

Social Emotional Learning and The Indian Curriculum of Education

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Received June 07, 2024

Accepted November 25, 2024

Electronic access December 31, 2024

The content of this paper illustrates the importance of embodying Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) in the existing curriculum of school education in India. The paper begins with establishing a clear understanding of Emotional Intelligence, which is followed by a corroborative explanation of Social-Emotional Learning (SEL). With a foundational framework at hand, it then highlights the relation between SEL and academics through international as well as India-specific scientific studies and through that underpins the urgent need of SEL incorporation. The paper then provides a cognizance of the Indian curriculum of education by reviewing the National Policy of Education (NPE) (1986) to materialize the pyramidal structure which forms the basic framework of Indian education, this is preceded by a comprehensive analysis of the New Education Policy (NEP), 2020, wherein specific provisions from the policy are elaborated to understand the provisional reforms in relevance to the dearth of SEL in Indian classrooms. In a conclusive derivation, the paper also emphasizes the need and challenges to coherently express SEL in the curriculum and the potency of future research, specific to Indian context, to craft a more country specific curriculum to foster SEL in a holistic and effective manner.

Keywords: Emotional Intelligence, Social-Emotional Learning, India, Education, New Education Policy (2020), National Policy of Education (1986)

Introduction

India has been set ablaze by the annual rise of suicide cases, particularly amongst the posterity, i.e. the students of the country. A report issued by the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) in 2023, stated that a total of 13,044 students took their lives out of which more than 2000 students committed suicide after failure in examinations. The excruciating academic pressure and little to no emphasis on the emotional capacity of the student under the existing education curricula which emphasizes more on theoretical methods of learning, one-point evaluation, increases peer-competition and promotes an unhealthy practice of cramming which has overburdened the young minds with little to no understanding of their own emotions caused these student suicide rates to rise by 7.6% in a single year between 2022-23 as also been highlighted in the National Suicide Prevention Strategy, launched in November 2022, declaring academic pressure as a causative factor of increasing student suicide rates.

This brings a pivotal yet latent bone of contention to the forefront, i.e., the need for restructuring the existing Indian education system and device a curriculum which emphasizes on integrating social and emotional learning within the walls of the classrooms alongside academia.

The contents of this study aim to establish a foundation on the incompatibility of the current education curriculum with the needs of the students and the limited discussion of SEL in the Indian society and how it has been neglected over the years and

has not been addressed adequately.

The paper has attempted to draw this incompatibility by establishing a foundation of the basic framework of the curriculum which has been the same since the NPE, 1986 and then progress towards the NEP 2020 to understand its effectiveness in altering this framework to make it more student-oriented and how much emphasis it puts on the incorporation of SEL as well as plausible challenges to SEL integration in India's existing educational environment.

Understanding Emotional Intelligence

The term as defined by *Mayor and Salovey*, is “the ability of an individual to bear control over their emotions and their way of expression”. It is a skill beyond academic competence, which targets the following aspects the way we perceive our own emotions and that of others, the source of their origin and master their regulation and appropriate management.

To understand the intricacies of the concept, *Mayor and Salovey* further categorized EI further comprehensively into a four-branch model as shown in Fig.1: -

Suresh in his assessment of the above model has given a very concise and accurate definition of the branches of Emotional-Intelligence.

1. **Emotional Perception-** it refers to the ability to comprehend non-verbal actions which convey a certain emotion

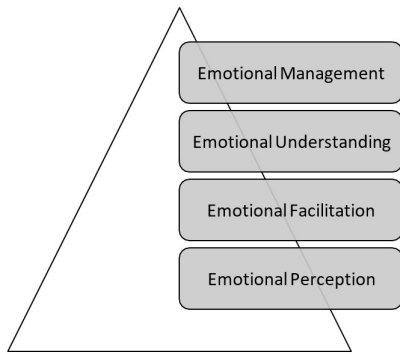


Fig. 1 The Four Branches of the Ability Model of EI

either through facial expressions or body language. It is the emotional perceptibility of an individual to be able to express himself/herself and apprise others through faces and pictures.

