

A Study on the Need for Social Emotional Learning among Adolescents

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Abstract:

Adolescents from disadvantaged backgrounds face several obstacles that impede their social, emotional, and cognitive development (Young & Widom, 2014). They are unable to handle relationships, manage emotions, and have a negative impact on the adolescent's success and later life. This can be addressed through social emotional learning (SEL), which is defined as the process of acquiring core competencies such as recognising and managing emotions, appreciating other perspectives, maintaining positive relationships and making responsible decisions constructively (Elias et al., 1997). The aim of the present study is to examine the need for SEL among adolescents from disadvantaged backgrounds. The study used a cross sectional survey design with a sample of 110 students. A self-developed SEL need assessment checklist was used for data collection. The data was analysed using frequency and percentage. The results of the study demonstrate that 80 percent of the respondents felt a strong need to develop the five core SEL competencies, such as self-awareness, social awareness, relationship skills, self-management, and responsible decision-making skills. In addition, study examined social and emotional skills that adolescents require for success in school and prosper as perceived by students. The findings of the study demonstrate the SEL program's potential benefit as well as the need to make SEL mandatory in all schools.

Key words: Social and emotional learning, disadvantaged backgrounds, adolescents

1. Introduction

A transitional stage of physical and psychological development, adolescence is a period of creativity, exploration, and opportunity. It is the most dynamic stage of individual development where adolescents exhibit increased potential and a strong desire to experiment new things. Adolescence is the time when behavioural and health problems can emerge or intensify, which can have negative consequences in later life (Yeager, 2017). They expect more autonomy and independence to make personal choices that can have an adverse effect on them.

According to UNFPA (2014), the world is home to 1.8 billion children in the age group of 10–24 years, with India accounting for 16 percent of the world youth population. Karnataka, one of the principal states in terms of industries and technology, has 11 million adolescents in the age group of 10 - 19 years. Although the Centre and state governments have come up with many programmes and policies to ensure equitable education and welfare measures for adolescent well-being (Population Council & UNICEF, 2013), the health and educational status of adolescents are not very promising (Yanky, 2011).

There is growing stress and confusion among adolescents, owing to rising expectations from parents and schools that place a greater emphasis on academic accomplishment. As a result, adolescents are unable to deal with failure and maintain healthy relationships with peers and teachers (Fairbrother, 2003). The changes during adolescence (biological) create an intense thrill and a strong desire to try new things, which makes them feel rejected, victimized, and aggressive when they fail. Self-management skills, building positive relationships, strengthening social skills, and forming a self-image are some of the core issues and concerns among adolescents (Prajina & Premsingh, 2014). While adolescents face a variety of obstacles in life, those coming from disadvantaged backgrounds are confronted with a unique set of challenges in addition to typical adolescent concerns.

Children from disadvantaged backgrounds do not enjoy the same benefits as children from middle class backgrounds do, as their parents are unable to support them academically or enrich them to enhance their social and personal development. The term "disadvantaged young person" is defined as one whose potential is limited by the challenges in the environment (Helms et al., 2021). They face several obstacles that impede the development of cognitive, emotional, and social skills (Young & Widom, 2014). These children are likely to exhibit poor disciplinary problems, self-management skills, low self-esteem, and poor cognitive skills. They are unable to handle

relationships and manage conflicts, which affect their overall social and emotional development. This negatively impacts children's academic achievement (Blum & Libbey, 2004) and causes disengagement and failure.

Therefore, education today should be able to make children culturally literate and reflective thinkers as they master academic subjects. To bring in this behavioural transformation in children through education, there is a pressing need to include Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) in schools as it is a "missing piece" in education (Elias et al., 1997).

2.Social and Emotional Learning(SEL):

The positive outcomes of SEL have led to its acceptance in many countries throughout the world. The key focus of SEL is to build essential competencies (social and emotional) in children. SEL is defined as the process of developing core competencies such as the ability to manage emotions, set and achieve goals, appreciate care and concern for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, make responsible decisions, and deal constructively with interpersonal situations (Elias et al., 1997).

The five core competencies of SEL are :

1. Self-awareness is to be aware of one's emotions and thoughts appropriately and the impact of thoughts and emotions on one's behaviour.
2. Self-management is the skill to control one's emotions, feelings, and behaviour in a healthy manner.
3. Social awareness is to know and empathise with people from all backgrounds and cultures, and to recognise the support and resources available from family, school, and the community.
4. Relationship skills equip the children to establish and sustain relationships that are positive and healthy, cooperate, communicate clearly and listen actively.
5. Responsible decision-making equips children to make choices about their own behaviour and interactions by taking into consideration social norms,ethical standards and the safety.

