Implementing SEL Programs to Enhance Academic and Socio-Emotional Competencies in Elementary Schools: A Systematic Literature Review

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Abstract

Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) is an increasingly important educational approach to support students' social, emotional, and academic development. This study aims to explore various approaches and strategies for implementing SEL in elementary schools and to identify their impact on students' academic achievement and social-emotional skills development. The method used was a systematic literature review (SLR) based on the PRISMA guidelines. Articles were obtained from leading academic databases such as ScienceDirect, ERIC, and DOAJ, with a publication coverage between January 2021 and March 2025. Of the 250 articles identified, 13 met the selection criteria and were further analyzed. The results of the study indicate that the implementation of SEL, both through classroom-based approaches and whole-school approaches, has a significant positive impact on improving academic achievement and the development of students' social-emotional skills, such as self-awareness, emotional management, and social interaction skills. The program's success is greatly influenced by supportive school leadership, active teacher involvement, and the use of learning media sensitive to cultural contexts. The practical implications of these findings suggest the importance of integrating SEL into the elementary school curriculum and the need for ongoing training for teachers and policy support from education stakeholders to create holistic and inclusive learning environments.

Keywords: Social emotional learning, elementary school, elementary student, academic achievement, Systematic Literature Review

Abstrak

Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) merupakan pendekatan yang semakin penting dalam dunia pendidikan untuk mendukung perkembangan sosial, emosional, dan akademik siswa. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengeksplorasi berbagai pendekatan dan strategi implementasi SEL di sekolah dasar, serta mengidentifikasi dampaknya terhadap pencapaian akademik dan perkembangan keterampilan sosial-emosional siswa. Metode yang digunakan adalah Systematic Literature Review (SLR) dengan mengacu pada pedoman PRISMA. Artikel diperoleh dari database akademik terkemuka seperti ScienceDirect, ERIC, dan DOAJ, dengan cakupan publikasi antara Januari 2021 hingga Maret 2025. Dari 250 artikel yang diidentifikasi, 13 artikel memenuhi kriteria seleksi dan dianalisis lebih lanjut. Hasil kajian menunjukkan bahwa implementasi SEL, baik melalui pendekatan berbasis kelas maupun pendekatan seluruh sekolah, memberikan dampak positif yang signifikan terhadap peningkatan prestasi akademik dan perkembangan keterampilan sosial-emosional siswa, seperti kesadaran diri, pengelolaan emosi, dan kemampuan berinteraksi sosial. Keberhasilan program sangat dipengaruhi oleh kepemimpinan sekolah yang suportif, keterlibatan aktif guru, dan penggunaan media pembelajaran yang sensitif terhadap konteks budaya. Implikasi praktis dari temuan ini menunjukkan pentingnya integrasi SEL ke dalam kurikulum sekolah dasar serta perlunya pelatihan berkelanjutan bagi guru dan dukungan kebijakan dari pemangku kepentingan pendidikan guna menciptakan lingkungan belajar yang holistik dan inklusif.

Kata kunci: Pembelajaran sosial emosional, Sekolah Dasar, Siswa Sekolah Dasar, Prestasi Akademik, Tinjauan Literatur Sistematis

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BACKGROUND

Recently, the public has been shocked by the increasing number of tragic cases that have occurred in educational environments, such as students committing suicide due to academic stress, bullying, physical violence, and others, which reflect a mental well-being crisis in schools. Ironically, it is not only students who are affected—teachers and parents are also often reported to experience similar psychological pressure, some even committing violence or ending their own lives. Schools should be safe and meaningful spaces where students and educators grow together in an emotionally supportive atmosphere. This reality raises a fundamental question: why do educational institutions, which should be places for character and moral formation, actually become sources of pressure that endanger mental well-being? In response to this concern, applying the Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) approach is critical because it focuses on developing social and emotional skills to strengthen student resilience and create a psychologically healthier school ecosystem. Numerous studies have shown that SEL implementation has a positive impact on students' emotional well-being and academic achievement, making it a strategic investment for every educational institution.

SEL plays a crucial role in teacher education, significantly improving learning outcomes for students and teachers (Kasperski et al., 2025). For students, SEL is a catalyst for social and emotional development, leading to enhanced academic achievement and healthier interpersonal relationships (Roffey, 2012). Meanwhile, for teachers, robust SEL competencies are a powerful tool in stress management, enabling them to build positive relationships with students and implement effective classroom management strategies (Cipriano et al., 2020). The integration of SEL into the educational framework is expected to promote increased academic achievement while safeguarding the emotional well-being of all school members. Students with strong social and emotional skills are generally better equipped to handle pressure, have high learning motivation, and cultivate harmonious relationships with peers and teachers (Ma'mun et al., 2025). Hence, the cultivation of self-awareness and emotional regulation skills through SEL is a reassuring strategy for addressing the emotional challenges faced by students and teachers in a rapidly changing world.

