

# The Pulse of Social and Emotional Learning: Status and Core Competencies in Primary Schools

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## ABSTRACT

**Aim of the Study:** This quantitative study employs a cross-sectional design to examine the current state of Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) and relationships between its core competencies among primary school students.

**Methodology:** With the help of a correlational approach, this research design enables the statistical analysis of relationships between variables. The sample size of 302 students was selected through a proportionate stratified sampling method (25%). The Panorama Social-Emotional Learning Survey was used for on-site data collection, covering all five core competencies of SEL. This study reports a significantly higher SEL status at most schools in Karachi.

**Findings:** The students demonstrated particular proficiency in two SEL domains: social awareness and self-management. Further, the correlation analysis reveals that a strong positive correlation was observed between self-awareness and self-management, self-awareness shows a moderate positive correlation with responsible decision-making, and a weak negative correlation with social awareness. A weak positive correlation was observed between self-awareness and relationship skills. However, a weak negative correlation was found between self-management and social awareness, social awareness and relationship skills, and social awareness and responsible decision-making.

**Conclusion:** The study concluded that all five SEL competencies are interlinked. Study shows that relationship skills are the only competency that can be developed independently during specific developmental stages of a young student and is the least correlated with self-regulation and responsible decision-making. To improve the current standard of SEL modules and practical strategies, there is a need to focus on teacher training, which must be incorporated in future pre-service and in-service teacher education programs.

**Keywords:** Social and Emotional Learning (SEL), Self-awareness, Self-management, Social Awareness, Relationship Skills, Responsible Decision-making, Primary Schools, Students.

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## **1. INTRODUCTION**

The developmental significance of Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) in young children has now been receiving increased recognition in recent years, particularly among educators, researchers, and policymakers. While the academic achievement of students has always been a top educational priority for any institution, an increasing recognition of cognitive development unfolds and ensures children's long-term success and overall health and well-being. Moreover, other factors are also equally important, such as children's abilities to understand and cope with emotions, which help them navigate the complexities of social settings, build healthy relationships, and make responsible choices. Of a well-rounded primary education, this holistic view is now recognized as a foundational component and is a substantial form in the formation of SEL.

However, despite the growing body of literature supporting social and emotional aspects of learning, SEL faces a variety of challenges in its actual implementation in primary settings. These challenges include, but are not limited to, restricted time constraints, academic pressures, teacher training, inadequate resources, and support from institutes (Balouch et al., 2025; Hussain & Ahmed, 2023; Martinsone et al., 2023; Shah et al., 2023). Moreover, the school environment itself can significantly influence students' experiences and internalize SEL through its factors, such as security, classroom climate, engagement, and teacher expectations. Hence, it is necessary to examine the emotional states of students and the environmental conditions together to understand the true status of SEL in primary schools of Karachi, Pakistan. For this purpose, the current study not only examines the current state of SEL from the perspective of students but also examines the relationship between the core competencies of SEL, including self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making.

### ***1.1 Research Gap***

International studies have validated the importance and effectiveness of SEL in enhancing students' overall development in schools. Most literature has focused on SEL implementation in high-income countries with well-established support systems (Dowling & Barry, 2020; Wigelsworth et al., 2022). Few studies have examined the interconnection between SEL implementation and academic priorities, lack of awareness, and limited support systems within the primary context, particularly in developing countries such as South Asia and Africa (Hayashi et al., 2022; Lasi et al., 2023). Few have examined adaptations of SEL programs via teacher training programs within schools (Sandilos et al., 2023) and the effectiveness of SEL on students' overall development (Haroon et al., 2023; Khan et al., 2023). Often, the literature neglects the predictive role of various factors that can determine the success or failure of SEL in schools, such as school environment and emotional well-being.

### ***1.2 Study Objectives***

1. To explore the current status of Social and Emotional Learning in primary schools of Karachi.
2. To examine the relationship between self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making.

### ***1.3 Significance and Scope of the Study***

The current study's findings will be beneficial with wider implications at the school level by addressing learning poverty and issues of inequitable access to socio-emotional support, equitable education, and the development of social-emotional and life skills, creating awareness of health rights among children, all while aligning with the global education development goal (SDG 4: Quality Education, Target 4.7). Additionally, the study will guide policymakers, teachers, and project administrators on improving educational quality and reducing dropout rates, particularly among individuals from lower socio-economic backgrounds. This quantitative study allows a comparative analysis to identify the current

status, relationships, and provides recommendations; through this, the study emphasizes potential disparities in SEL implementation across socioeconomic and demographic settings. This study further contributes to augmenting socio-emotional learning, enhancing the comprehensive standard of education, and student achievement.