The prime focus of SEL programmes were to provide a safe and enriching learning environment for adolescents and to enhance their social and emotional competencies.This has resulted in both short-term and long-term attitudinal and behavioural benefits for children. The meta-analysis conducted on school-based SEL programmes demonstrated a significant improvement in SEL outcomes in students compared to the control group. The treatment group students showed a significant improvement in six major outcomes such as social and emotional skills, change in attitudes, reduction in conduct, prosocial behaviour, and academic performance (Durlak et al., 2011).

Research studies demonstrate the long-term impact of SEL on school students.The study tried to examine the SEL impact on the math and language skills of children from third through sixth grade. The findings of the study revealed that students from the treatment group had a higher and lasting impact on language and math skills in fourth, fifth, and sixth grade when compared to the control group, (McCormick et al.,2021).

The long and short-term benefits of SEL led to the development of many conceptual frameworks which share many similarities. The present need assessment study is based on the SEL framework by the Collaborative for the Advancement of Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL), which consists of five core competency domains. Before assessing the need for SEL, it is critical to comprehend how the SEL framework aids in the social and emotional development of adolescents. The SEL Framework of CASEL follows a systemic approach which focuses on enhancing social, emotional, and academic learning by integrating SEL into academic curricula and culture, across broader contexts of school practices and policies, which leads to supportive classrooms, an improved school climate where all students and adults are respected and supported, and thus establishing authentic and stronger connections with peer,family, and community. Research evidence shows children coming from disadvantaged families experience challenges and difficulties within their homes, schools, and communities when compared to children from other backgrounds (Frazier et al., 2015, as cited in Helms et al., 2021). As adolescents, they also experience several hormonal and structural changes in the brain, making it harder to deal with life situations and thus experiencing feelings of rejection and isolation (Yeager, 2017). This can result in less stable relationships, conflicts, inability to handle emotions, and inability to make decisions in life. All these show a critical need for the social and emotional development of adolescents. This is possible through SEL, which enhances social and emotional learning and prepares young people to face challenges in school and life ahead.

3.Rationale for the Study

The need for the present study stems from the fact that schools play an important role in the promotion of SEL in children and adolescents. There is a national consensus among parents, teachers, and community members that schools should offer more than academic skills. Many western countries have incorporated SEL into their school curriculum. But the educational system in our country places emphasis on numeracy and literacy skills, and the importance of instilling SEL in schools has been less recognised. There has been limited research on SEL and its benefits for adolescents in India, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds. SEL, which is a main contributor to social emotional development, is lacking among adolescents from all backgrounds (advantaged and disadvantaged). Children studying in affluent schools are guided by their teachers and literate parents who act as strong pillars in their social and emotional development, while children from socially disadvantaged backgrounds are deprived of such benefits. Socially disadvantaged families are characterised by low income, inadequate health care, poor housing, neglect, and malnutrition (Noufina, 2019). Children from disadvantaged families enter school with many deficiencies, such as a lack of confidence, relationship skills, initiative, etc., and conventional schooling is not equipped to address these issues as the teachers are under intense pressure to enhance the students' academic performance. When a child enters school with such a handicap, it results in discouragement, and his deficiencies become accentuated as he reaches adolescence. This issue must be addressed sooner rather than later, which can only be accomplished by promoting SEL programmes in schools.

Therefore, the following research questions were posed to guide this study:

1. Is there a need for SEL among adolescents studying at secondary level from disadvantaged backgrounds?
2. Which are the most important SEL skills as perceived by adolescents?

Therefore, this study tries to examine the SEL needs of adolescents from socially disadvantaged families. This is accomplished using a survey, which has multiple benefits. The benefits of a survey include: (a) it is an effective technique to identify the student's concerns and needs; (b) it is useful to develop small or large interventions on the expressed student needs; and (c) it is useful in developing interventions and trainings (Nicholas, 2002).