2. **Emotional Facilitation-** it is the ability of the emotions to aid and assist in developing a rational and intellectual thought. It is our capacity to be able to channelize the emotions in a manner that they do not hinder the thought process and compromise our intellectual abilities.
3. **Emotional Understanding-** while emotions do stand to be abstract, the ability to analyze them and comprehend the dynamics of their inter-relation and also understanding the source of such emotions in a given situation.
4. **Emotional Management-** a very complex and vital branch of the model, it refers to the ability of optimizing our emotions and converging them into a source of personal and inter-personal effectiveness. It also refers to our capability of managing and utilizing the emotions in a sense which stands at par with the situation and the environment around us.

Daniel Goleman, a renowned author of his best-selling book 'Emotional Intelligence', published in 1995 introduced a refined meaning of the term to the masses and changed the global perception of intelligence which was predominately correlated to an individual's Intelligence Quotient or IQ.

Goleman in his own theory of emotional Intelligence delineates five key competencies of Emotional Intelligence: self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills and stated that all individuals differ in their competency in the respective parameters. These competencies, Goleman states, can further be bifurcated into personal competencies (Self-awareness, Self-Regulation, Motivation) which associate to an individual's self-management and social competencies which include Empathy and Social skills. The theory proves to be invaluable and forms a framework on assessing a student's

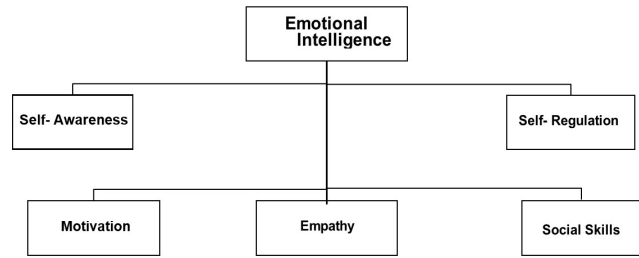


Fig. 2 Daniel Goleman's Theory of Emotional Intelligence

emotional competency to develop a student-oriented SEL curriculum which has been configured in a study by (Brackett, M. A., Rivers, S. E., & Salovey, P.)¹ in 2011 which found positive impacts of SEL programs based on the Emotional Intelligence theory on emotive and cognitive abilities of students. The theory also aligns very closely with the integral components of SEL as has been discussed under the following sub-heading.

Social-Emotional Learning (SEL)

SEL emphasizes on building the emotional competence of the directed individual and enable him/her to exercise authority over their emotions and navigate their mind with ease to convey all the thoughts that bother them and skills which empower them to build appropriate social relationships through interpersonal emoting. This is also the definition stated by CASEL.

According to (Elias et al. 1997)², social emotional learning is an integration process of thinking, feeling, and behaving to be aware of oneself and the people around, to manage one's and others' behaviors, and to take responsibility of one's own decisions (Serhat et al)³.

CASEL has classified SEL into five different competencies which make an individual socially and emotionally strong and exemplifies human development.

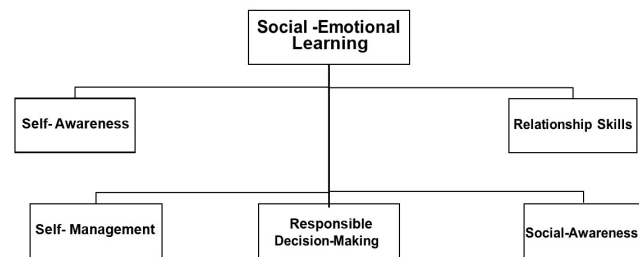


Fig. 3 CASEL's Model of Social- Emotional Learning

1. **Self- Awareness:** it refers to the ability to comprehend and evaluate our own emotions, analyze our thoughts, and express our feeling according to the prevailing situation. It also includes knowledge about our own strengths and

weaknesses, our passion, a sense of grounded confidence in oneself, and a purpose to fulfill.