On the other hand, SEL refers to programs designed to develop students' social and emotional competencies (Bergin et al., 2024). Today, the implementation of SEL is not just a complementary strategy in education, but a transformative approach that restores the essence of education as a comprehensive and holistic experience. By prioritizing the emotional health of students and teachers, schools are expected to create a learning environment that supports balanced emotional, academic, and personal development. Several studies have shown that implementing SEL positively impacts students' behavior, attitudes, and academic achievement in the short term and has a sustainable long-term influence (Durlak et al., 2011). As a result, implementing SEL is not just a response to the current crisis, but a proactive step that educators can take to form a more resilient and adaptive generation to the changing times.

In practice, SEL includes learning activities that help students develop skills in recognizing and understanding emotions, establishing healthy social interactions, and considering the consequences of actions taken (Avandra et al., 2023). These activities have a profound and positive impact on students, inspiring them to be more self-aware and empathetic. One of the most influential models in developing these competencies is the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) framework, which has been widely used as a reference in studies of social and emotional competencies (Ross & Tolan, 2018). The CASEL model identifies five core competencies in SEL: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making (Payton et al., 2000). These five

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competencies are the foundation for creating a productive and emotionally supportive learning environment for students and educators (Lozano-Pena et al., 2021).

This study is intended to explore aspects related to this through the exploration of the following review questions:

1. What approaches or strategies are generally used to implement SEL in elementary schools?
2. How does the SEL program affect improving students' academic achievement at the elementary school level?
3.   How does the SEL program affect the development of students' social and emotional skills?

Previous studies have examined the same topic, such as a literature review on SEL activities through language learning (Helaluddin & Alamsyah, 2019). The study highlights language learning strategies and programs that can be used by teachers in embedding SEL in classroom learning. Literature on the implementation of SEL in elementary schools in countries with paternalistic cultures (Surya et al., 2023). This study found that the Strong Kids, PATHS, Collaborative Learning and Social Support optimization programs are effective programs in developing social emotional skills in countries with paternalistic cultures. Literature on anti-racist teaching combined with social-emotional learning (Durm & Roper-Roach, 2023). The combination is carried out to fully address negative stereotypes about various minority groups. Next, a review of the literature on SEL as an intervention to reduce cyberbullying behavior (Anggraeni & Imania, 2025). The study confirmed that SEL can be a very effective tool in reducing cyberbullying among adolescents. With developed social and emotional skills, students can manage conflict, build relationships, and behave better. With that ability, students could contribute to the prevention of cyberbullying. In addition, the literature review on a comprehensive analysis of simulation-based learning methods aimed at improving teachers' social-emotional learning (SEL) (Kasperski et al., 2025). In the research, researchers found inconsistencies in the terminology and categorization of simulation types across studies, highlighting the urgent need for a standardized definition and offering certain types of simulations with their effective implementation.

Unlike previous studies, this study analyses several important aspects in implementing SEL, namely the approaches or strategies commonly used in implementing SEL, the influence of SEL programs on improving academic achievement, and the development of students' social and emotional skills at the elementary school level. Therefore, this study provides a comprehensive insight into important aspects of promoting SEL in learning in elementary schools.

RESEARCH METHOD

The method in this study was a systematic literature review conducted following the PRISMA guidelines (Page et al., 2021). Data collection was carried out between March and April 2025 through academic databases, including ScienceDirect, ERIC, and DOAJ. The article search in the selected academic databases utilized the keywords "social emotional learning", "elementary school", and "elementary student". The restrictions for the reviewed articles were set to peer-reviewed journal articles, full text available, open access, and in English. This search resulted in 16 articles from ScienceDirect, 195 articles from ERIC, and 39 articles from DOAJ. The process of selecting relevant publications was conducted through a structured four-step procedure: identification, screening, eligibility evaluation, and final inclusion, as depicted in Figure 1.