4.Objectives of the study:

- 1.To examine the need for SEL as perceived by adolescents studying at secondary level from disadvantaged backgrounds.
2. To Identify the most important social and emotional skills as perceived by adolescents

5.Methodology:

5.1.Research Design:

The aim of the study was to investigate the need for SEL among adolescents studying at a secondary level. For this, the study adopted a cross-sectional survey design. The target population for the present study is students from disadvantaged backgrounds studying at secondary level (9th grade) in low-resourced schools in South Bangalore (Urban). This study was carried out as a part of a larger project. For the study, a list of low-resourced schools with children from disadvantaged backgrounds was chosen based on their willingness to participate. There were ten such schools that met the criteria, and three (3) schools were chosen at random to form the sample for this study. The study used a purposive sampling method. The total sample size was 110 students, or 10% of the total population.

5.2.Measures:

A need assessment checklist was prepared by the researcher to examine the need for SEL among adolescents. Experts validated the checklist, and necessary changes were made based on their recommendations. The assessment checklist consisted of two parts. The first part provides socio demographic details of the students who participated in the study. The second part of the survey checklist consists of 30 items rated using a 5-item Likert scale. The checklist consisted of statements that examined the need for SEL among adolescents. The students were briefed about the study after obtaining consent from school authorities. The data collected was analysed and interpreted accordingly.

6.Results:

Table-1,Socio Demographic Profile of the Respondents

Gender	Distribution		Age(in years)	Distribution	
	Number	Percent		Number	Percent
Male	53	48	13	8	7
			14	69	63
Female	57	52	15	26	24
			16	7	6
Total	110	100	Total	110	100

Table-2,Students’ Perception of the Need for Self-awareness Skills

Self-awareness skills	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Identifying one’s strengths	66.7	24.3	1.8	3.6	3.6
Emotion awareness	34.2	41.4	15.3	5.4	3.6
Value and beliefs	68.5	24.3	6.3		0.9
Self-esteem	73.0	22.5	3.6		0.9
Self-efficacy	53.2	38.7	5.4	1.8	0.9

As shown in Table 2, 60% of students felt a strong need for self-awareness skills, which allow them to identify their strengths, inner resources, and limitations, as well as be aware of their values and beliefs, which boosts self-esteem. 53 percent of students felt a strong need for self-efficacy skills, which would increase their belief in themselves and help them work toward their goals. Of all self-awareness skills, a higher number of students (73 percent) felt a strong need to enhance self-esteem, that is, develop a positive attitude towards oneself and be aware of one’s self-worth. The result shows that 90 percent of the students either strongly agreed or agreed that there is a need for self-awareness skills among adolescents. Approximately 6 percent of students disagreed with the need for self-awareness skills.

Table-3,Students’ Perception of the Need for Self-management Skills

Self-Management skills	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree or disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Emotion Management	41.4	47.7	7.2	0.9	2.7
Controlling impulses	45.0	24.3	21.6	4.5	4.5
Setting goals in life	82.9	13.5	2.7	-	0.9
Stress management	16.2	62.2	14.4	3.6	3.6
Perseverance	45.9	40.5	9.0	0.9	3.6

Table-3 indicates that more than 80 percent of the students either strongly agreed or agreed that they require self-management skills, which include emotion management, setting goals in life, and perseverance. 82 percent of students felt a strong need to learn how to set realistic goals in life (both short-term and long-term). They also felt that, to achieve personal and educational goals in life, they should learn to persevere through challenges. The students felt a need to express emotions appropriately and manage themselves in various situations. Less than 5% of students disagreed with the importance of self-management skills.

Table-4, Students' Perception of the Need for Social-awareness skills

Social awareness skills	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree or disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Empathy	37.8	47.7	9.9	1.8	2.7
Gratitude	50.5	34.2	9.0	4.5	1.8
Respect	83.8	14.4	1.8	-	-
Appreciating diversity	33.3	54.1	10.8	1.8	-

Table-4 demonstrates that 80 percent of the students strongly agreed or agreed that there was a need for skills such as expressing gratitude and recognising the contributions of others, at the same time learning to respect parents, elders, and the environment they live. More than 70 percent of the students felt a need for students to be empathetic and learn to cooperate with their peers and live in harmony. The result shows that more than 80 percent of the students either strongly agreed or agreed that social-awareness skills is needed among adolescents. Less than 5% of students disagreed with the importance of social awareness skills.