2. **Self- Management:** it is the ability to organize one's emotions, thoughts, and behaviors in a manner to effectively optimize their effective use and focus them on achieving aspirations and goals.
3. **Responsible- Decision Making:** this term refers to our capability to take careful and rational decisions with necessary thought and emotions, balancing the benefactors and the limitations of a situation and taking concerns of ethics and safety into consideration before deciding on any situation.
4. **Relationship skills:** it is the ability to propagate healthy and appropriate social relationships and effectively navigate settings with diverse individuals. This can be achieved through effective communication, attentive listening, and consideration to divergent opinions.
5. **Social-Awareness:** it is the ability to accommodate different perceptions and empathize with those belonging to diverse cultures, historical backgrounds and contexts and feel compassion understanding to the existence of an array of human behaviors modified according to the setting.

The mentioned five competencies of SEL provided by CASEL have laid the groundwork for numerous successfully implemented SEL curriculums, especially in the USA as well as experimental curriculums like that created by the Learning Curve Life Skills Foundation, based in Hyderabad in India and have also helped establish systematic, equitable, evidence-based SEL for all preschool to high school students.

Social-Emotional Intelligence and Academics

Years under the sun, academia has always been associated with theoretical learning, literal intellect, and the ability to memorize and analyze texts. However, overtime, social- Emotional Intelligence has emerged as another dimension to the concept, and it does not stand alien but has always been positive influence in academic results. Recent meta-analyses have observed that students with a high EQ tend to attain increasing academic grades, while the one by (Durlac et Al, 2011)¹ shows an 11 percent increase in academic performance after introducing Social-Emotional Learning programs into the education curriculum (MacCann et Al 2019)⁴.

Furthermore, a cross-section descriptive study by (Hermoso et Al, 2020)⁵, developed on 333 high school students in Spain utilizing the Trait Meta-Mood Scale (TMMS) and KIDSCREEN-10 Index tools, meticulously defines the dimensions and levels of emotional intelligence among high school students and cohesively analyze the relation between emotional soundness and

academic performance of students. The study characterized the infliction of the three dimensions of emotional intelligence as devised by Mayor and Salovey on the pedagogical performance:

1. Emotional Attention- implying to what extent humans emphasize on self-thought and cater to their feelings and emotions.
2. Emotional Clarity- is the perceptibility of an individual to assess their existing emotional state and analyze their present state of mind.
3. Emotional Repair- reflects to the ability of a human to regulate, align, and organize their thoughts, feelings, notions, and emotions and handle emotionally- endearing situations.

The study concluded that, "45% of students were found to be at inadequate levels in the Attention

dimension (25% for "Insufficient" and almost 20% "Excessive"), 40% in the Clarity dimension, and 25% in the Repair dimension". a possibly clear and indicated towards a transparently positive relation existing between emotional intelligence and the dimensions of clarity and repair.

The outcomes of the RULER Feelings Words Curriculum have also indicated towards a positive relation between EI and academia, implying, that to succeed, a student not just requires to be smart and hard- working but also be in control and rightful management of his/her emotions.

Research conducted by (Parameswaran, S. and Aradhya, A.S., 2019)⁶ analyzed the results of survey conducted in 2018-19 wherein an SEL curriculum was implemented in 55 schools in 2 states of India comprising 390 teachers and 11,280 children (grade 3-grade 9) by the Learning Curve Life Skills Foundation and was based on the framework created by the CASEL.

It was concluded that not only did 85% of all children assessed showed improvement in social and emotional skills, but also 85% of the classrooms showed improvement in curiosity, participation, energy level and collaboration among children which further improved their academic performance. The survey indicates the vitality and the positive implications of SEL as well as its adaptability of an SEL curriculum in the fabric of India's education system.

The fragments of all these extensive researches are a clear testification that emotional competency does hold an important position in improving the quality of learning and further affirms the necessity of addressing the incompetencies of education, unable to develop the emotional competence of school students.

