

Socio emotional learning of secondary school students in Sikkim

Senderala Bhutia¹, Dr Sandhya Rai²

¹ Scholar, Loyola College of Education, Namchi, Sikkim, India

² Assistant Professor, Loyola College of Education, Namchi, Sikkim, India

Abstract

This study investigates the Socio-Emotional Learning (SEL) levels of secondary school students in Sikkim and examines variations based on gender, school management, and locale. A descriptive survey method was employed, involving 200 students from Classes IX and X across government and private schools in both rural and urban settings of Sikkim. The standardized Social Emotional Learning Scale by Dr. Sivanantham R. (2015) was used. Findings revealed that 33% of students demonstrated low levels of SEL, while 67% fell within the moderate range; notably, none exhibited high SEL levels. Independent sample t-tests showed statistically significant differences in SEL scores based on gender, and no statistically significant differences in school management (government vs. private), or locale (rural vs. urban). The study highlights the importance of SEL in supporting students' academic success, personal growth, and readiness to face life's challenges in a rapidly changing society.

Key words: Socio-Emotional learning, secondary school students

Introduction

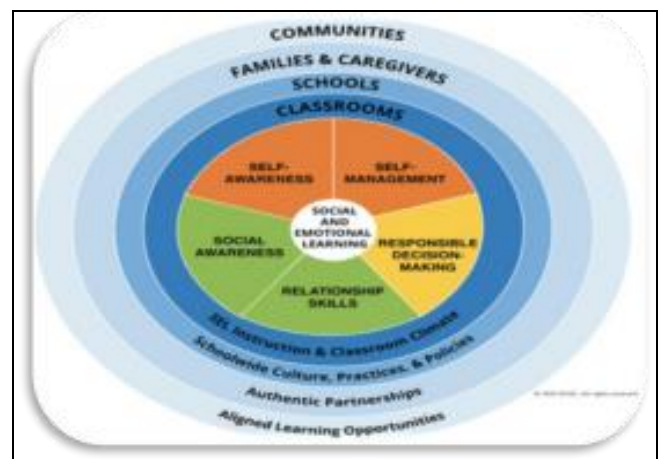
Education plays a pivotal role in the development of the society. Modern society is a dynamic and everyone is undergoing a paradigm shift due to explosion of information and communication technology and over flowing knowledge explosion thus giving everyone life altering experiences. It is inevitable that more such transformation is yet to come, so there is an urgent need to developing informed, compassionate, empathetic, and responsible citizens

where schools play a major role. In India's complex and diverse scenario, in addition to academic, vocational and technical skills, the children and adolescents are to be empowered to imbibe different attributes and psychosocial competencies or skills such as self-awareness, self-management, resilience, building relationships, discernment, responsible decision making to take positive actions and to meet the demands of increasingly vulnerable situations of life. Thus, making our future generations capable to adjust in the changing society by becoming socially and emotionally strong enough to face the everyday challenges. National Education Policy (NEP, 2020) underscores the importance of Socio Emotional Learning (SEL) to ensure holistic development of children and states that the education system must aim to develop good human beings capable of rational thought and action, possessing compassion and empathy (MHRD, 2020). Steinmayr *et al.* (2014) [17] has also stated that Socio Emotional Learning has an impact on how well the students perform in school which determines their academic achievement.

Weissberg *et al.* (2004) [20] stated that Socio and Emotional learning skills are strongly linked to academic performance and the comprehensive development of students' competencies. Social and emotional skills such as attention and emotion regulation can help critical thinking and informed decision making (Arslan & Demirtas, 2016) [1]. Inversely, fear and stress have a detrimental impact on learners' ability to learn, their health and well-being (Immordino-Yang & Damasio, 2007) [10].

Furthermore, SEL helps students develop a sense of responsibility and ethical reasoning, which are integral components of critical thinking. When students learn to consider the consequences of their actions and make ethical decisions, they become more thoughtful and reflective learners. This is particularly relevant in subjects such as history, literature, and social sciences, where students are required to analyze moral dilemmas, evaluate different perspectives, and engage in meaningful debates (Halpern, 2014) [9].