Table-5, Students' Perception of the Need for Relationship Skills

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree or disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Communication skills	79.3	11.7	4.5	3.6	0.9
Building positive relationships	78.4	16.7			5.4
Resolving conflicts	30.6	55.9	9.0	1.8	2.7
Collaboration skills	33.3	49.5	11.7	4.5	0.9
Problem solving skills	71.2	24.3	1.8	0.9	1.8
Negotiation skills	23.4	28.8	9.9	7.2	30.6

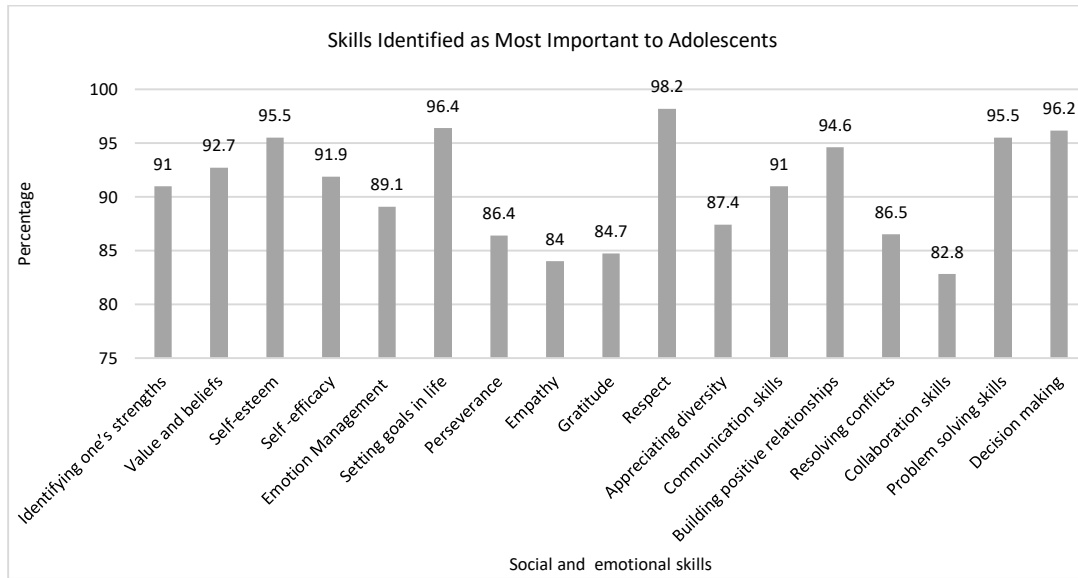
According to Table 5, 86 percent of students felt a strong need for relationship skills such as communication, positive relationship building, and problem-solving abilities. The students felt that these skills helped to create healthy relationships and sustain those relationships with others. Of all the relationship skills, the students had a mixed response to negotiation skills. Only 23.4 percent of students felt strongly that they needed negotiation skills. Less than 5 percent of students disagreed with the need for relationship skills, while 30 percent of students disagreed with the need for negotiation skills.

Table-6, Students' Perception of the Need for Responsible Decision-making Skills

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree or disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Decision making	82.0	16.2	0.9		0.9
Making informed choices	20.7	46.8	16.2	4.5	11.7

As shown in Table-6, 82 percent of students strongly agreed that decision-making skills are necessary. The students felt a need to develop their ability to make responsible decisions considering the well-being of themselves and others. More than 60 percent of the students agreed that making informed choices are very important. 11 percent of the students disagreed that making informed choices is important in life.

Figure-1, Most important SEL Skills as Perceived by the Students:



As Figure-1 shows, a majority of students strongly felt a need for all five core SEL competencies (self-awareness, social awareness, self-management and responsible decision making and relationship skills). More than 80 percent of students considered skills such as identifying one's strengths, values and beliefs, self-efficacy, self-esteem, management of emotions, perseverance, setting goals in life, gratitude, respect, communication, relationship skills, problem solving, and decision-making skills as most important for their social and emotional development. Emotional awareness, impulse control, conflict resolution, and making informed choices were considered less important by the adolescents

7. Discussion:

The present research study examined the need for SEL as perceived by the adolescents studying in low-resourced schools. The study results were analysed based on the two research questions.

