1.4.3 Providing continuous professional development opportunities: School management can initiate professional development for teachers and staff on SEL strategies and best practices and encourage and encourage them to support learners in achieving required SEL competencies identified in the school plan.

1.4.4 Incorporating technology and digital resources: School management can implement technology innovation into SEL instruction using the hybrid learning approach, combining simultaneous in-person presence and online participation to make it more engaging and interactive for learners at a distance (Evans, C., 2021). Learning resources can be digitalized and uploaded into learning management systems (LMS) for remote access and interactive learning. For example, some schools have already digital learning platforms that allow learners to continue learning outside the classroom—this phenomenon was accelerated during Covid-19 pandemic. Even schools with fewer financial resources and technical expertise to host their own LMS used open learning management systems (free to use), such as Google Classroom. These platforms can be used to host SEL digital resources and enhance learners' virtual engagement in SEL while at home or at school.

It is important to note that the integration of SEL at the curriculum level happens at the implemented and attained curriculum dimensions as shown at the figure below:
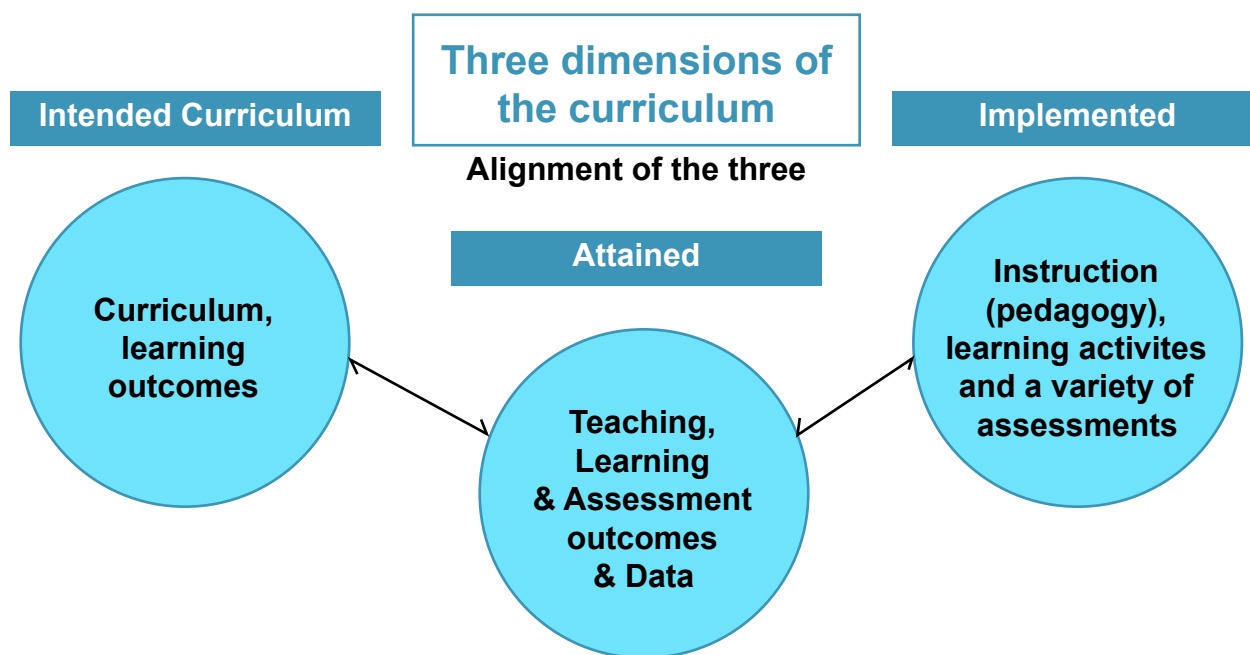

Figure. 1 – Curriculum Dimensions Alignment

It is also important to acknowledge that even before the onset of the pandemic, several different types of hybrid learning models had emerged. For example, for example, in 5 Models for Making the Most Out of Hybrid Learning, John Spencer describes (1) the differentiated model, (2) the multi-track model, (3) the split A/B model, (4) the virtual accommodation model and (5) the independent project model. Choice, development and implementation of any combination of these are dependent on such factors as the circumstances of learners, in particular the relative amount of time spent learning at home and in face-to-face environments, and the capacities of the systems and schools to adapt these models to local conditions and priorities making optimal use of available resources, including print and smartphone apps, among others and. It follows that approaches to infusing SEL into models such as these will also differ, as each provides a different set of opportunities for integrating, reinforcing and assessing this type of learning.

1.5 Work with families and community organizations to support learners' SEL

The involvement of stakeholders such as families and the community organizations through an effective collaboration with schools is very critical for a successful implementation of SEL. Here are some actions to consider for working with families and community organizations to support learners' social and emotional development:

1.5.1 Build strong relationships with families: Establishing a positive and supportive relationship with families is essential for promoting learners' social and emotional development. Regular communication and collaboration with families through a school board or parent-teacher association can help identify learners' strengths, challenges, and support needs.

1.5.2 Foster a sense of community: Encourage families and community organizations to participate in school events and activities, such as parent-teacher conferences, school-family fundraising events, and school assemblies. These events can help build a sense of community and promote a positive school culture (see Power School Resource Library, 24 Activities to Get Families Involved in Schools).

1.5.3 Provide capacity building and learning resources: Offer training and resources to families and community organizations on social and emotional development, including strategies for promoting positive behavior, emotional regulation, and problem-solving social skills. Providing resources such as books, articles, stories, social media posts and websites can also support families in reinforcing social and emotional development at home.

1.5.4 Involve community organizations: Collaborate with community organizations such as mental health clinics, youth groups, and after-school programmes to provide additional resources and support for learners' social and emotional development. These organizations can offer counseling, mentoring, and other services to help learners develop positive SEL skills (Bae & Kanefuji, 2018).

1.5.5 Encourage parent involvement: Encourage families to be involved in their children's education by attending parent-teacher conferences, volunteering at school, and participating in school activities. Engaged parents can support their child's social and emotional development by reinforcing positive behavior and encouraging healthy relationships (OECD, 2019).

1.5.6 Use positive discipline strategies: Collaborate with families and community organizations to promote positive discipline strategies that focus on promoting positive behavior, rather than punishing negative behavior. Positive discipline strategies can include praise, positive reinforcement, and problem solving (Morin, 2021).

1.5.7 Address individual needs: Recognize that each learner has unique social and emotional needs and work with families and community organizations to address these needs. Individualized plans that support learners' social and emotional development can include learning accommodations, interventions, and support services.

By implementing these actions, schools, families, and community organizations can work together to support learners' social and emotional development, promote positive behavior, and create a supportive, inclusive learning environment.

In sum, school management plays a crucial role in leading the way in fostering SEL by developing a comprehensive approach that includes (1) creating a safe and supportive learning environment; (2) promoting positive relationships among students, teachers and staff; (3) providing multiple opportunities to practice SEL skills; (4) fully infusing SEL into the school curriculum, and (5) working with families and community organizations to support learners' SEL.