Socio-emotional learning (SEL) is an educational framework that fosters the development of essential life skills such as self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship building, and responsible decision-making (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL, 2020) [5]. The foundation of SEL is deeply rooted in various psychological and educational theories that explain how individuals acquire, regulate, and apply social and emotional competencies. The CASEL Framework can be seen in figure 1 below:



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

Fig 1: CASEL Framework

Theoretical background of the study

According to Osher *et al.* (2016) [14] Socio-emotional learning draws its base from other learning theories, including social learning, behavioural, emotional intelligences and multiple intelligence. Social learning theory emphasizes self-expectancies which correlate to SEL's emphasis on social awareness and self-awareness.

Social Learning Theory

Bandura's social learning theory explains how children learn and retain the behaviour they're exposed to, developing antisocial or social personalities and adopting specific attitudes and behaviours in the long term which is very important to enhance social awareness as an important component of socio emotional learning.

Emotional Intelligence Theory

The concept of emotional intelligence (EI), introduced by Salovey and Mayer (1990) [16] and later expanded by Goleman (1995) [8], serves as another key theoretical underpinning of SEL. Emotional intelligence refers to an individual's ability to perceive, understand, regulate, and manage emotions in themselves and others. Salovey and Mayer (1990) [16] identified four core components of EI: emotional perception, emotional facilitation of thought, emotional understanding, and emotional regulation. Goleman (1995) [8] extended this model to include social skills such as empathy, motivation, and interpersonal relationship management—core aspects of SEL.

Gardner's Multiple Intelligence Theory

Gardner's Multiple Intelligence Theory (1983) indicates that Interpersonal and Intrapersonal intelligence are two different ways that people can learn to understand the temperaments, moods, motivation, intentions, and desires of oneself and that of other. Interpersonal intelligence is the ability to understand the people around in the environment it is critical for developing and maintain relationship with others, while intrapersonal intelligence is the ability to understand oneself, his/her strengths and limitations. Interpersonal intelligence is associate with social awareness and relationship skills whereas intrapersonal intelligence is associate with self-awareness and self-management skills. Hence these two intelligences emphasize empathy and understanding, aligning with the SEL components of self-awareness, self-management and social awareness. (Taylor & Larson, 1999) [18]

Rationale of the study

Socio-Emotional Learning (SEL) is essential for students' overall development, influencing academic performance, emotional well-being, and social adjustment (CASEL, 2020). However, in regions like Sikkim, where education systems largely emphasize academic outcomes, SEL integration in school curricula remains underdeveloped. Given the increasing challenges faced by adolescents—ranging from stress and peer pressure to lack of emotional support—this study seeks to explore the level of SEL among secondary school students in Sikkim. Understanding their socio-emotional competencies will provide insight into the urgent need for SEL-based interventions, ensuring a more balanced and holistic approach to education.

Statement of the problem

Socio-Emotional Learning (SEL) is crucial for students' overall growth, yet its presence in the school curriculum of Sikkim is limited. Secondary school students often struggle with emotional regulation, social skills, and responsible decision-making. Despite its importance, there is little research on SEL levels among students in Sikkim. This study aims to assess the "Socio-Emotional Learning of secondary school students in Sikkim" region to identify existing gaps and promote holistic education.

Objective of the study

1. To study the level of socio emotional learning of secondary school students in Sikkim.
2. To study the difference in socio emotional learning of secondary school students in Sikkim with reference to the following demographic variables namely gender, locale and management.

Hypotheses

H₀₁: There is no significant difference on socio emotional learning of secondary school students with reference to the following demographic variables namely gender.

H₀₂: There is no significant difference on socio emotional learning of secondary school students with reference to the following demographic variables namely management

H₀₃: There is no significant difference on socio emotional learning of secondary school students with reference to the following demographic variables namely locale.

Operational definition of the terms used

Socio Emotional Learning: It is the processes through which children and adults understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions (Weissberg *et al.*, 2015) [19]. In this study SEL refers to the skills or competences of self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, responsible decision making and relationship skills of secondary school students.

Secondary School Students: Secondary school students, as used in this study, are educational establishments that offer official instruction to students in Grades IX and X, usually serving teenagers between the ages of 14 and 16. These schools, which may be privately run or run by the government, adhere to the curricula set forth by the relevant state boards or by state or central education boards like the ICSE or CBSE. Institutions that are officially recognized and connected to an educational authority are included in the definition, whether they are located in an urban or rural area.