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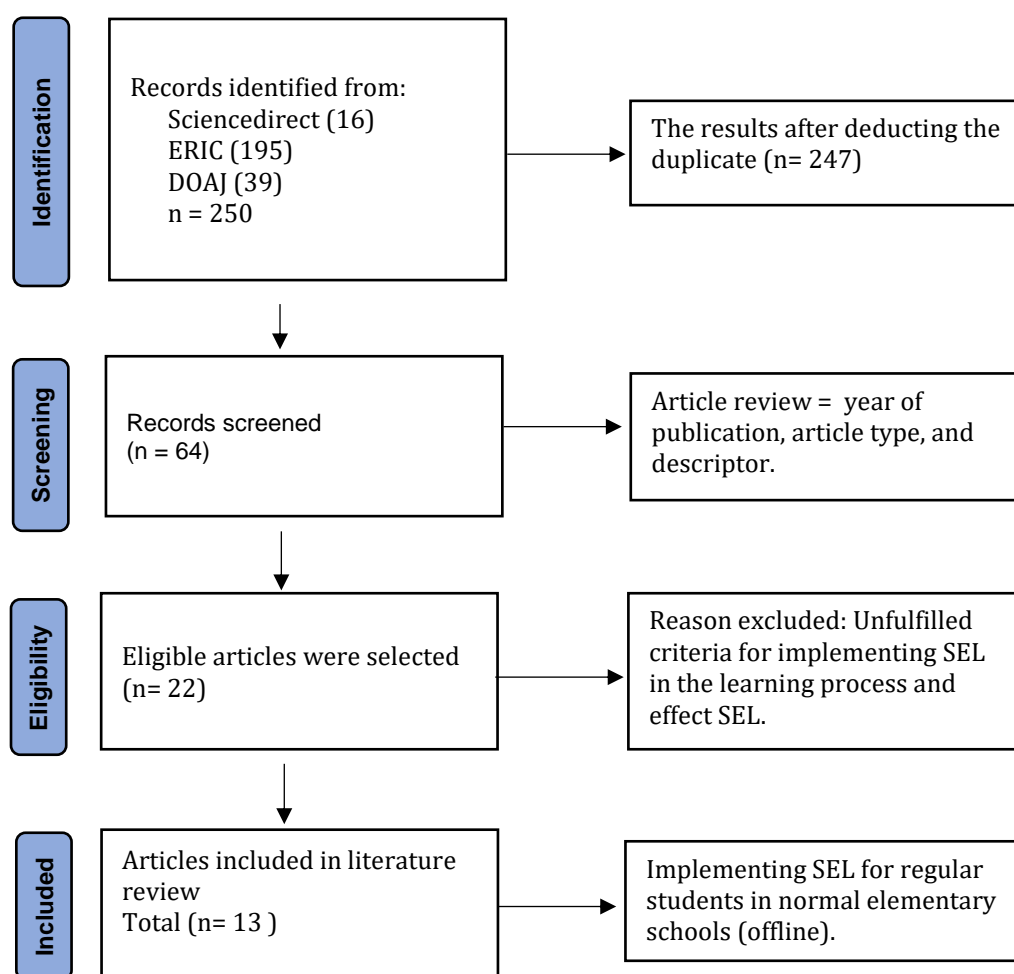
Systematic Literature Review

Figure 1 PRISMA flowchart

The initial search using the keywords "social emotional learning", "elementary school", and "elementary student" in three databases resulted in a total of 250 articles. Metadata from these articles, such as title, abstract, and conclusion, were analyzed to identify and remove similar or duplicate manuscripts. After the initial screening process, the researchers managed to collect 247 unique articles that did not have any similarities. The metadata analysis process is still ongoing. Those metadata were reviewed to determine its relevance to the research topic. To ensure eligibility, one author first screened each article based on the predetermined inclusion criteria. Next, other authors reviewed each decision to validate the inclusion and exclusion process. Any disagreements were resolved through discussion among members of the research team.

A second screening based on specific criteria left 64 articles for further review. These criteria include: year of publication (2021–2025), type of article as a research article, focus of study specifically on SEL and implementation at the elementary school level. After analysing the 64 articles in depth, some manuscripts did not meet the main criteria, namely the implementation of SEL in the learning process in

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elementary schools. The excluded articles included: (1) literature review articles, (2) articles that discuss SEL in the context of the general curriculum, (3) articles about SEL programs for prospective teachers, (4) articles that focus on the context of SEL during the COVID-19 pandemic, and (5) articles about SEL programs implemented outside school hours.