1. Is there a need for SEL among adolescents from disadvantaged background?

One of the major findings of the study is that 80 percent of students (strongly agree or agreed) felt a need for SEL skills such as self-awareness, social awareness, relationship skills, responsible decision-making, and self-management skills. The students felt a strong need to build the social and emotional competencies to face obstacles and challenges and be prepared for school and life. The results of the study align with the research conducted by Durlak et al. (2011), which showed the need for school-based SEL interventions among students which led to significant improvement in core social and emotional competencies along with other outcomes such as attitude towards others, prosocial behaviour, conduct problems, and academic performance. The results of the study aligned with another study by Taylor et al., (2017) on the need for SEL among adolescents which led to increased improvement in social and emotional skills, along with other indicators of well-being. Both studies provide sufficient evidence on the benefits of SEL and the need for implementing SEL programmes that can improve the social and emotional competencies of adolescents who feel a strong need for them.

2. Which were the most needed social and emotional skills, as perceived by the adolescents?

The present study examined the social and emotional skills that adolescents considered most important to face the challenges and difficulties of day-to-day living. The following SEL skills were identified as most important by the adolescents.

- Students recognised the need for self-awareness skills such as identifying one's strengths, values and beliefs, self-efficacy, and self-esteem.
- Students consider respect and gratitude to others the most important social awareness skills.
- Emotion management, setting goals in life and perseverance were key self-management skills identified by students.
- Relationship skills deemed extremely important by students were building positive relationships, effective communication, and problem-solving.
- A strong need for responsible decision-making skills was identified by 82 percent of the students.

According to the study's findings, the above-mentioned social and emotional skills were deemed the most important by the adolescents and felt the need to be implemented in schools. The results aligned with the study on need for school based SEL interventions and its positive effect on self-esteem and related outcomes (Silverthorn et al., 2017), improvement in mental health, self-esteem, and self-efficacy (Pannebakker et al., 2019), gains in social emotional competencies such as peer relations and social skills (Raimundo et al., 2013). An experimental study on students studying in middle school showed a need for SEL which led to improvement in social awareness and self-control among those who attended SEL programmes (Coelho, V.A et al., 2016). All these research studies provide sufficient evidence for SEL programme implementation and skill enhancement in adolescents. These research studies demonstrate that SEL skills which were perceived as the most important by the adolescents in the present study could be enhanced through the inclusion and effective implementation of SEL in schools.

8. Educational Implications of the Study:

The findings of the SEL assessment study demonstrate an urgent need for SEL among adolescents from disadvantaged backgrounds. The SEL checklist administered to adolescents showed the need for core SEL skills, such as self-awareness, social awareness, self-management skills, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making skills. Despite the growing interest in SEL and its role as a prime contributor to positive adolescent development, SEL still lags behind in its importance in our country. Our education system has not integrated SEL into the school curriculum. Some affluent schools have introduced SEL as a school-specific programme, and this benefits only a tiny percentage of the population, leaving a vast majority of students from disadvantaged backgrounds deprived of such benefits.

The findings of this study have profound implications for education and practice. The study findings suggest teachers and schools plan, develop, and implement SEL programmes as part of the school curriculum. The core SEL skills identified by adolescents in this study help teachers and school authorities plan SEL interventions for adolescents. Other measures include awareness and training of SEL among teachers and students to bring in a variety of classroom-based approaches; improved teaching practices; safe learning environments; and positive and caring relationships among students and teachers. The present study demonstrates an immediate need to incorporate SEL programmes into the school curriculum and culture, which will further enhance social, emotional, and academic learning; improve school climates; and foster stronger relationships and networks with families and communities so that children from all sections (disadvantaged and advantaged) of society benefit. The study provides enough evidence to make SEL mandatory in all schools so that no child is left behind.

9. Conclusion:

The present study examined adolescents' perspectives on the need for social emotional learning. The study was conducted for students from disadvantaged backgrounds studying at the secondary level in low-resourced schools in South Bangalore. The study involved a total of 110 students from 3 schools. The findings of the study indicated that 80 percent of the students felt there was a strong need to improve their social and emotional competencies, such as self-awareness, social awareness, relationship skills, self-management, and responsible decision-making skills. The study assisted in identifying the social and emotional skills for which the adolescents needed training. They were identifying their strengths, values, and beliefs; self-efficacy and self-esteem; emotion management; stress management; perseverance; goal setting; communication skills; collaboration; building positive

relationships; conflict resolution skills; problem solving skills; empathy; respect; gratitude; and decision making. The study has its limitations in sample size and scope, but it sheds light on the need for social and emotional development of adolescents, which can be initiated by making SEL a part of the curriculum in all schools. This enables all adolescents, regardless of the background they come from, to improve their skills in a safe and enriching environment and thrive.

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