Gender: It refers to the classification of the students who are male and female as per school records.

Locale: It refers to the school which is situated in the urban and rural area.

Management: It means the students who studying in the Government or Private institution.

Review of related literature

Several studies highlight the significance of social-emotional learning (SEL) across diverse contexts. Bhat (2021) [3] found no significant gender or locale differences in SEL competencies among adolescents in Jammu & Kashmir. Bishop (2023) [4], analyzing data from over 2,000 adolescents across 42 countries, emphasized the centrality of social awareness and responsible decision-making, particularly regarding empathy and inclusivity. Kothari and Wesley (2020) [12] reported a significant improvement in emotional intelligence following an SEL intervention, though gender differences remained insignificant. In contrast, Romer *et al.* (2011) [15] observed that girl’s consistently outperformed boys in SEL competencies across teacher, parent, and self-reports. Zins *et al.* (2004) [21] concluded that SEL plays a vital role in academic achievement by fostering emotional regulation and positive relationships.

Research Design

A quantitative and descriptive survey method was employed. This design enabled the researcher to describe and analyze existing conditions and relationships without manipulating variables (Best & Kahn, 2006) [2].

Population of the Study

The population comprised Class IX and X students from government and private secondary schools across all six districts of Sikkim, including both rural and urban areas. The total population was 16,482 students.

Sampling Technique

The study employed a proportionate stratified random sampling technique to ensure fair representation across key subgroups such as gender, school type (government/private), locale (rural/urban), and district. The total sample size of 200 students was determined. From this, 129 students were selected from government schools and 71 from private schools. Gender parity was maintained with 100 male and 100 female students. The sample also included 100 students from rural areas and 100 from urban areas, proportionately distributed across school types and districts.

Tools Used

The study used standardized Indian tools: Social Emotional Learning Scale by Dr. Sivanantham R. (2015)

Data Analysis

Analysis and interpretation of Socio Emotional Learning pertaining to the objective no 1: To study the level of Socio Emotional Learning of secondary school students in Sikkim.

The first objective of this study was to examine the level of socio-emotional learning (SEL) in secondary school students in Sikkim. For this purpose, students were categorized into three distinct groups based on their z-scores derived from SEL scores. The categorization was as follows: High Group ($z \geq +1.01$), Moderate Group (z between $+1$ and -1), and Low Group ($z \leq -1.01$). The distribution of students across these levels is presented in Table 1 and figure 2

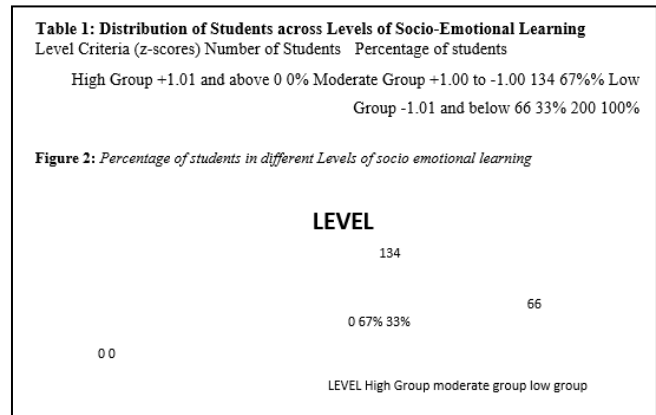


Table 1 and Figure 2 present the distribution of secondary school students across three levels of socio-emotional learning (SEL), classified using z-score criteria. None of the students (0%) fell into the high SEL group (z-score +1.01 and above), indicating that no student scored significantly above average in socio-emotional learning. A total of 134 students, accounting for 67%, were found in the moderate SEL group (z-score between +1.00 and - 1.00), the low SEL group (z-score -1.01 and below) comprised 66 students, representing 33% of the total sample. Underlining the need for effective SEL enhancement programs in secondary schools.