## **2. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE**

In the context of maintaining emotional well-being among individuals and groups of people, SEL has received much recognition in vast spheres encompassing many areas of society. SEL, as applied to students in educational establishments, has been directly linked to core concepts of holistic education by many authors and scholars. Hence, the current educational systems are focusing more on the holistic development of a child by incorporating SEL practices, as it supports emotional, cognitive, and behavioral growth in addition to academic performance. Social-emotional learning is the process through which students learn new skills and attitudes that help them make better decisions and develop good relationships (Gehlbach & Chuter, 2020). Gimbert et al. (2023) also believe that SEL is a developmental process that provides the necessary skills for the overall success of individuals. It especially focuses on teaching young children empathy and the importance of healthy relationships and moral decisions (Goodman, 2021).

The current study is rooted in the CASEL model, an abbreviation for the ‘Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning, established in 1994 by Daniel Goleman and his colleagues as a nonprofit organization to promote SEL integration in conventional educational environments (Laurens et al., 2022). This model explains that SEL is a process through which individuals regulate their own emotions to make responsible decisions in their lives (Jones & Doolittle, 2017) and build healthy relationships (Wigelsworth et al., 2022). Furthermore, a study elaborated on the effectiveness of the CASEL model in schools and highlighted that it promotes and supports the integration of SEL in schools and communities (Mahoney et al., 2021). The effective utilization of evidence-based SEL approaches creates enrichment in the environment, ultimately benefiting the holistic development of students, as outlined in the CASEL model (Lawson et al., 2019). The CASEL framework is based on five competencies, including self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. These competencies serve as a foundational pillar for effective SEL practices in educational settings (Richerme, 2022). These competencies are personal necessities for mental and emotional growth through which students navigate academic, social, and emotional challenges, as highlighted by Coskun (2019). Each of the five competencies is detailed as follows.

### ***2.1 Self-Awareness***

Self-aware individuals possess the ability to gauge their emotions, thoughts, and values and be informed of the effects of each. Borowski (2019) explained that self-awareness requires one to realize their strengths and weaknesses with confidence and optimism. Developing self-awareness in young students means helping them identify, understand, and accept feelings such as happiness, sadness, anger, or frustration, as well as the reasons they feel everything they feel (Jones & Doolittle, 2017).

### ***2.2 Self-Management***

Self-management refers to the ability to regulate one’s own emotions, thoughts, beliefs, and behaviors in different situations and to make an effort toward personal and academic goals (Gehlbach & Chuter, 2020). This competency of the CASEL framework includes handling stress, motivating oneself, controlling impulses, and sustaining persistence and focus, as mentioned by Crawford (2022). For primary school children, this competency involves calming down after becoming stressed, staying focused on a challenging activity, or resisting the urge to interrupt or disturb others (Durlak et al., 2022).

### ***2.3 Social Awareness***

According to Cefai and Cavioni (2013), social awareness is the ability to adopt the perspectives of others. It is directly related to having an understanding and empathetic personality. A significant part of social awareness is having the acumen and knowledge to understand the circumstances and social standing of people from diverse backgrounds and demographics. An understanding of social norms from outside of one's own circle helps to feel and express empathy for others. Sensing other people's feelings and respecting their opinions, experiences, and values is crucial to self-awareness, as described by Coskun (2019).

### ***2.4 Relationship Skills***

Relationship skills, the fourth competency of the CASEL framework, entail the character traits that ease the process of initiating and maintaining relationships with people belonging to diverse backgrounds (Gresham et al., 2020). Some of these skills are effective communication, active listening, resisting social pressures, and being open about giving or asking for help (Cipriano et al., 2023). Relationship skills in a primary school may be observed in their practices of kindness, supporting peers, contributing to group projects, and resolving conflicts healthily (Durlak et al., 2022). Ahmed et al. (2020) highlighted the importance of infusing pupils with strong relationship skills to develop a trusting classroom atmosphere, one of the prime objectives of any SEL initiative.

### ***2.5 Responsible Decision-Making***

Decision-making is the fifth and final competency in the CASEL framework. The CASEL model focuses on making constructive, caring, and ethical choices in personal and social situations. The immediate goal is not to take the most utilitarian, resource-considerate, or productive course of action, but to interact healthily with people in a variety of settings without damaging their dignity, sense of belonging, and one's relationship with them (Foster et al., 2022; Van Huynh et al., 2023). For primary school students, responsible decision-making involves not cheating on exams, telling the truth, choosing to include someone who is being excluded from the team, and sharing your favorite items with others (Coskun, 2019). These decision-making skills and responsibilities help children become ethical, thoughtful, and contributing members of their societies. Thus, the CASEL framework helps students, educators, schools, and communities implement SEL through integrated classroom instruction, school-wide practices, and fosters partnerships between family and community in school.

### ***2.6 Developmental Significance of SEL in Primary School Years***

Wigelsworth et al. (2022) highlighted that the primary years of schooling are a critical window for children's social and emotional development. Children begin to understand their own and others' emotions more intensely, develop empathy, and navigate increasingly complex social interactions during early to middle childhood (Dusenbury & Weissberg, 2017). Miyamoto et al. (2015) mentioned that these early experiences of children's lives significantly shape their long-term emotional regulation capabilities, relational abilities, and mental health competencies or outcomes.