Importance of SEL alignment with contemporary matters in education

UNESCO recognizes the potential of artificial intelligence (AI) and the fourth industrial revolution (4IR) technologies to improve education, such as by providing personalized learning experiences, expanding access to education, and importantly supporting the development of 21st century skills. Take note that Artificial intelligence refers to the simulation of human intelligence in machines that are programmed to think and perform tasks in ways that mimic human cognitive intelligence, and can even surpass human capabilities in various domains, such as decision-making, pattern recognition, language translation, image recognition, and problem-solving. In addition, the 4IR describes the profound impact of technologies such as artificial intelligence, robotics, the Internet of Things (IoT), big data analytics, 3D printing, nanotechnology, biotechnology, and renewable energy systems leading to the creation of smart systems, smart cities, intelligent machines, and interconnected networks for enhanced productivity with high quality.

UNESCO has also called for the responsible development and ethical use of AI and 4IR technologies in education, and has emphasized the importance of ensuring that these technologies are used in ways that are inclusive, equitable, and respectful of human rights (UNESCO, 2021).

Social and emotional learning (SEL) is becoming increasingly important in this era of the fourth industrial revolution (4IR) because it equips individuals with the skills they need to thrive in a rapidly changing, complex, and interconnected world. The alignment between SEL and 4IR can be established through (1) emotional intelligence, (2) problem solving and critical thinking, (3) collaboration, (4) adaptability, and (5) additional SEL skills described in various SEL frameworks as self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social awareness. Often referred to as '21st century skills', these are transferable and applicable across various fields of human endeavors. Thus, they are in high demand in today's workforce (Buasuwan, et al., 2022). Overall, SEL is important in this era of the fourth industrial revolution because this dimension of learning equips individuals with the skills they need to thrive in a rapidly changing, complex, and interconnected world. It helps to develop individuals who are emotionally intelligent, adaptable, and able to solve problems, think critically, and collaborate effectively.

Similarly, artificial intelligence (AI) plays an increasingly central role in the 4IR. As we have seen in recent years, AI already greatly influences the workforce of today and will continue even in the future. Therefore, it is obvious that there is a closer relationship between AI and SEL. Their relationship is mostly due to the complementarity between the two, where AI has the potential to support SEL in a number of ways. such as, the support of AI for the personalization of SEL by adapting instruction modalities to each student's needs and learning style. Importantly, AI can provide real-time feedback to students and educators in their progress along SEL pathways using the learning analytics already integrated in the learning management systems (LMS). This can help them better understand how their social and emotional competencies are developing over time. In addition, it can help students learn to regulate their emotions and behaviors, while educators use this kind of continuous feedback to adjust their instruction to better support student needs (Gregory Brown, 2023). It is important to draw the alignment between SEL, 4IR and AI to inform school management of the relationship between these three paradigms and to draw attention on the potential of the three on the implementation of social and emotional learning at school level.

Country Examples on the Implementation of SEL

South Africa

South Africa is implementing social and emotional learning (SEL) in various ways. One example is the 'Life Orientation' curriculum, which is part of the national education system and includes SEL components such as personal development, relationships, and responsible decision-making (Prinsloo, 2007).

The South African curriculum defines life orientation as a holistic study of the self, the self within the society, a prospect to develop the emotional skills for young people, citizenship, democracy, and human rights. The life orientation curriculum also articulates different aspects that contribute to life in general, without forgetting the health side, lifestyle, healthy living and physical fitness (Abraham, 2008). This curriculum tries to address issues related to values and norms that have deteriorated over time and the perception that adults who are striving in a self-centred way to achieve material gain and personal gratification are actually contributing to the problem (Prinsloo in Van Wyk & Lemmer, 2003).

According to Erna Prinsloo (2007), despite the achievement on social and emotional skills developed by the learners through the implementation of the life orientation curriculum, the latter is facing increasing challenges, such as: (1) lack of a value system where learners are caring toward themselves and others. In some instances, they are without role models for inspirational purposes; (2) lack of parental involvement, in many instances where school principals struggle to get parents to participate in school activities and their children's learning process; (3) influence from negative aspects of the community life on the developing values and behaviors of the learners; for example, there is a general tendency to refuse to obey laws of the government and the negative impacts of alcoholism, drug abuse, child abuse, criminal activities, extreme violence, etc.

According to the South African College of Applied Psychology (SACAP) (2020), South Africa implements SEL with the expectation of achieving the following outcomes:

1. Enhance SEL teaching efficiency in overcrowded classrooms;
2. Increase the capacity of the teaching staff to implement SEL through professional development;
3. Transform the classroom environment to make it more conducive to learning;
4. Transform individual learners to change their persistent misbehavior, which distracts other learners and causes stress and anxiety for teachers;
5. Provide to South African learners with the education they deserve that develops both academic and social and emotional competence to build the resilience that the youth of today need to thrive and develop when faced with our current and future life challenges.

SEL is perceived in South Africa as an innovative mediation approach in education with the aim of allowing learners to benefit from education that matures academic, social and emotional competencies (SACAP, 2020). SEL is used as a tool to equip teachers with strong and trusted skills for changing the toxic relationship dynamics between teachers and learners, and between classmates (Marsay, 2019). In doing so, learners will try out new behaviors through applying sets of skills and competencies to help them move on through decent life. These processes are intended to ensure learners' success initially in school, later in the workplace, and ultimately, as constructive and responsible members of society.

Additionally, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) such as the Nelson Mandela Children's Fund and the Ikamva Labantu organization have implemented SEL programmes in underprivileged communities. These programmes aim to build life skills, self-esteem, and resilience in children and youth through activities such as mentoring, counseling, and community service. However, despite these efforts, the quality of SEL implementation in South Africa is varied and there are still challenges caused by poverty, inequality and unemployment (DHET, 2016).

In addition, the acknowledgment of poverty, inequality, and unemployment as significant challenges in South Africa by the Department of Higher Education and Training has obliged this Department to underscore the need to prioritize the implementation of interventions that focus on SEL skills (hundrED, 2020). These interventions aim to enhance the learning environment and support young individuals in developing a forward-looking mindset, thus addressing the pressing issues faced by the country. In this optic, South Africa implemented a project named 'Grassroot Soccer' (GRS), focusing on leveraging community structures and stakeholders in collaboration with hundrED and the LEGO Foundation. Grassroot Soccer (GRS), an organization founded by American pediatrician Tommy Clark, was established in 2002, and over time, they have expanded their efforts to provide comprehensive support to young people in developing nations.

Starting from 2018, their focus in South Africa has been on integrating emerging topics related to adolescent health and introducing new interventions into their existing programmes and ongoing research, particularly in the context of mental health. In line with resilience research, GRS has committed to piloting mindfulness micro-interventions and implementing well-being questionnaires in South Africa.

Grassroot Soccer operates as an independent non-profit organization, registered locally, and harnesses the influence of soccer to educate, motivate, and empower young people in developing nations. The organization strives to help them overcome significant health challenges, lead healthier and more productive lives, and become catalysts for positive change within their communities. By leveraging the popularity of soccer, GRS effectively engages adolescents in making informed and healthy choices through three key elements, the three C's: (1) Curriculum (an evidence-based health curriculum tailored to the needs of adolescents), (2) Coaches (local mentors and role models who provide support and guidance), and (3) Culture (a positive, inclusive, and enjoyable atmosphere). Grassroot Soccer adopts a comprehensive approach that acknowledges the agency of youth in their own personal development and recognizes the importance of holistic programmes that consider the social network of relationships, influential figures, societal norms, and systems in youth development.