Analysis and interpretation of Socio Emotional Learning pertaining to the objective no 2:

To study the difference in socio emotional learning of secondary school students in Sikkim with reference to the following demographic variables namely gender, locale and management. The distribution of students across these variables is presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Differences in Socio Emotional Learning (SEL) among Secondary School Students in Sikkim by Demographic Variables

Variable	Group	N	M	SD	t(df)	p	Decision on H ₀
Gender	Male	100	162.00	15.20	-0.20(198)	.020	Rejected
	Female	100	166.00	7.91			
Locale	Rural	100	158.00	14.70	-0.30(198)	.764	Retained
	Urban	100	159.00	14.00			
Management	Govt	129	158.00	14.30	0.41(198)	.686	Retained
	Private	71	157.00	13.90			

An independent-samples *t*-test was conducted to examine differences in socio-emotional learning (SEL) scores across gender, locale, and school management. The results revealed a statistically significant difference between male and female students, $t(198) = 2.34, p = .020$, with females ($M = 166.00, SD = 7.91$) scoring higher than males ($M = 162.00, SD = 15.20$). No statistically significant differences were found between rural ($M = 158.00, SD = 14.70$) and urban students ($M = 159.00, SD = 14.00$), $t(198) = -0.30, p = .764$, or between students from government ($M = 158.00, SD = 14.30$) and private schools ($M = 157.00, SD = 13.90$), $t(198) = 0.41, p = .686$. These findings suggest that gender influences SEL levels, whereas school locale and type of management do not.

Findings of the Study

1. Level of Socio Emotional Learning

In Sikkim, the majority of secondary school pupils showed moderate level of Socio Emotional Learning skills. There were no students in the high SEL group, suggesting that the sample lacked significant Socio Emotional Skills.

2. Comparison of SEL by Gender (Male/Female)

Female students' mean SEL score ($M = 166.00$) was higher than that of male students ($M = 162.00$). This difference was statistically significant, $t(198) = 2.34$, $p = .020$, suggesting that gender influences SEL levels among secondary school students in Sikkim.

3. Comparison of SEL by Management (Government / Private Management)

The average SEL score of pupils attending government schools ($M = 158.00$) was slightly higher than that of students attending private schools ($M = 157.00$). However, the difference was not statistically significant, $t(198) = 0.41$, $p = .686$, indicating that SEL is not significantly affected by the type of school management.

4. Comparison of SEL by Locale (Rural/Urban)

Rural students' mean SEL score ($M = 158.00$) was slightly lower than that of urban students ($M = 159.00$). The difference was not statistically significant, $t(198) = -0.30$, $p = .764$, suggesting that locale does not have a substantial impact on SEL levels.

Educational Implications

The study found a statistically significant difference in socio-emotional learning (SEL) between male and female students, with females scoring higher, while no significant differences were observed across school management or locale. This suggests that SEL development is generally consistent across different school types and locations, enabling schools to adopt largely uniform approaches while still addressing gender-specific needs.

- **Uniform yet responsive SEL programs:** While SEL can be applied broadly across management types and locales, gender differences should be acknowledged in designing activities to support all learners.
- **Strengthening existing SEL initiatives:** SEL is already being implemented in Sikkim through various school programs, classroom activities, and government initiatives. However, there is a need for more targeted workshops, capacity-building sessions, and follow-up training to further enhance its reach and effectiveness.
- **Focus on classroom climate:** Fostering positive teacher–student relationships, encouraging constructive peer interactions, and creating supportive classroom environments can promote SEL growth.
- **Teacher professional development:** Regular training in SEL integration will equip teachers to embed socio-emotional skills into everyday lessons across subjects.
- **Family and community engagement:** Partnering with parents and community organizations can reinforce SEL skills outside of school.
- **Alignment with NEP 2020:** Embedding SEL into the formal curriculum supports the policy's vision of holistic education, empathy, and responsible citizenship.

Conclusion

This study has given the insight for the present status on the socio-emotional learning (SEL) conditions of secondary school students in Sikkim. The findings show that none of the children reach the high competency level, and a significant portion of them have low SEL levels. This suggests a concerning lack of emotional regulation, social awareness, self

awareness and responsible decision-making abilities in students, all of which are very important for holistic development in today's challenging and rapidly changing world. Furthermore, there shows no differences in SEL by gender, location (rural vs. urban), or school administration (private vs. government). This consistency implies that the low SEL levels are systemic rather than isolated, affecting students from a range of demographic groups. The results show how important it is for Sikkim's schools to have structured SEL awareness programs. This is especially important because the National Education Policy (NEP, 2020) stresses the importance of raising morally upright, emotionally strong, and caring citizens. By adding SEL to the curriculum, students can learn the skills they need to do well in school, stay emotionally healthy, and behave well in social situations and in school environment (MHRDD, 2020). This study ends by urging teachers, policymakers, and parents to make socio-emotional learning a more important part of school education so that students are not only academically ready but also emotionally strong and socially responsible.