Existing School Education in India

The Indian education system is structured in accordance to the framework provided under the Education policy of 1986 (NEP, 1986) until revitalized in 2020 (NEP, 2020)⁷ by the Honorable

Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Being one of the largest education systems in the world, the Indian education stands highly competitive and largely driven by theoretical learning and text-book knowledge.

The '10+2+3' structure of education has been adopted under the National Policy of Education of 1986, revised in 1992, was recommended by the Kothari Commission (1964-66). It is a pyramidal model diverging into four different stages with students climbing up tier-by-tier as shown in the Fig.3: -

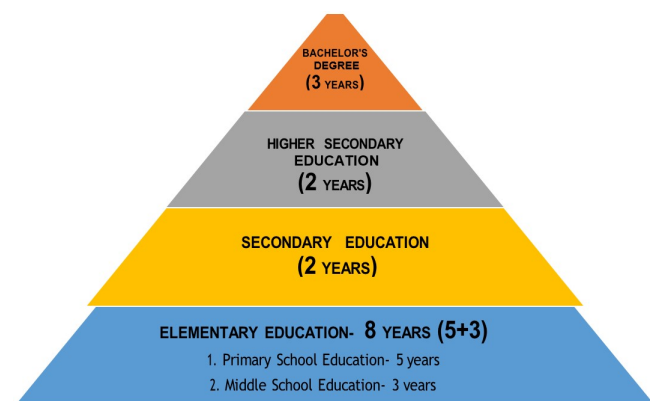


Fig. 4 The Structure of Indian School Education Under the NPE of 1986

A categorical description of this pedagogical structure of education as provided by (Gupta, A., 2022)⁸ is as follows:

- The first 5 years are of Primary education, extends from 1st to 5th standard, emphasizing on the cognitive development of the student.
- The next 3 years, referred to as the Middle School Education or Upper Primary School Education extend from 6th to 8th class, these classes provide a gist of all the subjects which are further magnified at higher standards, forming a foundation for the coming years.
- The next 2 years of Secondary Education comprises a detailed study of all the subjects taught in the previous levels extending from 9th to 10th.
- The last 2 years are dedicated to career-building with a segregation of students into separate streams of different subjects suitable for different professions. These years comprise the 11th and the 12th standards.

The NPE of 1986 has been able to provide access of education in several unreserved rural areas, where economic circumstance shackled the children from pursuit of knowledge. It held some structural demerits which hindered its progress as a policy encouraging a more holistic and engaging education.

This structure has been a stumbling block due to the exhilarating pressure it has lathered onto the students. Consequentially,

India is consistently met with an alarming percentage of the adolescent population (aged between 13-17) suffering from mental distress and anxiety which according to (National Mental Health Survey) has been 7.6% implying 50 million teenagers who bear persisting issues with their mental health. A predominant factor behind these overwhelming numbers lies in the negligence of our education system towards the very core of their foundation, i.e. the students. An adolescent bears an expanding emotional diaspora, being exposed to multiple new and complex realities, which often becomes a source of stress, and this turns even more distressing when the individual does not bear the emotional capacity to comprehend the changes within themselves and the ones around them. So, it becomes imperative for an educational institute to cater to these individuals in a holistic manner, to develop social-emotional intelligence to create well-rounded individuals rather than imparting a burden of forceful knowledge which hampers their mental well-being.

The New Education Policy (NEP), 2020

This policy stands as the first education policy launched in the 21st century after the NPE formulated in 1986. This policy is a revitalization of our pedagogical structure as well as the curriculum of Indian schools, adaptive to the nouvelle advancements in several technologies which have been an indelible part of our education from the beginning of this millennium and rose to an indispensable prominence after the Covid-19 pandemic.