GRS collaborates with mentors, teachers, and school personnel to foster a nurturing and youth-oriented atmosphere by implementing meaningful youth engagement strategies. As part of this approach, GRS provides training to teachers and other adults working with young people, equipping them with essential skills to effectively engage youth in the 'SKILLZ Core '[5] intervention. These skills include imparting empowering and constructive feedback, establishing personal connections, facilitating important conversations, creating a safe environment, and effectively conveying essential health concepts (hundrED, 2022, pp 39-42)

Namibia

According to the Ministry of Education, the purpose of life skills subject activities in classrooms is to facilitate the development of learners as a whole, rather than solely focusing on intellectual development (2006). The objective of life skills subjects is to educate students on a range of topics, such as healthcare (including HIV&AIDS), family and society, self-awareness, personal responsibilities, problem-solving, decision-making, positive attitudes, personal values, assertive behaviors, motivation strategies, study skills, examination preparation, time management, and career planning. By imparting knowledge on these topics, students are better equipped to achieve their educational goals (Hako & Mbango, 2018). Namibia has implemented SEL in its schools through the Life Skills Education Programme, which focuses on teaching students the skills they need to navigate the social and emotional challenges of everyday life. The programme is integrated into the existing curriculum and is taught by trained teachers. It has been implemented in all primary and secondary schools in the country since 2006, was revised in 2016, and has been well-received by both teachers and students. Additionally, the Namibian government has also implemented a national policy on Life Skills Education, which ensures that all schools in the country have access to the necessary resources and support to implement the programme effectively (NIED, 2014).

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[5] Skillz Core is made up of eight, 45 minute practices designed to be delivered to youth ages 12-14 in-school during Department of Education Life Orientation classes by trained, local community volunteers called Skillz Coaches. Along with the curriculum, a Coach's Guide was also developed for the Skillz Coaches to use as a tool to facilitate the practices.

Evaluation studies show that students in Namibia who participated in the Life Skills Education Programme showed improvements in a number of areas, including emotional regulation, pro-social behavior, and academic performance. Furthermore, teachers report that the programme has helped to create a positive and supportive classroom environment, which has led to improvements in student behavior and engagement in learning.

In conclusion, Namibia has been successful in implementing SEL through its Life Skills Education Programme, which has been integrated into the existing curriculum and is taught by trained teachers. The programme has been well received by both teachers and students and has shown positive results in emotional self-regulation, pro-social behavior, and academic performance.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we looked at the school management roles, scope and actions in the implementation of SEL at school level and beyond. We highlighted some ideas on the expansion of the roles and scopes, including possible actions as countries move forward in the post-pandemic era, yet have viable plans in place in the case of new or recurring emergencies. As school systems in Africa and around the world transform, school management has the opportunity to create a supportive and safe learning environment, positive school culture, provide resources and support, foster positive relationships, and build partnerships with families and community organizations to ensure that learners feel safe, respected, and supported on their learning journey. Therefore, school management is called upon to play a critical role in promoting the integration of SEL instruction into the curriculum, creating a supportive and safe learning environment, providing access to counseling and support services, encouraging extracurricular activities, and working with families to support student's SEL development.

The urgent strong appeal is for school management to initiate the development of a comprehensive SEL plan, which prioritizes creation of a supportive, safe and inclusive learning environment and provision of professional development for the teaching staff on integrating SEL into their daily practice.

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Abstract

Education systems across the globe have been negatively affected by the pandemic. Schools had to be shut down which led to increased isolation and stress in children. As a result, countries recognized the urgent need to establish social and emotional support for students by implementing online learning solutions. In the global South, countries like India faced additional challenges. They had to navigate disparity in access to online learning due to digital divide, lack of digital literacy and accessibility to technology. To solve this, they leveraged existing technology and innovated to ensure continuity of education. This paper elaborates the status of social and emotional learning in India, challenges of implementation, innovations, best practices and recommendations to strengthen hybrid modes of education.

Introduction

Social and emotional learning contributes to academic achievement, positive mental health, and well-being of children. The detrimental impact of COVID-19 on children's mental health led to countries prioritizing the need to strengthen the implementation of SEL in the education system. The closure of schools led to children feeling isolated and stressed. Parents and teachers struggled to support themselves and equip their children with SEL skills such as emotional self-regulation, resilience, and managing stress while they were learning remotely from home. As a result, social sector organizations developed innovative ways to provide parents, teachers, and children with SEL skills. Along with the advent of technology, the worldwide lockdown pushed countries to implement SEL in a hybrid format. Countries across the world utilized virtual platforms such as Google Meet and Zoom. The lack of access to technology, especially in low- and middle-income countries, encouraged them to utilize offline methods such as telecalls and short message service. Given the uncertainty of our times, which has been brought to light by the experience of the pandemic it is imperative that educators prioritize and strengthen SEL in hybrid modes of education at local, regional and global levels.

SEL and hybrid modes of education in the global context

Social and emotional learning is a major area of interest within the field of education, due to its ability to reduce risky behaviors and promote well-being and long-term life outcomes in children (Greenberg et al., 2017; Weissberg, 2019). With the advent of COVID-19 and research highlighting its detrimental effects on mental health, social and emotional learning has become a priority (Reimers and Opertti, 2021). COVID-19 also highlighted the importance of technology and its ability to keep people connected during the worldwide lockdown. Given the variety of emerging technologies that go beyond standard screens, technology is considered a potential tool for parents, educators, or caregivers to supplement and enhance such learning experiences. Mobile video chats, virtual tutors, and virtual augmented and 'mixed' reality technologies all make learning more engaging than traditional teaching methods (Sharma, 2021). Education systems across the world have recognized this and implemented social and emotional learning in hybrid models.

Hybrid modes of learning include and integrate both traditional in person learning practices and online education. Such modes attempt to expand and democratize learning opportunities for all students in a way that caters to their individual needs and expectations (UNESCO, 2020). To be effective, hybrid learning requires a balance between traditional and online education to enable learners to reach their full potential irrespective of their skills, choices, and environment (UNESCO, 2020). Remote teaching occurs when the teacher and learner are in a separate physical space and learning happens virtually. It includes teaching online, and utilizing low technology options such as TV, radio or IVRS (interactive voice response system). In 2020, due the school closures, countries had to resort to remote teaching and develop innovative ways to reach students.

Recognizing the need to respond to students' emotional distress and social isolation, educators quickly found ways to embed SEL in remote learning. For instance, in the United States, the Compassionate Schools Project Case Study was launched in 24 schools to develop mindfulness through age-appropriate activities. It utilized weekly asynchronous classes using a combination of Google Meet and home assignments (UNESCO,2021). Similarly, another application, ClassDojo, facilitated character development and growth mindset via gamification of SEL. The app contains avatars which allow teachers to award students with 'leadership' and 'grit' dojo points (Williamson, 2017). However, ClassDojo has been criticized for its lack of data privacy and tendency to create competition in the classroom, highlighting the challenges and limitations of hybrid education programme (Williamson, 2018). In Africa, an organization hosted weekly visual mental health workshops to support 40 learners to cope with adversity during the pandemic (Africa Unite, 2021). Participants reported an increased awareness of social emotional learning skills and increased self-esteem. In Singapore, immersive virtual environments (IVE) have been proposed to implement SEL in schools. IVE helps the user immerse into a virtual reality scenario and imagine themselves in someone else's place. A study demonstrated IVE to have a positive impact on perspective taking and empathy in 15-year-olds (Tan et al., 2022). Similarly, in Israel, a virtual reality curriculum Educating for Future was included in a pre-service teaching course to enhance SEL skills (Weissblueth et al., 2018). It is clear that countries are moving towards implementing SEL in various formats and using virtual tools.