References

1. Arslan G, Demirtas AS. Social emotional learning and critical thinking skills. *International Journal of Educational Methodology*, 2016;2(2):69–77. <https://doi.org/10.12973/ijem.2.2.69>
2. Best JW, Kahn JV. *Research in education* (10th ed.). Pearson Education, 2006.
3. Bhat A. Socio-emotional competence of adolescents with respect to gender and locality. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 2021;13(1):22–29.
4. Bishop J. Global adolescent SEL trends: A cross-national analysis. *International Journal of Child and Adolescent Studies*, 2023;15(3):101–117.
5. Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL). What is SEL?, 2020. Retrieved from <https://casel.org/fundamentals-of-sel>
6. Creswell JW. *Educational research: Planning, conducting, and evaluating quantitative and qualitative research* (4th ed.). Pearson Education, 2014.
7. Facione NC, Facione PA. Externalizing the critical thinking in knowledge development and clinical judgment. *Nursing Outlook*, 1996;44(3):129–136. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0029-6554\(06\)80005-9](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0029-6554(06)80005-9)
8. Goleman D. *Emotional intelligence: Why it can matter more than IQ*. Bantam Books, 1995.
9. Halpern DF. *Thought and knowledge: An introduction to critical thinking* (5th ed.). Psychology Press, 2014.
10. Immordino-Yang MH, Damasio A. We feel, therefore we learn: The relevance of affective and social neuroscience to education. *Mind, Brain, and Education*, 2007;1(1):3–10. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1751-228X.2007.00004>

11. Kothari CR, Garg G. Research methodology: Methods and techniques (3rd ed.). New Age International Publishers, 2014.
12. Kothari R, Wesley M. Impact of SEL intervention on adolescents' emotional intelligence. *International Journal of Indian Psychology*,2020;8(2):234–240. <https://doi.org/10.25215/0802.090>
13. Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD). National Education Policy 2020. Government of India, 2020. <https://www.education.gov.in>
14. Osher D, Kidron Y, Brackett M, Dymnicki A, Jones S, Weissberg RP. Advancing the science and practice of social and emotional learning. *Review of Research in Education*,2016;40(1):644–681. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0091732X16673595>
15. Romer N, Ravitch NK, Tom KM, Merrell KW, Wesley KL. Gender differences in positive social-emotional functioning. *Psychology in the Schools*,2011;48(9):958–970. <https://doi.org/10.1002/pits.20606>
16. Salovey P, Mayer JD. Emotional intelligence. *Imagination, Cognition and Personality*,1990;9(3):185–211. <https://doi.org/10.2190/DUGG-P24E-52WK-6CDG>
17. Steinmayr R, Dinger FC, Spinath B. Motivation as a mediator of the relation between intelligence and school achievement. *Learning and Individual Differences*,2014;32:95–100. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.lindif.2014.03.008>
18. Taylor JL, Larson D. Interpersonal and intrapersonal intelligence: The foundation for socio-emotional learning. *Journal of Humanistic Education and Development*,1999;38(2):73–78.
19. Weissberg RP, Durlak JA, Domitrovich CE, Gullotta TP. Social and emotional learning: Past, present, and future. In Durlak JA, Domitrovich CE, Weissberg RP, Gullotta TP (Eds.), *Handbook of social and emotional learning: Research and practice*. Guilford Press, 2015, 3–19.
20. Weissberg RP, Zins JE, Wang MC, Walberg HJ. The scientific base linking social and emotional learning to school success. In Zins JE, Weissberg RP, Wang MC, Walberg HJ (Eds.), *Building academic success on social and emotional learning: What does the research say?*. Teachers College Press, 2004, 3–22.
21. Zins JE, Bloodworth MR, Weissberg RP, Walberg HJ. The scientific base linking social and emotional learning to school success. In Zins JE, Weissberg RP, Wang MC, Walberg HJ (Eds.), *Building academic success on social and emotional learning: What does the research say?*. Teachers College Press, 2004, 3–22.