Furthermore, after the selection process based on eligibility criteria, 22 articles were obtained. The further selection process is an inclusion process carried out by reviewing in more depth and only including articles that examined the implementation of SEL in the learning process of regular students during formal school hours. Articles discussing SEL implementation in inclusive classrooms or with students with special needs (EBD) were excluded. From this stage, 13 articles were obtained that met all inclusion criteria and were ready for the analysis stage by reviewing all content in the article: title to conclusion. Thus, the results of the application of SEL in learning that can influence elementary school students' academic, social, and emotional aspects are shown in Table 1.

Table 1 Analysis Qualitative Finding

No	Title	Topic	Main Finding
1	Discussion Formats for Addressing Emotions: Implications for Social-Emotional Learning	A design-based implementation aimed at encouraging productive dialogue in primary language arts classrooms to make the learning process more effective in enhancing SEL in learning.	Implementing SEL through classroom discussions has many benefits and can encourage interesting discussions that are inherently relevant to students' everyday knowledge and experiences. However, there are some challenges in discussions. Hence, a productive dialogue is needed in discussions to promote SEL. Also, inclusive emotional dialogue offers significant potential for dialogue, especially in the context of social-emotional learning, because it encourages sharing personal experiences. This aspect is often lacking in classroom discussions. This form of discussion is more aligned with dialogic principles such as 'cumulative' and 'purpose', making it more effective in improving social and emotional learning in the classroom setting. In addition, there is a moderate effect on mathematics achievement in low-motivated student groups.
2	Capturing Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) Through Children's Literature	The use of SEL by first-grade teachers through the integration of children's books focusing on SEL competencies.	The use of children's books that focus on SEL competencies, such as I Like Me and I Am Enough, can help students identify and develop self-awareness—a crucial aspect of their academic and emotional success. Exposure to these books

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			in the context of SEL implementation has been shown to improve oral language skills and support students' learning processes in the classroom, school, and community settings.
3	Does Universal SEL Promote Academic Success? Examining Learner Outcomes Under Routine Conditions in First-Grade Classrooms	A trial of the effectiveness of SEL programs in improving academic performance under general conditions	The SSIS SEL program is a brief, manual-based social emotional learning program focusing on children's mastery of 10 core social skills. Each unit in the program covers basic social skills that align with CASEL's SEL framework. The program demonstrated positive effects with medium to large effect sizes on student engagement in academic activities and improved math achievement. In addition, students whose teachers rated them as having lower academic motivation at the pre-test tended to show more significant improvements after participating in the SSIS SEL program.
4	Effectiveness of a Social-Emotional Learning Program for Both Teachers and Students	The impact of *Leader in Me* (LiM), a widely implemented social-emotional learning program in thousands of schools, has garnered increasing academic attention due to its potential to enhance students' social-emotional competencies and overall school outcomes.	Leader in Me (LiM) is a Social Emotional Learning (SEL) program that is integrated into learning activities and involves seven positive habits that are applied in everyday interactions. Schools that implement LiM show higher scores in Mathematics and English Language Arts (ELA) on state proficiency tests, although not in Science, and experience fewer discipline incidents. The program contributes to increased student motivation to learn and academic engagement by strengthening the role of teachers and creating a supportive learning environment. Students in the LiM program tend to be more prosocial, confident, and motivated, and exhibit fewer problem behaviours.
5	Identifying social-emotional skills among elementary school students in vietnam: a cross-sectional study	Social Emotional Skills of Primary School Students in Vietnam: Cooperation, Empathy, Emotion Regulation, and Problem Solving.	This study found that the implementation of Social Emotional Learning (SEL) at the elementary school level significantly improved students' social-emotional skills, such as the ability to collaborate, empathize, manage emotions,

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			and solve problems, all of which contributed positively to their learning process and social interactions.
6	Promoting resiliency, peer mediation and citizenship in schools: The outcomes of a three-fold research intervention	Integration of Resilience, Peer Mediation, and Citizenship Education in School Curriculum for the Development of Students' Emotional Skills, Conflict Resolution, and Democratic Roles	The program aims to promote resilience, peer mediation, and civics education by introducing these concepts into the learning process. Research shows that learning interventions focusing on resilience, peer mediation, and civics education can significantly improve students' social-emotional skills, create a favourable school climate, and reduce conflict and aggressive behaviour.
7	Effects of Positive Action in Elementary School on Student Behavioral and Social-Emotional Outcomes	Evaluation of the effectiveness of a school-based universal program targeting social-emotional skills in late elementary school (grades 3-5) in a low-income urban minority population.	Positive Action (PA) is a comprehensive, school-based, social-emotional program that includes a learning toolkit for teachers in every classroom and training for teachers, counsellors, and families to strengthen school climate. Growth curve analyses indicate that the program positively impacts adolescent development, emotional health, self-esteem, prosocial behaviour, healthy habits, learning climate, and academic achievement. Longitudinal data also revealed increases in grade point averages (GPA) in schools that received the intervention. Additionally, positive associations were found between early exposure to SEL-based programs and students' long-term academic experiences, including decreased grade retention rates and decreased need for remedial services.
8	Hope and School Leadership for Elementary School Students	The concept of hope emphasizes the important role of school leadership in integrating hope-based education into the daily curriculum to support students' social-emotional well-being.	Integration of the concept of hope into classroom instruction is influenced by leadership within the school structure. Students can understand the concept of hope deeply through their personal experiences, but still need explicit instruction and concrete examples to relate hope to everyday life. They also face challenges applying hope as a goal-oriented cognitive process in authentic contexts.