Social emotional learning in remote and hybrid classrooms in India

Prior to the pandemic, India's education policy, the National Education Policy (2020), emphasized the importance of Social Emotional Learning as significant for whole child development. Several initiatives by the Union and state governments have supported this and helped to reduce the disruptions to children's overall health and development. The Ayushman Bharat Scheme's Health and Wellness Curriculum for Adolescents has been introduced, moving in a similar direction. State governments actively prioritized social emotional learning by introducing various programmes. One such programme is the Happiness Curriculum, which aims to enhance students' levels of mindfulness, critical thinking, and problem-solving. This encouraged educators to reassess conventional pedagogical approaches to teach fundamental skills that are useful in a real-world scenario. Social and emotional Learning gained increased relevance in this context as proven to be an efficient method for developing abilities, skills, and attitudes required to learn and achieve well-being (Sharma, 2021).

However, India's formal school education system was disrupted in 2020–2021 because of school closures, affecting around 264.5 million students (Ministry of Education, 2021). Close to 108 million children were out-of-school from pre-primary to higher secondary section because of non-enrolment alone during 2020-2021, while there was a 3.55 per cent drop in the overall enrolment of children with special needs during the same period (Government of India, 2022). Apart from the direct impact on the education system, economic inequalities, food shortages, and reverse migration aggravated the drop-out rates in the country (Mitra, Mishra and Abhay, 2022). It is estimated that the stressors related to the pandemic would decrease the lifetime income of students by 3%, which is going to be more obvious among marginalized children in the Global South, including India. Being confined to their homes all day with little or limited options for physical and mental refreshments further worsened the scenario for children. Changes in routine, way of life, fear of sickness and death of family members, and uncertainty regarding education had a debilitating impact on their mental and psychological health. As a result, children expressed a lack of interest in general activities, such as pursuing hobbies and a diminished focus on academics (Datta and Kundu, 2021). This prolonged impact of COVID-19 has increased the risk of adverse childhood experiences and can have long lasting consequences, such as lack of sleep and difficulty concentrating (Hanushek and Woessman, 2020). Climate change and potential global pandemics can cause prolonged school closure in the future (Mateen, 2021). To prepare for such events, it is important to implement SEL in a hybrid format across schools in India.

Challenges and education sector response to COVID-19

Educators world-wide developed a range of new strategies to maintain educational opportunities during the lockdown. Critical analyses of some of these strategies have offered evaluations of their limitations and potential, together with suggestions for the way ahead (Reimers, 2021). Studies found that there were significant differences across and within countries in terms of how effective remote education platforms had been. The most affected were the marginalized students in the Global South, mainly due to the lack of access to resources. How far the students from different social backgrounds were and how effectively they could engage with innovations in remote education platforms, especially in a developing country like India, is a question offering ample scope for research. The differences in the effectiveness of the hybrid forms of learning are determined not only by factors like technological infrastructure, connectivity, and digital skills but also by the disparities in institutional and innovative capacity. This is crucial for the Indian education system, which is experiencing serious challenges in terms of access, low effectiveness, and relevance (Reimers, 2021).

The intersection of the pre-existing challenges with the newly emergent issues had a disproportionate impact on different communities. The most important barriers for the implementation of SEL through hybrid learning in India include the 'lack of Information and communication technology (ICT) infrastructure and technical support, language barriers, lack of financial resources, ignorance of accredited online courses, inability to control irrelevant online information, learner inefficiency, a lack of online interaction between students and instructors, gender bias and the preference for conventional forms of teaching' (Majumdar, Rai and Singh, 2022).

Online learning led to 40–70% of children in India being left out as they lacked access to a smart device. This was severe among the rural population, in which 70% lacked internet access (Boston Consulting Group, 2022). Access to these platforms during the crisis primarily relied on several factors, like availability of electricity, access to digital gadgets and high-speed internet.

Less than 50% of families in India had access to power for more than 12 hours a day, according to the Antyodaya Survey (Ministry of Rural Development, 2019). The country's internet penetration remained at around 55% during the period with one of the slowest internet speeds in the world (Bahia & Suardi, 2019). The smartphone-enabled internet techniques were found to be frequently problematic for hassle-free uploading and viewing of documents, and hence personal computers became a requirement. Different regions in the country had different percentages of families having computers at home, ranging from 4.6% in Bihar to 35% in Delhi (MS and Siddiqui, 2022), which proved to be the major challenge for the implementation of hybrid modes of learning.

During the pandemic, children spent the majority of their time at home, compared to pre-pandemic when they spent time in school as well. As a result, the home environment also influenced their social and emotional development. So, it was important to engage parents along with teachers with SEL skills. However, India is a country with various cultures and languages. The lack of SEL resources in a culturally responsive way and in different regional languages represented a barrier to engaging with parents. More than 90% of the information on online learning platforms is in English, which denied learning opportunities to a considerable percentage of India's multilingual student population. Only a small percentage of them could access the platforms while many students lacked the language skills to make effective use of the same. Only about 50% of Indian school-children were proficient readers in their mother tongue according to the National Achievement Survey conducted by NCERT in 2017. Consequently, navigating in a setting where English is the predominant language posed a significant problem (MS and Siddiqui, 2022).

As online learning became the new normal for those who were able to connect, there was a significant rise in the screen time of students. Children who were constantly browsing the internet on laptops experienced increased levels of stress, resulting in the propensity to eat irregular meals. Feeling worn out and drained, as well as possibly overindulging, were all symptoms of the emotional and physical exhaustion that came along with the constant Zoom learning. 42% of the children reported facing health issues including stress on eyes, headache, etc. (BCG, 2022). A study conducted on the relationship of eating behaviour and Zoom fatigue in the millennium students of India also revealed that online learning had a significant negative impact on both the health and academic performance of students (Gupta, Chaturvedi and Chand, 2022).

Similar to how the pandemic affected students and their families, teachers' lives were also impacted. With inadequate training and support, they had to adapt to several new demands to maintain schooling remotely. More than 90% of teachers felt it difficult to build emotional connection with the students online (BCG, 2022). In India, the transition to remote instruction was smoother in settings where teachers were well supported for digital teaching (Juuti et al., 2021). Some teachers also had to balance teaching remotely with caring for their own children or attending to other family obligations brought on by the pandemic. These demands harmed teachers' well-being and raised legitimate worries about burnout and professional attrition (Hamilton and Ercikan, 2021). Failure to acknowledge the value of teachers' own social and emotional competence also remained an obstacle which deterred the successful promotion of SEL in Indian schools (Sharma, 2021).