Literature emphasizes that early mastery of SEL abilities is predictive of later life outcomes (Beatty & Campbell-Evans, 2020; Gehlbach & Chuter, 2020), including prosocial behavior, academic achievement, and reduced behavioral complications (Mundy et al., 2017; Van Huynh, 2023). At this point, children are mostly receptive to the modeling and strengthening of social-emotional capabilities by adults in their school setting (McNally et al., 2019). Similarly, Ahmed et al. (2020) highlighted that various interactions together influence how children form their sense of identity, emotional well-being, and belonging, such as teacher-student interactions, peer interactions, and classroom routines. A study by Mondy et al. (2021) shows that introducing SEL initiatives during early childhood can strengthen the adaptive function of a child and reduce problematic behaviors. It can also improve their attention span and cooperation. By implementing SEL in the early school years, children tend to be more self-sufficient, resilient, and keen to

acquire knowledge (Crawford, 2022); these traits benefit a child well into adulthood (Rehman et al., 2023; Wigelsworth et al., 2022).

### 3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This quantitative study employs a cross-sectional study design to examine the current state of SEL and relationships between its core competencies among primary school students. With the help of a correlational approach, this research design enables the statistical analysis of relationships between variables.

#### 3.1 Population of the Study

The target population for the current study consisted of all students from public primary schools in Karachi West, specifically those in classes IV and V. The reason for selecting Class IV and V students was that they can express their thoughts easily. According to the School Education and Literacy Department of the Sindh Government (2024-2025 data), there are 16 functional public primary schools in the Karachi West region, with a total enrolled student population of 3426, at the time of data collection. With the help of the Krejcie and Morgan Table, the sample size was determined to consider the need for gender-balanced insights for students. According to the Krejcie and Morgan Table, if the total population is 1200, then the sample size should be 291, which was rounded to 302 by the researcher for the proportional estimation of students. Thus, with the help of proportionate stratified random sampling (25%), the sample size was determined, as highlighted in Table 1.

Table 1: *Study Sample*

Schools Name	Gender	Students enroll Class IV	Students' sample Class IV (25%)	Students enroll Class V	Student Sample Class V (25%)	Total sample
GBPS Iqbal Nagar	Boys	2	1	3	1	4
	Girls	4	1	2	1	
GBPS Bachal Brohi	Boys	13	3	6	2	10
	Girls	13	3	6	2	
GBPS Khyber Muslim No.2	Boys	34	9	22	6	16
	Girls	0	0	3	1	
GBPS Subhani	Boys	18	5	10	3	11
	Girls	12	3	0	0	
GBPS No.2 Sector 10	Boys	26	7	26	7	28
	Girls	31	8	23	6	
GBPS Eastern Public	Boys	17	4	7	2	14
	Girls	11	3	20	5	
GBPS Orangi Public	Boys	27	7	25	6	27
	Girls	30	8	25	6	
GBPS Bismillah	Boys	20	5	23	6	17
	Girls	17	4	9	2	
GBPS Shams	Boys	10	3	93	23	49
	Girls	11	3	80	20	
GBPS OLIYA Meraj	Boys	19	5	22	6	23
	Girls	26	7	18	5	
GBPS Madina	Boys	12	3	10	3	13
	Girls	15	4	11	3	
GGPS J/M Hanifia	Boys	8	2	7	2	12
	Girls	16	4	17	4	
GBPS No.2 Khudkar	Boys	14	4	15	4	23

	Girls	29	7	33	8	
GBPS Darul Islam	Boys	10	3	10	3	12
	Girls	10	3	10	3	
GBPS Pak Medico	Boys	17	4	21	5	18
	Girls	21	5	14	4	
GBPS Noor ul Islam	Boys	22	6	25	6	25
	Girls	26	7	23	6	
<b>Total</b>		<b>515</b>	<b>141</b>	<b>649</b>	<b>161</b>	<b>302</b>

### 3.2 Research Instrument

For this study, the ‘Panorama Social-Emotional Learning Survey’ for Grades 3–5 was used, which is freely available on the internet from Panorama Education for researchers to measure SEL competencies across students (grades 3–12), including self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. The reliability of the tool observed in the current study was .709 on Cronbach’s Alpha.

The researcher collected data herself by filling out the questionnaire on-site at the school. Further, the researcher strictly followed the ethical guidelines, obtained assent from students, and ensured their data privacy and confidentiality.

## 4. FINDINGS

Table 2 highlights the descriptive statistics of the first competency of the SEL named self-awareness, which has 9 items in the questionnaire. The majority of the participants (44.3%) somewhat agreed with the statements, whereas 37% of the participants agreed (32.5% agreed, 4.5% strongly agreed), and 18.5% disagreed with the statements. The overall mean score was observed for self-awareness,  $M = 3.18$  and  $SD = .579$ . However, within the statements, the highest mean score was observed for item 4, stating, ‘how much can you increase how smart you are?’  $M = 3.92$  ( $SD = .672$ ). The lowest mean score was observed for item 7, stating, ‘How sure are you that you can learn all the subjects taught in your classes?’  $M = 2.87$  ( $SD = 1.055$ ).