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			Effective school leadership can support hope-based education by allowing teachers to integrate this concept into the daily curriculum.
9	Preventive Initiatives to Promote Psychological Adjustment Among Primary Students: Findings of RULER Approach in Spanish Public Schools	SEL interventions, particularly through the RULER approach, play a critical role in supporting the mental health of elementary school children. This approach has been shown to be effective in reducing symptoms of anxiety, feelings of inadequacy, and various behavioral disorders that arise in the school environment.	The RULER approach to social and emotional learning (SEL) is an evidence-based method rooted in the emotional intelligence theory. This approach significantly contributes to improving the mental health of elementary school students by reducing clinical symptoms such as anxiety, feelings of inadequacy, and other emotional discomfort.
10	An exploratory evaluation of universal social-emotional learning programs delivered during elementary school to Australian students	This study evaluated the relationship between a social and emotional learning (SEL) program implemented in Australian primary schools and students' developmental functioning in late childhood, at ages 11–12.	SEL program implementation significantly affected four social-emotional competencies, except responsible decision-making. The most substantial effects were found for evidence-based SEL programs that provided explicit instruction in the targeted competencies. In contrast, no significant effects were found for programs that had not been empirically proven. This population-level evaluation confirms the universal benefits of implementing evidence-based SEL programs in supporting the development of elementary school students' social-emotional competencies.
11	Leveraging technology to address social-emotional learning during the pandemic: Findings from an efficacy trial	A cluster-randomized controlled trial was conducted to evaluate the impact of a technology- and game-based social-emotional development program on elementary school students.	The SS GRIN Adventures program is a digital version of an effective face-to-face board game. This social skills group intervention, consisting of nine 40-minute instructional episodes, focuses on five SEL competency clusters identified by the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL). Adventures significantly and meaningfully impacted students' social-emotional learning (SEL) skills. Findings from Adventures highlight

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			the growing effort to support all students, including those perceived by teachers as having social-emotional challenges. The program also expands our understanding of the potential role of technology in developing SEL competencies.
12	Effects of the Tools for Getting Along Curriculum on teachers' reports of elementary students' executive functions, social-emotional skills, and behavior problems	This study aims to test the effectiveness of Tools for Getting Along (TFGA) based on teacher reports on executive function (EF), social-emotional skills, and student behaviour at the elementary school level.	TFGA is a classroom-based prevention curriculum that teaches students evidence-based problem-solving steps to apply in emotionally charged situations. Designed to be teacher-friendly and easy to implement in everyday classroom practice, the curriculum consists of 21 core lessons. The TFGA program significantly improved elementary school students' social-emotional skills and executive functioning, especially for students who experienced greater early difficulties. However, the program did not significantly impact teacher-reported externalising or internalising behaviours.
13	Feel Your Best Self: Insights from elementary teachers' use in teaching emotion-focused coping strategies	Feel Your Best Self (FYBS) teaches 12 emotion-focused coping strategies to strengthen emotion regulation and everyday experiences with positive emotions.	Feel Your Best Self (FYBS) program teaches 12 emotion-based coping strategies to strengthen emotional regulation skills and increase positive experiences in everyday life. FYBS has succeeded in achieving its goal of providing flexible and straightforward instruction on emotion-based coping strategies in elementary school classrooms. This program makes teaching easier for teachers, creating a calmer and more enjoyable atmosphere. On the other hand, students become more focused and appear to enjoy learning. FYBS has a significant positive impact on the social-emotional development of both teachers and students.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) was first introduced by Daniel Goleman in 1995 (Helaluddin & Alamsyah, 2019). Goleman emphasised the importance of teachers in paying special attention to students' social-emotional learning. The concept of SEL is an elaboration of emotional intelligence, which is the ability to recognise, understand, and manage one's emotions and establish positive relationships