The Policy is rooted to make our existing structure of education more holistic, inclusive, and student-oriented to a much higher extent which it aims to achieve by reduction of curriculum content for every subject which clears out more space for concept-analysis and application and integrating critical thinking, parting away from the conventional method of 'rote learning' and incorporating practical skills into the realm of education. (4, 4.5, NEP-2020, The Ministry of Human Resource Development of India)

Another concept which was being consistently blindsided and ostracized in the previous curriculum frameworks is of SEL. One of the most evident and congruous drawbacks of the preceding policies has been the lack of attention towards developing the emotional competence and intelligence of the students, securing their social-emotional compatibility for them to be able to build and maintain proper social relationships and become empathetic humans with a capacity of rational thought. The NEP 2020, is a leap forward in the development of this gray-area of education by putting special emphasis on the assimilation of SEL into the existing classroom curriculum. The fourth part of the NEP 2020 talks about the curriculum and pedagogical reforms adopted to make classroom learning more holistic and engaging for the students.

SEL-Oriented Provisions of NEP-2020

The new pedagogical structure adopted under the neoteric policy is the '5+3+3+4' model 'consisting of the Foundational Stage (in two parts, that is, 3 years of Anganwadi/pre-school + 2 years in primary school in Grades 1-2; both together covering ages 3-8), Preparatory Stage (Grades 3-5, covering ages 8-11), Middle Stage (Grades 6-8, covering ages 11-14), and Secondary Stage (Grades 9-12 in two phases, i.e., 9 and 10 in the first and 11 and 12 in the second, covering ages 14-18)'. (4, 4.1, NEP-2020, The Ministry of Human Resource Development of India)⁹

The policy stresses upon students being taught at a young age to 'do the right thing' providing them a logical framework to make ethical and morally righteous decisions. Students will be exposed to an array of ethics and moral principles expanding on themes of equality, justice, empathy, ethnic diversity, and practices enabling students to embody these values to help them develop a rational perspective on a multitude of subjects and enable them to conduct their own lives and utilize these skills in their daily practices. Students will be instilled with traditional Indian ethical values of human conduct "(such as seva or service, ahimsa or non-violence, swachchhata or cleanliness, satya or truth, nishkam karma or selfless deeds, and shanti or peace)" and constitutional values like "(democratic outlook, integrity, responsibility, justice, liberty, equality, and fraternity)." Basic training on mental and physical hygiene, good nutrition, and detrimental effects of alcohol, drugs and tobacco shall also be scientifically explained (4, 4.28, NEP- 2020, The Ministry of Human Resource Development of India)⁷.

The provision does align with instilling the 'social awareness' component from the CASEL framework of SEL into the students by acquainting them with a democratic and secular outlook to foster social rationality and prevent the proliferation of any socio-cultural biases and preconceived notions in the students.

Substantial changes have also been made in the examination pattern and format of assessment to reduce the examination stress which has created heightened mental duress amongst students of higher classes. In the foundational years, instead of conducting exams annually, students will appear for exams only at the end of grade 3, 5, and 8. These examinations, according to the policy shall "test achievement of basic learning outcomes, through assessment of core concepts and knowledge from the national and local curricula, along with relevant higher-order skills and application of knowledge in real-life situations, rather than rote memorization", (4, 4.40, NEP-2020, The Ministry of Human Resource Development of India)⁷.

This measure aims to eradicate rote learning from the education structure which does harm to a student's cognitive abilities and deprives the young minds of the implementation of the acquired knowledge in practical situations. It indicates that the score card will hold not just the marks as a sole indicator of a child's academic prowess but also critically assess the applica-

tion of the knowledge they have acquired.

It does not directly coincide with any SEL component but removes the burden of rote-learning which sets the tone for a positive and student-oriented SEL curriculum.

The policy also proposes the creation of the National Testing Agency (NTA) offering high quality common-aptitude tests for college entrance examinations in various subjects chosen by the respective students in various fields of Science, Commerce and Humanities, with a purpose to eliminate the need for coaching classes. "The high quality, range, and flexibility of the NTA testing services will enable most universities to use these common entrance exams - rather than having hundreds of universities each devising their own entrance exams - thereby drastically reducing the burden on students, universities and colleges, and the entire education system" (4, 4.42, NEP-2020, The Ministry of Human Resource Development of India)¹⁰.