Teachers also it found it difficult to make time for SEL in their virtual classes. As academics and subjects like literacy and numeracy were prioritized, the shorter virtual classroom hours made it difficult to accommodate SEL in the timetable. Lack of awareness of SEL and how to integrate this dimension into remote instruction made it difficult to convince stakeholders to prioritize SEL. Even when stakeholders were aware of SEL, they needed to be equipped with skills to implement it in the virtual classroom. Hence, virtual capacity building and implementation of SEL within a brief period of time became another challenge.

Adding to the challenges, gender seemed to influence accessibility to blended learning methods. Although online and remote learning are presumed to be gender-neutral, this was inadequate to guarantee that the learning environment for the community that switched from the conventional medium to the online mode was inclusive and free of gender-related issues. In the context of India, where disparities in socially created behaviour are particularly pronounced, it was harder for girls to be heard in an online classroom (Navaneeth, Siddiqui and Issmail, 2022). Technology is still seen as exclusively the domain of men in India because many families have disagreements over women and girls using the internet, most of which stem from cultural beliefs (Kakar et al. 2012). Similar to other countries, India had a significant gender gap in internet access, with women making up only 35% of all users. Online learning thus turned into a 'third shift' for women in countries like India since they were forced to choose between their already hectic family and professional lives (MS and Siddiqui, 2022).

Finally, age influenced the social and emotional needs of children. For instance, children under 6 years were unable to understand the safety measures for COVID-19 and demanded more attention from parents compared to older children and adolescents (Singh et al.,2020). Adolescents preferred to be included in decision making and required clear instructions about COVID-19 safety protocols. Children above 12 years felt disconnected from peers and used social media to stay connected, which increased the risk of cyberbullying and cybercrime. Older adolescents (16-18 years) felt worried about their academics, health and safety of their loved ones (Shukla et al., 2021). Parents and teachers struggled to cater to the differentiated needs of children while taking care of themselves. Given the differentiated needs of children, no single umbrella curricula or policy of social emotional learning was able to account for the social and emotional needs of children.

Innovations, evidence and lessons learned

The previous sections illuminated the need and challenges of implementing SEL in India. This section discusses the case studies of hybrid modes of SEL in India, such as curriculum, capacity building, digital school, resources, radio calls, television, and IVRS.

Implications for curriculum and pedagogy

Social sector organizations across India created digital SEL curricula to provide educators and caregivers with guidelines and frameworks for SEL implementation. The Indian Social Emotional Learning Framework (ISELF) is a research-based SEL framework to help teachers, counsellors, and facilitators to develop self-awareness, self-management, relationship management, social awareness and decision making in adolescents. This open-source curriculum was used by several organizations throughout the pandemic. Additionally, some organizations worked on developing children's social-emotional competence and creativity in visual art. 'Everyone's an Artist,' a digitized YouTube curriculum, is a series of 12 episodes which teaches students about a new feeling or emotion, enhanced their knowledge, and was followed by a quiz to check for understanding. Some organizations adopted and tweaked the CASEL framework to suit the context of children and meet their social and emotional needs. For example: to support children from Grade 5 and 6, a Maharashtra-based organization collaborated with teachers to build an online SEL curriculum. This curriculum was tailored to the context of children, for example community awareness was built through discussion about community helpers who supported each other during COVID. In addition to building a curriculum, organizations also supported teachers with ways to integrate SEL in their pedagogy.

There has been an abundance of initiatives at a state and national level to implement these innovations within school curricula. SEL is also being embedded in the intended curriculum at state and national levels. At a national level, The National Education Policy (2020) aims to devise four National Curriculum Frameworks (NCFs), which are being developed by the Ministry of Education (MoE) and National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT). However, the development of this curriculum is at a nascent stage and it is difficult to highlight specific innovations. Nevertheless, there has been a significant emphasis on leveraging technology in education at policy level. For instance, NITI Aayog, the apex public policy think tank of the government of India is focusing on strengthening technology by improving data privacy and technology transparency. As a part of the National Education Plan, 2020 the Indian government launched National Digital Education Architecture (NDEAR) in July 2021, which aims to create a united national digital infrastructure and catalyst for improving the efficacy of technology in the education system. It consists of digitized textbooks, digital classes and even helps score student assessments using artificial intelligence. These initiatives suggest that the government is focusing on technology and SEL in the Indian education system.

Implications for capacity building and training

Some social sector organizations focused on equipping teachers, school staff and education officers with digital literacy skills and virtual SEL pedagogy via remote training. For example, to engage with education officers in Tripura, a Pune- based organization implemented a two-phase strategy: (1) investigate how the officials coordinate with each other, (2) create self-paced courses and peer learning environments to enhance the professional growth of education officers. In Andhra Pradesh, a training programme for teachers comprised offline asynchronous learning through pre-reads, case studies, and reflections in addition to online synchronous learning circles that took place over the course of two to three days.

Several online initiatives such as SEE (Social, Emotional and Ethical) learning and SEL Shala were launched to support educators with their social-emotional competence skills. SEL Shala, an 8-day online training workshop, trained educators on SEL and ways to facilitate it in the classroom. The training is disseminated through a variety of experiences such as expressive writing, poetry, pair-share protocols, small group discussions, audio-visuals, art, and research. Additionally, teachers are also provided with knowledge resources for SEL such as a framework, SEL activities, and lesson plans to implement in the classroom. This training was bilingual and included a mix of English and Hindi. Similarly, SEE learning, an open-source programme, equips educators with SEL practices through four components (attention training, compassion and ethical discernment, systems thinking resilience, and trauma-informed practice). Finally, to engage with educators across India, Firki, a free online platform for teachers, provides asynchronous and synchronous resources in various e-formats such as courses, webinars, learning paths and online learning circles. After introducing a curriculum and supporting teachers with ways to implement in a classroom, organizations designed ways to teach SEL during a countrywide lockdown.

Digital schools

To ensure the continuation of classes during the pandemic, many social sector organizations conducted classes via Zoom and Google Meet. They assisted teachers in virtual classes by helping them navigate SEL concepts. For instance, in virtual classrooms, teachers were encouraged to do a feeling check-in with children at the beginning and end of a class, which meant creating PowerPoint slides or facilitating group discussions virtually. Some teachers responded by innovating new strategies for facilitating SEL, which they then shared with each other. Organizations also leveraged their existing relationship with students to send them SEL resources on WhatsApp.

Various other SEL strategies were also implemented in the digital school format. Quality Circle Time, an SEL approach by Jenney Mosley aimed at fostering relationship-building skills in children (Mosley, 2014), was facilitated online. In the first attempt, the children and the teacher in Rajasthan sat in a circle in the classroom while the facilitators were on Zoom. However, children were unable to connect with the facilitator, which was not optimal. The second time, in Mizoram, even if children did not have individual smartphones, they were encouraged to share and attend the sessions online. As a result, children engaged with the facilitators and opened up about their feelings.

According to officials implementing the Happiness Curriculum, schools conducted Happiness Classes for families every Friday for 45 minutes via YouTube and Facebook. It aimed at building mindfulness in families via activities and meditation. Parents were also sent guided meditation strategies via WhatsApp to create a positive home environment. As a result, digital schools helped children cope with learning loss and to attend schools virtually. It was also important to provide children and parents with resources to access after school.