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with others. In recent years, the term SEL has become more widespread and shows a significant upward trend. A study noted that around 107 media outlets mentioned the term SEL in 2010, which increased to 1,500 in 2017 (Alliance, 2018). However, implementing SEL in the field faces several limitations, especially the lack of cultural responsiveness and the minimal focus on equality issues within the existing program framework. Therefore, many researchers and educators develop more contextual approaches tailored to each school's conditions (Gimbert et al., 2023). In this study, various approaches were developed by educators to promote SEL both in the learning process and outside of learning activities. In addition, this study also revealed the positive influence of SEL on students' academic achievement and their improvement in social-emotional abilities.

Approaches to SEL implementation in schools

Based on a review of various articles, the Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) approach in schools shows variations, ranging from classroom-based approaches to comprehensive school-based approaches. In general, the implementation of SEL is carried out through two main approaches: Classroom-Based SEL and Whole-School Approach. The classroom-based approach involves direct intervention in teaching and learning activities, while the school-based approach includes all elements of the school community, including students, educators, and administrative staff. The majority of studies show that the classroom-based approach is the most commonly used method, with direct integration into the learning process through various strategies and programs, both structured and flexible. SEL is often integrated into daily lessons such as language arts, through productive dialogue (Lefstein et al., 2024) and interactive read-aloud activities (Morton & Akram, 2022). These strategies have been shown to encourage student engagement and emotional expression and build personal connections between students and teaching materials.

Some SEL programs are based on explicit and structured curricula, such as Social Skills Improvement System (SSIS SEL) (Hart et al., 2024), Tools for Getting Along (TFGA) (Garcia et al., 2024), and Adventures (Flynn et al., 2024), designed to develop core SEL competencies as defined by CASEL. For example, TFGA uses 21 sequential lessons with a problem-solving approach, while Adventures adapts a gamification approach to deliver students social-emotional material. On the other hand, some programs are designed to be more flexible and contextual, such as Feel Your Best Self (FYBS), which allows for implementation in both special lesson sessions and non-academic time (Koslouski et al., 2024). This shows the adjustment of the SEL approach to the needs and context of each school. Another example is Leader in Me (LiM), a program that provides formal training and reinforces learning through daily habits based on seven core habits (Bergin et al., 2024), emphasizing the importance of consistency and repetition in developing SEL competencies. In addition to the classroom-based approach, several studies emphasize the importance of the whole-school approach, which makes SEL part of the overall structure and culture of the school. This approach relies heavily on school leadership as the main driving factor. O'Shea & O'Shea (2024) showed that principals with a distributed leadership style could create adequate space and support for teachers in implementing SEL across the school level.

Other comprehensive and evidence-based school-based programs include Positive Action (PA) and RULER (Recognising, Understanding, Labelling, Expressing, Regulating). The PA program carries the Thought-Action-Feeling model as a self-reinforcing cycle (Lewis et al., 2021). Meanwhile, RULER, which is rooted in emotional intelligence theory, focuses on developing five key skills: recognizing, understanding, labelling, expressing, and regulating emotions (Gualda et al., 2023). Both involve training teachers, counsellors, and family support and developing a holistic school climate.

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In the review of these articles, there are findings in the form of obstacles and challenges in implementing SEL. For example, Hart et al. (2024) provided evidence supporting the effectiveness of SEL when implemented under typical school conditions, addressing a gap left by earlier studies that were mostly conducted in ideal settings with extensive researcher involvement. Other obstacles and challenges to SEL implementation also include the lack of practical guidance and mismatch of emotional codes between teachers and students (Lefstein et al., 2024), weak formal evaluation of SEL programs (Carpendale et al., 2025), and difficulties in measuring abstract concepts such as expectations (O'Shea & O'Shea, 2024). In addition, there are technological challenges to technology-based SEL approaches (Flynn et al., 2024).

The influence of SEL implementation on students' academic abilities

In modern education, Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) has become an essential element that supports student well-being and contributes significantly to academic achievement (Aziz & Makhtuna, 2024). Carpendale et al. (2025) stated that implementing SEL programs consistently and according to standards can improve student learning outcomes. A positive correlation exists between mastery of SEL competencies and academic achievement, indicating that social-emotional skills are not merely additional aspects but key components supporting academic success.