Table 2: *Descriptive Statistics of Self-Awareness*

SELF-AWARENESS	Not at all	A little	Somewhat	A lot	Tremendous amount	M	SD
1. Can you improve your behavior in your school?	0	31 (10.3%)	94 (31.1%)	147 (48.7%)	30 (9.9%)	3.58	.806
2. Can you increase the effort you put into your school?	10 (3.3%)	50 (16.6%)	142 (47%)	90 (29.8%)	10 (3.3%)	3.13	.845
3. Do you ask your teacher to correct your mistakes that you make in your schoolwork?	10 (3.3%)	50 (16.6%)	164 (54.3%)	68 (22.5%)	10 (3.3%)	3.06	.809
4. How much can you increase how smart you are?	0	10 (3.3%)	51 (16.9%)	194 (64.2%)	47 (15.6%)	3.92	.672
5. Can you complete all the schoolwork that is given to you in school?	21 (7%)	42 (13.9%)	151 (50%)	78 (25.8%)	10 (3.3%)	3.05	.899
6. Can you do the hardest schoolwork that is given to you?	11 (3.6%)	31 (10.3%)	208 (68.9%)	52 (17.2%)	0	3.00	.650
7. Are you sure that you can learn all the subjects that are taught in class?	43 (14.2%)	53 (17.5%)	112 (37.1%)	87 (28.8%)	7 (2.3%)	2.87	1.055

8. Are you sure that you will remember what you learned in your current classes till next year?	11 (3.6%)	41 (13.6%)	154 (51%)	89 (29.5%)	7 (2.3%)	3.13	.808
9. When teachers discuss complicated ideas in class, are you sure that you understand them?	11 (3.6%)	85 (28.1%)	128 (42.4%)	78 (25.8%)	0	2.90	.824
Total	117 (4.3%)	393 (14.5%)	1204 (44.3%)	883 (32.5%)	121 (4.5%)	3.18	.579

Table 3 highlights descriptive statistics of the ‘self-management’, a second competency of SEL, based on 16 items in the questionnaire, ranging from 10 to 25. The majority of the participants (41%) somewhat agreed with the statements, whereas 40.8% of the participants agreed (36.8% agreed, 4% strongly agreed), and 18.2% disagreed with the statements. The overall mean score was observed for self-management,  $M = 3.241$ .

Table 3: *Descriptive Statistics of Self-Management*

<b>SELF-MANAGEMENT</b>	<b>Not at all</b>	<b>A little</b>	<b>Somewhat</b>	<b>A lot</b>	<b>Tremendous amount</b>	<b>M</b>	<b>SD</b>
10. Do you get your work done, even when you don't want to do it?	21 (7%)	83 (27.5%)	118 (39.1%)	70 (23.2%)	10 (3.3%)	2.88	.952
11. If you fail at something important to you, do you try it again?	11 (3.6%)	32 (10.6%)	98 (32.5%)	151 (50%)	10 (3.3%)	3.39	.858
12. Can you keep working to reach your goals if problems come up again?	0	42 (13.9%)	112 (37.1%)	148 (49%)	0	3.35	.712
13. When you are working on something important and there are some distractions, can you stay focused?	11 (3.6%)	50 (16.6%)	169 (56%)	72 (23.8%)	0	3.00	.743
14. How hard do you work to keep your promises, even if it is hard to keep?	22 (7.3%)	32 (10.6%)	218 (72.2%)	20 (6.6%)	10 (3.3%)	2.88	.764
15. Are you able to pull yourself out of a bad mood?	11 (3.6%)	83 (27.5%)	90 (29.8%)	118 (39.1%)	0	3.04	.901
16. When you are upset, how do you stop to think before acting?	0	52 (17.2%)	201 (66.6%)	49 (16.2%)	0	2.99	.579
17. Are you able to control your emotions when you want to?	11 (3.6%)	59 (19.5%)	154 (51%)	68 (22.5%)	10 (3.3%)	3.02	.837
18. When you get upset, how often can you get yourself to relax?	10 (3.3%)	124 (41.1%)	142 (47%)	26 (8.6%)	0	2.61	.691
19. When things go wrong, are you able to stay calm in that?	0	33 (10.9%)	112 (37.1%)	147 (48.7%)	10 (3.3%)	3.44	.730
20. Do you come to your class with preparation?	0	20 (6.6%)	81 (26.8%)	190 (62.9%)	11 (3.6%)	3.64	.662
21. Do you follow directions in your classroom?	0	0	52 (17.2%)	223 (73.8%)	27 (8.9%)	3.92	.506
22. Do you get your work done on time, without waiting last minute?	0	20 (6.6%)	95 (31.5%)	151 (50%)	36 (11.9%)	3.67	.770