"Board exams for classes 10 and 12 will also be made 'easier.' in the sense that they will test primarily core capacities/competencies rather than months of coaching and memorization". Students will just have to focus on their classroom concepts which would fetch them good marks in the examinations.

Furthermore, to reduce the 'high-stake' value of board examinations, each student will be permitted to appear for the board exams up to two times in the same session, one main and the other one for improvement if required or needed (4, 4.37, NEP-2020, The Ministry of Human Resource Development of India)¹¹.

The progress card reports of the students, unlike now, will not just comprise their examination scores, it would rather be a detailed multi-dimensional assessment of students in "the cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains." Created under the guidance of the NCERT and the SCERT, these progress card reports would comprise self and peer assessment of the student, project-based and inquiry-based learning, quizzes, role plays, group work, portfolios, etc., along with teacher assessment (4, 4.35, NEP-2020, The Ministry of Human Resource Development of India)¹² This will lead to a reduction in unhealthy competition amongst peers and would elevate a holistic development of students in the five metrics of SEL as proposed by CASEL.

The policy itself does not directly address the idea of SEL and its integration but directs towards aligning the education system to mental, physical and emotional enhancement and evolution of the students which draws coherent inference from the principles of SEL and lays the ground for a student-oriented SEL curriculum. The policy has paid emphasis on character development and instillation of not just ethical values but also traditional as well as constitutional principles to foster a holistic approach to develop a rational, intellectual, and emotionally balanced posterity.

Challenges to SEL Integration in India

The NEP 2020 does not elaborate on the methods of incorporation of SEL into classroom learning and provides an ambiguous take on SEL inclusive classroom pedagogy with unique and structured curriculum. Furthermore, the understanding of the concept would be imparted from the teachers and the policy does not include any such provisions which delineate a set of methodologies and skill-building techniques for the teachers as there social- emotional competence and understanding of such concepts will only be able to help implement the student-centric provisions of the policy.

Moreover, access to educational technology which is reliable and supports SEL integration remains inconsistent throughout the country as elaborated in a report issued by the Unified District Information System for Education of India or UDISE in 2021-22. This problem poses an immense challenge not just nationally but also globally as stated by UNESCO and MGIEP and makes for an imbalanced implementation of the NEP 2020 as well as inadequate structural setup to proliferate an SEL curriculum.

SEL cannot be implemented through individual interventions, rather our entire education system needs to gear up and create consciousness about the importance of SEL as it still remains a stone unturned. To do so, the participants of the SEL exercises, i.e. the educators, facilitators and teachers need to be provided appropriate training to mediate through a multitude of inter-sectioning social identities, especially those in government schools which are consistently under the spot for the relatively poor quality of education provided in these institutions as compared to private education institutions which makes it even more formidable to cater to a larger population of students, especially those who reside in rural pockets of the country.

Conclusion

In a quest to understand the standing of SEL in the Indian education system, the paper has been able to underpin the positive confluence of SEL in Indian classrooms through the discussion of a survey conducted by (Parameswaran, S. and Aradhya, A.S., 2019)⁶ which has highlighted the success of SEL as not only a tool to increase student competency but also as one to improve classroom environment fostering efficient learning. The paper has highlighted specific provisions of the NEP 2020 which stand to benefit the students and have been assessed in consonance to the SEL framework curated by CASEL followed by a detailed discussion on the challenges of SEL integration through inferences from UDISE, UNESCO as well as MGIEP. Through these discussions, the paper has attempted to amalgamate the contemporary standing of SEL in India and acknowledges the dearth of research in this area especially in the Indian context which revitalizes its holistic importance. The NEP 2020 does

not directly address SEL integration which makes it challenging to analyze the provisions in the SEL context.

With an ever-increasing population, widening urban rural disparities, and a large population of young minds struggling to receive the basic levels education with no access to modern technology, integration of SEL stands to be even more critical and requires a clear and pragmatic addressal in government policies as well as strong emphasis on rural education to foster holistic evolution of Indian education.

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