Resources

Some social sector organizations created a repository of SEL resources which students, teachers and parents could access in their own time. A Maharashtra-based organization launched Kahaani Time (story time), a virtual age-inclusive space utilising storytelling through Zoom as a way to build parent-child relationships and keep children engaged in learning during the pandemic. Similarly, another organization introduced 'Art for Wellbeing' a parent's guide targeted at children from 3 to 15 years and their caregivers. This included digital workbooks focused on identifying, expressing, and regulating their emotions in Kannada, Hindi, Tamil, and Malayalam. Alternatively, for children who were unable to access online resources, over 34,000 children in Chennai, Coimbatore and Delhi NCR were given an art kit comprising stationery, art materials, a set of plain notebooks and an Art for Wellbeing workbook.

At national level, DIKSHA, a Digital Infrastructure education portal setup by the Government of India for schools was further enhanced during the lockdown. In response to the increased need for high-quality digital content, the Indian government on April 22, 2020, started a nationwide programme called VidyaDaan 2.0 (knowledge contribution) on DIKSHA to solicit contributions for e-learning content. It aimed to provide students and teachers with resources and is available in 36 languages. Several teachers referred to it to train themselves in mental well-being and inclusivity pedagogy. A unique aspect of DIKSHA is that each State/UT uses the platform in their own unique way because it enables educators, students, and administrators to create and implement content using a standardized template for free. Additionally, the National Council for Education Research and training (NCERT) delivered their content through DIKSHA, which made access to education easier during the lockdown.

Radio, telecalls, IVRS

To overcome the challenge of lack of internet connectivity, organisations leveraged radio, telecalls and Interactive Voice Response Systems to reach students at scale. IVRS is an automated telephone system which engages with callers through a combination of pre-recorded systems/ text-to-speech technology. This enabled callers to access information without a live agent. IVRS was used to reach out to students in particular due to its low-cost high-scale benefit.

IVRS was utilized to continue implementation of Project Sampoorna, a state level SEL initiative in Jharkhand aimed at equipping children with resilience, problem solving and social interaction skills. Strategies such as storytelling, roleplay, narrations, and jingle were prioritised as ways to engage with children, parents, and teachers.

Some social sector organisations chose art as a strategy for social and emotional learning. Para 4.7 of the NEP ,2020, explained that this art-integrated approach would strengthen the links between education and Indian culture. It further emphasized on the importance of experiential learning and embedding arts in the classroom. For instance, a non-profit leveraged WhatsApp, IVRS and radio to launch 'Arts For All' which employed art as a strategy for activating SEL in students. 'Arts for All' consisted of two programme (1) Meri Awaaz (my voice) where children learned about gender discrimination and equality through art based activities (2) Project Awaza a state level teacher training and art implementation programme executed in collaboration with the state council of education in Punjab. It was also modified to produce materials that are free, interactive, and available in English and Hindi (as well as translated into Punjabi, Tamil, Malayalam, and Marathi) and made accessible through a variety of low-tech distribution channels, including WhatsApp, IVRS, and Radio. To increase parent engagement, the organization conducted webinars facilitating SEL activities; district administrators, school leaders and teachers reached out to parents to increase participation in these webinars. Parents were encouraged to ask simple questions like "how was your day?" to provide an opportunity for children to share their feelings. This had a state level impact and reached 4.7 million children, across 23 Indian States and 19 countries, along with more than 610 partners in the form of governments, educational institutions or state actors.

Support for students and families

To address the well-being of children, some social sector organizations conducted telecalls, webinars and YouTube classes. By conducting weekly telecalls with adolescents, an organization was able to reduce stressors in the ecosystem, talk to children about their feelings and create a virtual safe space. 'Take it Eazy', an IVRS-based intervention, targeted 15- and 16-year-olds to reduce exam stress. Children could give a missed call on a number and receive 6-minute recorded stories for 30 days. The characters in these stories had challenges similar to the children, which provided them with mental health strategies and ways to cope with stress. Similarly, Project Sampoorna launched webinars for adolescent girls that led to them being able to access a virtual safe space amidst the pandemic. Another initiative, 'Project Karuna', was launched by a Pune-based organization to support the physical and mental wellbeing of students, families, and communities. To address anxiety related to Covid-19, the organization supported them with ration kits, increased access to vaccines, and facilitated counselling services.

The Indian government also launched various initiatives to address the wellbeing of children. The Ministry of Human Resource Development established the Manodarpan effort nationwide during the pandemic to mobilise psychological support to assist kids and teenagers in a comprehensive and multimodal way. The purpose was to offer students counselling and psycho-social support for their mental health and wellbeing. The ministry unveiled a manual on 21st century skills, a toll-free national helpline number, and a dedicated website. The effort offered advice to families as well as students, educators, and academics from school systems and universities. The website offered suggestions, helpful hints, posters, films, 'do's and don'ts', and advice for psychological support. Additionally, it featured a national database repository and a list of university and school counsellors whose services can be offered voluntarily for telephonic counselling on the national helpline (Sharma, 2021).

Some non-profit organizations prioritized teacher wellbeing and conducted webinars and telecalls for them. As the burden on teachers had increased overnight, organizations addressed the social emotional needs of teachers. They conducted wellbeing calls for them in their regional language, aimed at the community of teachers, who could share their struggles and support each other throughout the pandemic. For example, 'Quality Circle Time', a universally practised whole school model that encourages teachers to reflect on their interactions, with children was conducted online. A Maharashtra-based organization conducted telecalls and group Zoom calls to create a space of sharing for teachers. Teachers responded by actively participating and sharing their feelings. This created a safe space for teachers and a community for them.

Challenges and the way forward

Even though virtual curricula, capacity building and digital schools offered innovative ways to implement SEL virtually, they had various drawbacks:

1. Organizations which worked on capacity building over various digital platforms like Zoom for parents and teachers struggled to engage with participants in breakout rooms. Teachers and parents from low-income communities had limited digital literacy skills, which made the process difficult. Participants often kept their cameras off due to lower bandwidth, organizations were unable to conduct group discussions efficiently. Additionally, it was difficult to improvise and check for understanding in virtual training as compared to physical training. Organizations tried to overcome these barriers by utilizing engagement building tools such as Whiteboard, Padlet, Jamboard, Mentee.

2. Even though virtual classrooms offered ways to reach children, they were unable to create the same learning environments as a physical classroom. For example, students faced Zoom fatigue and struggled with concentrating on a screen for too long. Additionally, most children attended virtual class through a small- screen cell phone, which caused strain to their eyes and made them sometimes unable to read the text on the slides. Moreover, organizations at first found it difficult to create an experientially designed pedagogy for an online classroom. Physical classrooms offered more innovation and hands-on learning compared to virtual classrooms.

3. Another drawback of virtual classrooms was that parents were often around the children during class, which prevented children from opening up and talking about their struggles at home. Learning from home also meant that the teachers had to make an additional effort to keep students engaged and overcome distractions such as television, games, food, guests at home and play. Some children were unable to access mobile phones every day, as most families had one smartphone owned by the father, which he carried to work., This left children with access to the phone only in the evenings, without sufficient time to finish their activities and assignments.