23. Do you pay attention and resist distractions?	0	61 (20.2%)	114 (37.7%)	127 (42.1%)	0	3.22	.759
24. When you work independently, do you stay focused?	0	29 (9.6%)	78 (25.8%)	133 (44%)	62 (20.5)	3.75	.889
25. Do you allow others to speak without interruption?	11 (3.6%)	49 (16.2%)	164 (54.3%)	68 (22.5%)	10 (3.3%)	3.06	.815
Total	118 (2.4%)	769 (15.8%)	1998 (41%)	1791 (36.8%)	196 (4%)	3.241	.3556

Table 4 reports the third competency of SEL, named ‘social awareness’, which includes 11 items (items 10 to 25). The majority of the participants (51.9%) agreed with the statements; among them, 42.2% agreed and 9.7% strongly agreed. Whereas 28.7% of the participants disagreed, and 19.2% somewhat agreed with the statements. The overall mean score was observed for social awareness competency, 3.3019 (SD = .1848).

Table 4: *Descriptive Statistics of Social Awareness*

<b>SOCIAL-AWARENESS</b>	<b>Not at all</b>	<b>A little</b>	<b>Somewhat</b>	<b>A lot</b>	<b>A tremendous amount</b>	<b>M</b>	<b>SD</b>
26. Do you listen carefully to other people's opinions?	0	10 (3.3%)	30 (9.9%)	203 (67.2%)	59 (19.5%)	4.03	.654
27. Do you care about other people's feelings?	0	0	32 (10.6%)	195 (64.6%)	75 (24.8%)	4.14	.579
28. Do you compliment others' accomplishments?	0	91 (30.1%)	133 (44%)	78 (25.8%)	0	2.96	.748
29. Do you get along with students who are different from you?	0	108 (35.8%)	73 (24.2%)	121 (40.1%)	0	3.04	.871
30. Are you able to describe your feelings?	0	110 (36.4%)	40 (13.2%)	132 (43.7%)	20 (6.6%)	3.21	1.014
31. How respectful are you of other people's opinions when they don't agree with you?	9 (3%)	111 (36.8%)	30 (9.9%)	122 (40.4%)	30 (9.9%)	3.18	1.123
32. Are you able to stand up for yourself without putting others down?	60 (19.9%)	120 (39.7%)	30 (9.9%)	72 (23.8%)	20 (6.6%)	2.58	1.233
33. Are you able to disagree with others without starting an argument?	10 (3.3%)	105 (34.8%)	73 (24.2%)	104 (34.4%)	10 (3.3%)	3.00	.980
34. Do you try to understand how other students feel?	10 (3.3%)	94 (31.1%)	76 (25.2%)	102 (33.8%)	20 (6.6%)	3.09	1.020
35. Do you notice when a classmate needs help?	10 (3.3%)	41 (13.6%)	30 (9.9%)	160 (53%)	61 (20.2%)	3.73	1.036
36. Do students respect each other at your school?	10 (3.3%)	48 (15.9%)	93 (30.8%)	122 (40.4%)	29 (9.6%)	3.37	.972
Total	119 (3.6%)	838 (25.1%)	640 (19.2%)	1411 (42.2%)	324 (9.7%)	3.3019	.1848

Table 5 reports the fourth competency of SEL named ‘relationship skills’, which includes 9 items (items 37 to 45). These items relate to peer support, teacher-student reliance and trust, collaboration, and emotional connection with friends and adults. The majority of the participants (49.5%) agreed with the statements; among them, 42.9% agreed and 6.6% strongly agreed. The overall mean score was observed for social awareness competency, M = 3.1623 and SD = .45741.

Table 5: *Descriptive Statistics of Relationship Skills*

<b>RELATIONSHIP-SKILLS</b>	<b>Not at all</b>	<b>A little</b>	<b>Somewhat</b>	<b>A lot</b>	<b>Tremendous amount</b>	<b>M</b>	<b>SD</b>
37. Are your teachers respectful towards you?	11 (3.6%)	93 (30.8%)	61 (20.2%)	117 (38.7%)	20 (6.6%)	3.14	1.044
38. When you came into class with an upset mood, did your teacher show concern for you?	27 (8.9%)	142 (47%)	33 (10.9%)	91 (30.1%)	9 (3%)	2.71	1.081
39. When your teachers ask, “How are you?”, do you feel they want to know your answer?	0	19 (6.3%)	9 (3%)	233 (77.2%)	41 (13.6%)	3.98	.647
40. How excited would you be if you could have your same teachers in the next grade, too?	42 (13.9%)	51 (16.9%)	51 (16.9%)	139 (46%)	19 (6.3%)	3.14	1.193
41. Have you ever had a teacher or other adult from school whom you can count on to help you, no matter what?	36 (11.9%)	134 (44.4%)	82 (27.2%)	50 (16.6%)	0	2.48	.907
42. Have you ever had a family member or other outside of school who you can count on to help you, no matter what?	38 (12.6%)	133 (44%)	60 (19.9%)	71 (23.5%)	0	2.54	.987
43. Have you ever had a friend from school whom you can count on to help you, no matter what?	20 (6.6%)	61 (20.2%)	21 (7%)	180 (59.6%)	20 (6.6%)	3.39	1.085
44. How often do you help others in your class?	10 (3.3%)	40 (13.2%)	93 (30.8%)	109 (36.1%)	50 (16.6%)	3.49	1.024
45. How well do you work with others when doing group activities?	10 (3.3%)	22 (7.3%)	74 (24.5%)	176 (58.3%)	20 (6.6%)	3.58	.851
Total	194 (7.1%)	695 (25.6%)	484 (17.8%)	1166 (42.9%)	179 (6.6%)	3.1623	.45741