Several SEL programs show empirical evidence of their impact on student academic performance. One example, in a study by Hart et al. (2024), the Social Skills Improvement System–Classwide Intervention Program (SSIS SEL CIP), which has been shown to increase student engagement in learning and academic achievement, especially for students with low academic motivation. The statistical analysis results showed a moderate effect on improving mathematics achievement. Compared to the control group, students with low baseline motivation scores experienced a significant increase in adjusted motivation scores after participating in the SSIS SEL CIP intervention in routine learning (see Figure 2). These findings suggest that SEL interventions can effectively support students at risk of falling behind academically due to low motivation to learn.
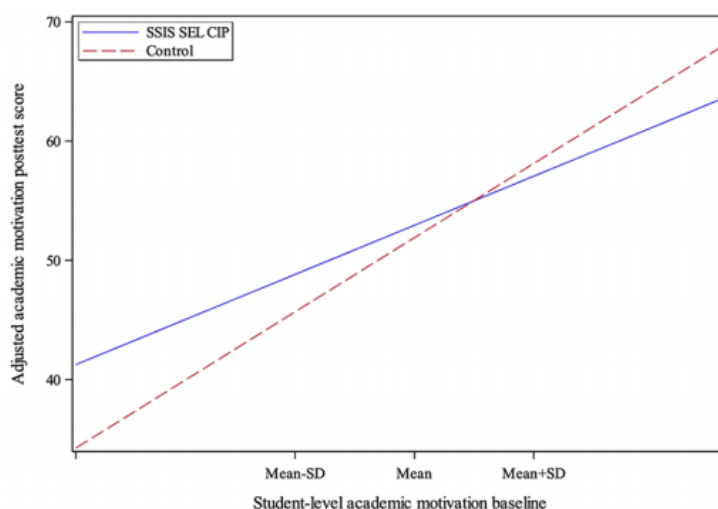

Figure 2 Experimental conditions on academic conditions (Hart et al., 2024)

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Other programs, such as Leader in Me (LiM), have also positively contributed to increasing student learning motivation and academic engagement through empowering teacher roles and creating supportive learning environments (Bergin et al., 2024). Schools implementing LiM have been shown to have higher scores on state-level math proficiency tests. In addition, the Positive Action (PA) program successfully creates a conducive learning climate, indirectly contributing to improving student focus and academic outcomes (Lewis et al., 2021). Longitudinal evidence shows a trend of increasing Grade Point Average (GPA) in schools implementing PA interventions, indicating that the program's impact is long-term and sustainable.

These findings confirm the strong relationship between reinforcing positive values in student behaviour and consistently improving academic achievement. Whether through SSIS SEL CIP, LiM, or PA, various SEL interventions have shown effectiveness in increasing student learning motivation, engagement, and academic achievement. Programs designed with a holistic approach—involving active teacher involvement, school environment support, and structured training—have been shown to have significant and indirect impacts. The effectiveness of interventions will be even more optimal if implementation is carried out consistently and according to the guidelines that have been prepared.

The influence of SEL implementation on students' social emotional abilities

Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) competencies have been proven to help students adapt to various life demands (Reyes & Elias, 2011). This is in line with the view that the purpose of education is not only limited to improving academic achievement, but also includes the formation of character and emotional well-being of students so that they can face life's challenges more effectively (Aziz & Makhtuna, 2024). Based on the analysis of various articles, strong consistency was found in the fact that SEL programs play a strategic role in improving the social-emotional competencies of elementary school students. These competencies cover five main domains: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. SEL programs significantly improve four of the five competencies among students (Carpendale et al., 2025).
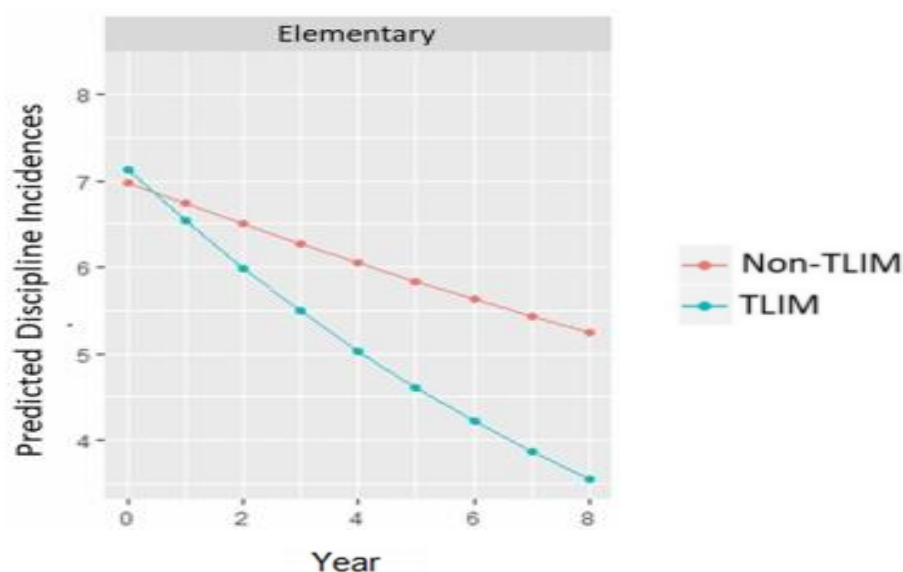