4. Finally, in the case of IVRS, radio and television, it was difficult to track the engagement of students, teachers, and parents. It was also challenging to determine the response of students and monitor the efficiency of the content. Similarly, while open-source resources led to large-scale accessibility, it was difficult to ascertain the number of people engaging with and using the content.

Going forward, most social sector organizations recommend strengthening hybrid modes of education, in part to prepare for future school closures. For instance, organizations said they would prefer the first class meetings to be in person, if possible, and then continue with virtual training for areas with access to technology. This saves time, money, and logistical issues. A major strength of virtual classrooms was that neurodivergent children preferred it over physical classrooms. One explanation for this could be that children are learning in a known environment, i.e. their own home. Given, the challenges and existing technological innovations in India, we recommend the following:

1. A mindset shift is emerging at a systemic level to engage teachers, parents, and officers in SEL, which needs to be enhanced further. However, this still has a long way to go and India needs a behavioural change strategy, as students and facilitators are used to the blackboard and classroom as a default mode of education. In the short term, creating spaces for stakeholders to discuss their problems and help each other may increase collaboration. Communicating the advantages of technology and how it will save their time and effort may reduce resistance in the community. Conducting digital literacy classes through experiential and fun learning can help stakeholders come out of their comfort zone and use it in their day to day lives.

2. Teachers' role in the classroom also needs to be reimagined. Teachers need to shift to being a facilitator in the classroom and rethink their pedagogy. Given the effect of the pandemic on the mental health of children, teacher training programmes need to focus on trauma-informed pedagogy to help teachers address a child's emotional needs. Nurturing empathy, creativity, developing listening and validation skills, facilitation skills and sharing authenticity can help teachers cope with changing learning environments. These skills are important in hybrid modes of education, as the lack of the in-person touch makes it difficult to understand how children are feeling. Consistent on-ground support and frequent training can make this effective in the long term.

3. Translating blackboard teaching to online teaching will take more than just than sharing the worksheet on a virtual screen. To enable a smooth transition, remote modes of education need to account for the difference between attention spans and focus in an in-person classroom and a remote classroom. There are a variety of online social and emotional resources available for students to access. However, these resources need to be language friendly, culturally relevant and interactive to increase virtual engagement. Digital content needs to focus on engaging students, reduce cognitive load and prioritise quality over quantity of content. This would enable students, teachers, and parents to access it at their own comfort and learn independently.

4. There is an urgent need to reduce the gap in the digital divide and optimize hybrid models of education in rural parts of India. This will overcome the barrier to technology and help children access SEL resources. However, for many this a distant prospect, and a more pragmatic option would be useful. Leveraging low-cost mobile phones, radio and IVRS might mitigate the lack of accessibility while providing education in under-resourced communities.

5. In the long term, learnings from the field advocate for SEL to be integrated into the school culture and not as a stand-alone subject. For instance, every lesson could incorporate a critical thinking question to help students reflect on their own experiences. Finally, the social and emotional needs of teachers need to be prioritized. As teachers are the implementers of SEL in the classroom, their well-being needs to be focused upon.

In conclusion, the challenges of hybrid learning are myriad and there is no one size that fits all. In a country where data cost and affording a gadget is a luxury for some, accessing hybrid modes of education seems like a distant dream. Building a digital infrastructure and bridging the digital divide in a developing country like India requires not just a huge amount of funds but also a mindset shift in the citizen. Even if the financial and technological resources are available, the idea of virtual education is still alien to many. Short term solutions such as conducting professional development programmes, may equip parents and teachers with digital literacy skills but may still fail to increase access to technology. The answer to the question "How do we strengthen the hybrid model of education" is not simple and requires a collaborative effort from education systems.

Acknowledgements

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Purpose

As one of the contributors to this document (Cheng, 2023) has noted, the process leading to publication of this Discussion Paper is not the conclusion of an undertaking, but a beginning. While the immediate intent of the Paper is to animate constructive discussion, talk will be of little use if it does not lead to action. This final chapter is, therefore, an urgent appeal to educators at all levels to take the necessary steps to move the undertaking forward in ways that have immediately applicable benefits while ensuring preparedness for future crises.

The abrupt school closures brought by the COVID-19 pandemic caught teachers, school managers, and parents around the world unprepared and ill equipped to support students' learning. Yet, as illustrated in the plentiful examples described in this document, the wave of extraordinary innovations that arose almost overnight served to open new opportunities and address different priorities. In this emerging paradigm, the physical and emotional well-being of all members of a home or school-based learning community, took on a role of central importance. Building on the momentum created by these grassroots innovations, this Call for Action focuses on full integration of social and emotional learning (SEL), contextually defined, into learning and teaching practices at all levels and in all modes of education as a matter of urgency. Making this happen, as an interim measure in preparation for future emergencies as well as an essential component of ongoing curriculum reforms, requires holistic thinking and bold action. The expectation is that the steps outlined below will guide education stakeholders as they take action to transform education in ways that equip all learners for life and work in a rapidly changing world.

International frameworks and declarations

Several international frameworks and declarations undergird these recommended actions. For example, the 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development calls for re-orienting education toward the well-being of people and planet. UNESCO's Futures of Education initiative (2021) challenges us to 'reimagine how knowledge and learning can shape the future in an increasingly complex world'. A series of UNESCO Forums on Transformative Education for Sustainable Development, Global Citizenship Education (GCED), and Health and Well-being (2013-2021) reflect a changing discourse on the shape and purpose of education. The Calls for Action recently issued at the Transforming Education Summit (TES) state that the policy commitment of countries to transform education is crucial.

Concurrently, breathtaking innovations in applications of information technology, school-based practices and new models of hybrid learning, many inspired by pandemic era exigencies, have already begun to transform teaching and learning in unforeseen ways. Most notably, the roles of students, teachers, parents, and school management have begun to shift toward less hierarchical, more collaborative relationships that focus on and respond to the needs of all individuals in a learning community—including teachers, learners, parents and school managers—as human beings as well as contributors toward a common goal. To profit from these innovations, a totally new way of processing human interactions and the development of self during learning has to be put into place.

This Call for Action is also framed by UNESCO-IBE's Hybrid Education and Learning Assessment (HELA) initiative, which calls for the continued development of flexible, diverse models of hybrid learning, each with the built-in capability of adapting to changing circumstances. The constant feature in the design of these models is that they combine aspects of remote and face-to-face modalities for learning and are intended to '... articulate and offer a robust set of competencies and knowledge that makes explicit the why and what to teach, which are common and binding for all educational centres (IBE 2021).' This aligns HELA with UNESCO's broad vision for transformative education and casts the multiple forms of hybrid learning as optimal tools capable of integrating social and emotional learning (SEL) in ways that enhance the health and well-being of learners while supporting their cognitive development, socialization acquisition of relevant skills for work and life.

Recommended actions

At a glance

The experiences and approaches described throughout the six contributions to this Discussion Paper, together with presentations and discussions among contributors, have led to the following 9 recommended actions.

Planning
- Develop a comprehensive and flexible plan to guide schools and system responses in times of emergency.
- Elaborate a research-based conceptual framework and definition of SEL based on shared values and cultural norms.
- Articulate a comprehensive, robust set of SEL competencies.