Table 6 reports the last competency of SEL, ‘responsible decision-making’, which includes problem-solving, self-checking, decision-making, planning, and reflecting on consequences, covering 9 items in the questionnaire from 46 to 54. The majority of the participants (37.2%) agreed, and 28.3% somewhat agreed with the statements. However, 34.5% of the participants disagreed with the statements. The overall mean score for responsible decision-making competency was  $M = 3.01$  and  $SD = .337$ .

Table 6: *Descriptive Statistics of Responsible Decision-Making*

<b>RESPONSIBLE DECISION-MAKING</b>	<b>Not at all</b>	<b>A little</b>	<b>Somewhat</b>	<b>A lot</b>	<b>Tremendous amount</b>	<b>M</b>	<b>SD</b>
46. When you stuck in learning something new, will you try to learn it differently?	0	62 (20.5%)	80 (26.5%)	150 (49.7%)	10 (3.3%)	3.36	.842
47. Are you sure that you can figure out a good way to get your schoolwork done well?	0	52 (17.2%)	69 (22.8%)	161 (53.3%)	20 (6.6%)	3.49	.854
48. Before you start on a challenging project, do you think about the best way to do it?	22 (7.3%)	54 (17.9%)	98 (32.5%)	108 (35.8%)	20 (6.65%)	3.17	1.034

49. Are you good at figuring out how to learn new things?	11 (3.6%)	73 (24.2%)	61 (20.2%)	127 (42.1)	30 (9.9%)	3.30	1.056
50. Do you think about the consequences before making a choice?	21 (7%)	126 (41.7%)	69 (22.8%)	76 (25.2%)	10 (3.3%)	2.76	1.013
51. Are you good at thinking of ways to solve problems?	10 (3.3%)	101 (33.4%)	90 (29.8%)	101 (33.4%)	0	2.93	.894
52. Do you check your work to see if it's right?	11 (3.6%)	92 (30.5%)	88 (29.1%)	111 (36.8%)	0	2.99	.906
53. Can you figure out what to do next when something goes wrong?	32 (10.6%)	110 (36.4%)	102 (33.8%)	58 (19.2%)	0	2.62	.914
54. Before making a choice, do you think about how it might affect others?	21 (7%)	140 (46.4%)	111 (36.8%)	30 (9.9%)	0	2.50	.768
Total	128 (4.7%)	810 (29.8%)	768 (28.3%)	922 (33.9%)	90 (3.3%)	3.0132	.33717

#### 4.1 Research Question 1

##### What is the current status of Social and Emotional Learning in primary schools of Karachi?

**Research Hypothesis H<sub>1</sub>:** The current status of Social and Emotional Learning differs in the primary schools of Karachi.

**Null Hypothesis H<sub>0</sub>:** The current status of Social and Emotional Learning does not differ in the primary schools of Karachi.

Table 7 reports the one-sample t-test to determine whether the mean scores of SEL competencies differed significantly from a test value of 3 on a 5-point Likert scale. This analysis consisted of six components of SEL based on a sample (N = 302) of primary school students in Karachi, Pakistan. The results reveal that the overall status of SEL in primary schools of Karachi is significantly above average,  $t(301) = 12.86$ , with a mean difference of 0.18, and a moderate effect size,  $d = 0.740$ . The findings indicate that the overall status of SEL is significantly above average, particularly in social awareness as  $t(301) = 28.39$ , with a mean difference of 0.30, effect size was large,  $d = 1.634$ , and in self-management  $t(301) = 11.81$ , with a mean difference of 0.24, effect size was moderate to large,  $d = 0.680$ . However, self-awareness was found to be significantly higher than the test value,  $t(301) = 5.50$ , with a mean difference of 0.18. The effect size was small to moderate,  $d = 0.316$ , and relationship skills were also significantly above the test value,  $t(301) = 6.16$ , mean difference = 0.16, small to moderate effect size,  $d = 0.355$ . Whereas, responsible decision-making did not show a significant difference from the neutral benchmark, as the test value  $t(301) = 0.68$ ,  $p = .495$ , mean difference = 0.01, effect size was negligible,  $d = 0.039$ , suggesting this domain may require more targeted support and development in the school context. Thus, the research hypothesis is accepted that the current status of SEL differs in the primary schools of Karachi.