Figure 3 Discipline changes by school type and LiM status (adopted from Bergin et al., 2024)

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Furthermore, SEL programs effectively develop empathy, collaboration, and students' emotional regulation skills. These improvements are generally achieved through explicit teaching approaches, using children's storybooks, and integrating moral values in learning (Bergin et al., 2024; Le et al., 2022; Morton & Akram, 2022). Implementing SEL programs also contributes to creating a more positive school climate, increased mental well-being of students, and increased participation and engagement in the learning process. In addition, several programs such as RULER, Tools for Getting Along (TFGA), Leader in Me (LiM), and technology-based programs such as Adventures have shown the effectiveness of SEL in reducing clinical symptoms and problematic behaviors, such as anxiety, aggression, and non-prosocial actions. For example, a study by Bergin et al. (2024), implementing the LiM program has positively impacted student discipline. Data collected showed that schools that implemented LiM experienced a significant decrease in disciplinary incidents compared to schools that did not implement the program. Students in LiM schools experienced a significant decrease in disciplinary incidents over time compared to non-LiM schools (see Figure 3).

Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) programs significantly reduce feelings of inadequacy and atypical behaviour in elementary school students (Gualda et al., 2023). In addition, implementing SEL has been shown to create a more peaceful school climate, reduce student conflict, and increase self-confidence and learning motivation (Lewis et al., 2021; Lithoxoidou et al., 2021). This shows that SEL has a broad impact on individual aspects of students and social dynamics in the school environment. The importance of using contextual and relevant learning media has been highlighted in several studies. Media that can be felt close to students' experiences, such as children's storybooks, are effective in helping students identify and explore emotions more personally (Morton & Akram, 2022). In addition, interactive digital media also positively contribute to facilitating deeper emotional engagement, mainly through an engaging and adaptive approach to students' needs (Flynn et al., 2024).

On the other hand, school leadership and teacher autonomy are important factors in successful SEL implementation. According to O'Shea & O'Shea (2024), when teachers feel empowered and given space to integrate social-emotional values into daily learning, the impact of SEL programs becomes more consistent and meaningful for students. Supportive school leadership, primarily through a distributed leadership approach, helps create an educational ecosystem conducive to implementing SEL as a whole. Overall, implementing SEL programs that are carried out systematically and adjusted to the school context has a significant positive impact on the social-emotional development of elementary school students. These programs strengthen students' core social and emotional competencies, reduce negative psychological symptoms, increase prosocial behaviour, and build a healthy learning climate that holistically supports the learning process.

CONCLUSION

Adaptive instructional strategies, relevant materials, active support from teachers and school leaders, and alignment with evidence-based practices strongly influence the effectiveness of SEL programs. Classroom-based SEL is typically delivered through explicit instruction or integrated into academic subjects, while whole-school approaches create environments that support students' broader social and emotional development. This review indicates that combining the two approaches provides the most optimal outcomes for student growth. Based on these findings, schools and education policymakers must adopt a dual approach combining classroom-based SEL instruction with whole-school initiatives. Teachers must receive ongoing training and professional development to implement culturally and

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contextually relevant SEL strategies. Principals and administrators are also expected to create a school climate that focuses on academic achievement and students' emotional well-being. Policymakers need to integrate SEL as part of national and local education policies, allocating budgets for teacher training, curriculum development, and evaluating the effectiveness of SEL programs. However, it should be noted that this study has several limitations, such as the limited number of databases and search keywords used, and the geographical focus that is not fully representative globally. Therefore, further research is recommended to explore the implementation of SEL across different cultural contexts and educational systems, and to test the effectiveness of SEL approaches in the long term. In closing, SEL should not be viewed as an add-on but as a crucial strategic investment supporting students' holistic development. By mainstreaming SEL in educational policies and practices, we can create learning environments that are more inclusive, emotionally healthy, and oriented towards students' long-term growth.

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