Aligning
- Facilitate the full, systematic integration of SEL into hybrid modes of education.
- Strengthen school-community partnerships to support the well-being of teachers, students and families in times of crisis.
- Build on pandemic era innovations to actualise policies and plans for re-imagining and transforming education.

Following through
- Harness the power of emerging models of hybrid education to advance SEL.
- Make use of all available media channels to build specific SEL skills and promote SDG Target 4.7 themes.
- Narrow the digital divide.

In more detail, these recommendations entail the following actions.

1. Develop a comprehensive and flexible plan to guide schools and system responses in times of emergency. The plan should: (a) draw upon lessons learned from the COVID-19 experience and other education in emergencies initiatives; (b) support measures that integrate social and emotional learning into the academic curriculum and into teaching and learning processes in remote and hybrid learning environments; (c) provide for coordination with government bodies charged with providing emergency health measures or disaster response and use of their guidelines; and (d) suggest modalities for immediate essential and equitable support to students, schools, teachers and families in response to learning needs of students in situations of emergency

**2.	Elaborate a research-based conceptual framework and definition of SEL based on shared values and cultural norms,** using terminology that is relevant and understood by all interested groups and professionals. The conceptual framework can be used as a starting point for selecting and prioritizing SEL skills to be included in the curriculum and built upon as the context evolves over time to: (a) map an approach for aligning, strengthening, and assessing the development of the prioritized skills; (b) suggest a template for engaging with communities and families to promote informal SEL in the home and in the community; and (c) gather and analyse data for the purpose of measuring ongoing curriculum processes against their established objectives.

**3.	Articulate a comprehensive and robust set of SEL competencies** anchored in the shared conceptual framework that explicitly state: (a) intended learning outcomes for SEL in hybrid and blended learning environments; (b) implications of the stated competencies for the personal well-being and social development of individuals; and (c) benefits of the competencies for the economic development and social cohesion of the community and country.

**4.	Facilitate the full, systematic integration of SEL into hybrid modes of education** in alignment with curriculum goals and policy aims. The integration process should include (a) robust support to both the digital literacies and the SEL needs of teachers, for example though online professional development, dedicated mobile phone networks, and continuously updated resources; (b) development of textbooks, digital learning materials and other learning media/materials that explicitly support SEL through content selection and design of learning interactions; and (d) development of valid yet low-stress and emotionally nutritive assessment methods and tools for measuring SEL processes and outcomes.

**5.	Strengthen school-community partnerships to support the well-being of teachers, students and families in times of crisis**, and dedicated to nurturing students' emotional health as well as promoting pro-social behaviors. Recognizing that the introduction of remote and hybrid learning models further blurs the physical walls as well as the social distance between schools and their surrounding communities, strong partnerships can: (a) strengthen the connection between SEL at home and at school; (b) better support students' and families' transitions to and from remote and hybrid to in-person learning environments in situations of upheaval emergency; and (c) make optimal use of locally accessible communication tools, such as mobile phone networks, radio, signs, posters, flyers, and word-of-mouth to inform and guide families on how to encourage and enhance children's SEL growth in the family context.

**6.	Build on pandemic era innovations to advance plans for transforming education** at local, provincial, national and regional levels. Revisit and re-assess grassroots innovations and the lessons learned from these to: (a) build on teacher-designed learning content and technical skills gained during the pandemic, including applied in new modes of blended learning; (b) continue to promote student autonomy through active, student-centred learning; (c) re-define and assess learning gains made by students in remote and hybrid learning arrangements (d) form multi-stakeholder, caring communities of practice to set goals, continuously incorporate new ideas and innovations, implement actions and monitor progress toward visions education, transformed.

7.   Harness the power of emerging models of hybrid education to advance SEL in both school and community contexts by experimenting with new innovations in technology, including generative AI, that are seen as instrumental in the movement to transform education. To achieve this objective, create constructive collaborations among IT professionals, content developers, SEL specialists and researchers that: (a) build upon pandemic-era innovations to inform the design of platforms and integrated tools to promote student and teacher autonomy, individualized pacing, and collaborative learning; (b) apply powerful new data-gathering and analysis tools to enhance and continuously streamline the development of new and ongoing SEL in the hybrid and blended learning environments.

8.   Make use of all available media channels to build specific SEL skills and promote SDG Target 4.7 themes both in and out of physical schools and classrooms. These include, for example, (a) traditional story-telling and folk tales with empathetic characters, performed live in community venues or presented as radio, film or television dramas; (b) written or performed stories of modern life centred around challenges faced by children and young people that require SEL-related coping skills; (c) printed books for supplementary reading (fiction and non-fiction) linked to the SEL themes and components of the curriculum, such as inspirational stories of popular leaders, climate activists, and differently-abled athletes.

9.   Narrow the digital divide by providing equitable access to digital tools, including software and devices, needed to connect students and their families to online resources and real time instruction. To accomplish this long-term goal, education systems must begin by developing a technology plan built on policies explicitly intended to provide equitable access for all, regardless of location, economic class, ethnicity, or ability. Successful implementation of a system-wide technology plan relies on reliable connectivity to the internet, which in turn is dependent on government and/or private investment in strong and well-maintained telecommunications infrastructure designed to serve multiple sectors of society. Intermediate steps that can be taken include: (a) including basic computer skills and digital literacy in the curriculum using offline programmes; (b) initiating mobile hotspots to allow for connectivity during certain hours on a revolving schedule; and (c) training teachers to design content and platforms in preparation for facilitating remote, hybrid, and blended learning arrangements once the infrastructure is in place, (d) exploring creative solutions to enable families to access digital devices, for example direct provision, device lending and recycling programmes, or assistance to purchase devices on credit.

UNESCO-IBE

Founded in 1925 in Geneva, the UNESCO International Bureau of Education (UNESCO-IBE) is the first intergovernmental organization exclusively active in education, UNESCO's oldest institute, and the world's leading authority on curriculum transformation for quality learning. The IBE is also a unique platform for regional and international cooperation on education.

UNESCO-BIE

Fondé en 1925 à Genève, le Bureau international d'éducation de l'UNESCO (BIE-UNESCO) est la première organisation inter-gouvernementale exclusivement active dans le domaine de l'éducation, le plus ancien institut de l'UNESCO et la principale autorité mondiale en matière de transformation curriculaire pour un apprentissage de qualité. Le BIE est également une plateforme unique pour la coopération régionale et internationale en matière d'éducation.

The COVID-19 pandemic intensified existing educational disparities globally, prompting a reevaluation of school curricula to include Social and Emotional Learning (SEL). This shift recognized the holistic needs of learners, teachers, and families, emphasizing competencies beyond traditional knowledge acquisition.

Despite SEL's increasing global recognition, it is often absent from formal curricula, prompting the UNESCO-IBE to address this gap. This Discussion Paper explores the crucial role of SEL in the broader transformation of global education, particularly in the post-COVID-19 era. It highlights six key topics, presenting diverse experiences in integrating SEL into education. Experts from various fields contribute insights, focusing on socio-emotional and hybrid learning advancements worldwide.

The report aims to inspire global change-makers, advocating for robust policies aligned with UNESCO's Futures of Education framework. This call to action aligns with the UNESCO-IBE's HELA initiative, promoting flexible hybrid learning models for crisis response and sustainable educational strategies in line with the UN Transforming Education Summit's vision.