Table 7: One Sample t-test for SEL and Its Competencies

One-Sample Statistics	N	M	SD	Std. Error Mean
Self-Awareness	302	3.18	.579	.033
Self-Management	302	3.2417	.35565	.02047
Social Awareness	302	3.3019	.18480	.01063
Relationship Skills	302	3.1623	.45741	.02632
Responsible Decision-Making	302	3.0132	.33717	.01940
SEL	302	3.1805	.24382	.01403

One-Sample Test (Test Value = 3)	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower	Upper
Self-Awareness	5.499	301	.000	.183	.12	.25
Self-Management	11.811	301	.000	.24172	.2014	.2820
Social Awareness	28.392	301	.000	.30193	.2810	.3229
Relationship Skills	6.164	301	.000	.16225	.1105	.2140
Decision-Making	.683	301	.495	.01325	-.0249	.0514
SEL	12.863	301	.000	.18047	.1529	.2081

One-Sample Effect Sizes		Standardizer <sup>a</sup>	Point Estimate	95% Confidence Interval	
				Lower	Upper
Self-Awareness	Cohen's d	.579	.316	.201	.432
	Hedges' correction	.580	.316	.200	.431
Self-Management	Cohen's d	.35565	.680	.554	.804
	Hedges' correction	.35654	.678	.553	.802
Social Awareness	Cohen's d	.18480	1.634	1.461	1.806
	Hedges' correction	.18526	1.630	1.457	1.801
Relationship Skills	Cohen's d	.45741	.355	.238	.471
	Hedges' correction	.45855	.354	.238	.470
Responsible	Cohen's d	.33717	.039	-.074	.152
Decision-Making	Hedges' correction	.33801	.039	-.073	.152
SEL	Cohen's d	.24382	.740	.612	.867
	Hedges' correction	.24442	.738	.611	.865

a. Denominator used in estimating the effect sizes

Cohen's d and Hedges' correction use sample SD, but Hedges' correction uses a correction factor too.

## 4.2 Research Question 2

**Is there a significant relationship between self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making?**

**Research Hypothesis H<sub>2</sub>:** A significant relationship exists between self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making.

**Null Hypothesis H<sub>0</sub>:** There is no significant relationship between self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making.

Table 8 highlights the correlation analysis among the competencies of SEL, such as self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. The results reveal that a strong positive correlation was found between self-awareness and self-management ( $r = .865$ ). Furthermore, self-awareness shows a moderate positive correlation with responsible decision-making ( $r = .469$ ), and a weak negative correlation with social awareness ( $r = -.158$ ). Whereas, a weak positive correlation was observed between self-awareness and relationship skills ( $r = .113$ ). Meanwhile, a weak correlation was found between self-management and social awareness ( $r = -.191$ ), social awareness and relationship skills ( $r = .116$ ), and social awareness and responsible decision-making ( $r = .275$ ). Similarly, a moderate positive correlation was found between self-management and responsible decision-making ( $r = .320$ ). However, no significant correlation was found between self-management and relationship skills ( $r = -.082$ ,  $p = .156$ ), and relationship skills and responsible decision-making ( $r = .073$ ,  $p = .204$ ). Thus, the research hypothesis is partially accepted that A significant relationship exists between self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making

Table 8: *Correlation Analysis Between Competencies*

	1	2	3	4	5
Self-Awareness	1				
Self-Management	.865**	1			
Social-Awareness	-.158**	-.191**	1		
Relationship Skills	.113*	-.082	.116*	1	
Responsible Decision-Making	.469**	.320**	.275**	.073	1

\*\* . Significant correlation is at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

\* . Significant correlation is at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

## 5. DISCUSSION

The study supports the idea that schools can teach SEL competencies. Through SEL competencies, such as self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making, students can improve their social and personal lives.

### 5.1 *The Current Status of SEL in Primary Schools*

This study reports a significantly higher SEL status at most schools in Karachi. The students demonstrated particular proficiency in two SEL domains: social awareness and self-management. Conversely, school authorities need to focus more on responsible decision-making, which showed average values. Thus, this establishes an important correlation between SEL and the holistic development of a student. These deductions are consistent with those in previous literature on SEL. Two key studies, Van Pham (2024) and Wigelsworth et al. (2022), also confirm the role of SEL in producing positive lifelong effects when incorporated into one’s primary education.

Students' academic success and mental health depend upon essential life skills like emotional regulation, empathy, and responsible decision-making. SEL develops and integrates these skills in their lives. It has been stated in multiple previous studies that the five core competencies of SEL are necessary for the holistic development and long-term success of students. These competencies not only help them manage their emotions and show empathy but also sharpen their decision-making skills, which improves their social and personal relationships (CASEL, 2023). Many studies have shown a direct correlation between SEL interventions and a person's behavior. A study by Durlak et al. (2011) demonstrated that SEL programs made students more socially and academically adept in the long run. Taylor et al. (2017) also supported this idea by proving that students continued to show improved social behaviors and reduced stress levels even years after program completion.

When primary schools implement structured SEL programs, they see a tremendous impact on the overall school climate. This includes improved classroom engagement, social conduct, peer relationships, and more. However, the trends seen in low- and middle-income countries seem to differ. The proper, consistent implementation of such programs becomes difficult not only due to a general lack of resources and awareness but also the absence of policy frameworks at a national level (CASEL, 2023; UNESCO, 2021). This is especially the case in Pakistan. Over time, multiple educators and policymakers have come to realize the importance of SEL programs and are aiming to bring about a change.

### 5.2 *Relationship Between SEL Competencies*

It is believed that all five SEL competencies are interlinked. While that is true, this study shows that relationship skills are the only competency that can be developed independently during specific developmental stages of a young student and is the least correlated with self-regulation and responsible decision-making. Findings also explain that although the competencies are generally interrelated, limited or inconsistent implementation can weaken their correlation. It is proposed that the independent development of the relationship skills domain in primary students may be because social interactions do

not usually affect their way of regulating emotions or making decisions. Similarly, it can also be attributed to the peer dynamic and social context rather than a student's way of handling emotions.

The five competencies of SEL are interlinked and tend to influence one another, despite the slight variation as highlighted by CASEL (2023). For example, self-management, the ability to regulate one's emotions, depends on self-awareness, the ability to comprehend one's emotions. Similarly, researchers Cipriano et al. (2023) further elaborated the significant relationship between intrapersonal and interpersonal competencies by pointing out that individuals with higher levels of self-awareness are better at emotional regulation and constructive problem-solving skills.

The interconnectedness of these five competencies is further emphasized by peer dynamics and classroom behaviors. Social awareness and good relationship skills require students to be better able to regulate their emotions and remain self-aware. In order to understand another person and negotiate solutions, students must self-reflect or monitor their emotions. They need to demonstrate empathic behavior and exhibit the communication skills necessary for individuals to develop relationships. Multiple studies have shown a cascading effect on SEL skills. One longitudinal study showed that when students improved in self-management, their empathy levels and problem resolution skills also improved dramatically (Domitrovich et al., 2022; Rehman & Sajjad, 2024; Sajjad et al., 2019). This shows that when a person improves in one SEL domain, they tend to improve in others as well. Therefore, to bring about the most positive outcomes, SEL programs should be incorporated holistically and not as individual modules.

## **6. CONCLUSION**

SEL has emerged as a fundamental aspect of holistic education, as per all available literature. It equips students with essential life skills that help them excel in life within and outside of school. These students show higher-than-average levels of self-awareness, empathy, responsible decision-making, and emotional regulation. Through SEL, we can shape students' emotional well-being, critical thinking, and interpersonal relationships for a better life. These outcomes are observed only when SEL is effectively incorporated into the curriculum as a core component and not as an auxiliary support. When capitalized on, SEL can help students, teachers, and the entire educational community because of its innate ability to foster an inclusive, respectful, and emotionally safe environment. Despite the proven benefits, multiple barriers hinder the consistent application of SEL. These issues are present throughout the educational system, and so changes need to be implemented on every level, and not just in classroom settings. The issues present at the forefront include high academic pressure on students, teacher burnout due to excessive workload, gender disparity, and school environment. However, these issues are a result of underlying systemic barriers. Underlying issues, like a lack of resources, funds, and teacher training, along with inadequate feedback systems and insufficient knowledge about SEL programs, only complicate the delivery of SEL. Eradication of these barriers requires a systemic shift that values emotional development just as much as academic performance.

## **7. RECOMMENDATIONS**

Teachers play a pivotal role in the SEL programs; thus, teacher capacity and support systems need to be refined for even better results. In Pakistan, teacher training lacks inclusivity, emotional literacy, and trauma-informed approaches. To improve the current standard of teacher training, SEL modules and practical strategies must be incorporated in future pre-service and in-service teacher education programs. Teachers working in the public sector in rural areas require more focused developmental workshops and peer-learning communities. They should also be provided emotional and logistical support from the school to prevent burnout so they can better model healthy emotional behaviors. Other than that, NGOs and other concerned local organizations can contribute to this cause by facilitating community-based trainings, awareness programs, and co-designing culturally appropriate SEL programs.

More longitudinal studies need to be carried out to get a better understanding of the specific ways SEL competencies develop that influence the long-term academic and social outcomes of the students.

Documenting SEL effects across different grades over a period is bound to offer much valuable insight into SEL sustainability and long-term impact. Since quantitative analysis alone cannot provide a complete picture, qualitative or mixed-methods approaches should also be utilized to gain a deeper, contextualized understanding of how SEL is experienced by students, teachers, and school communities.

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