



Core Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) and Relationship Skills in Middle Childhood: A comprehensive Empirical Analysis of the SEED Curriculum

¹Parag Lunawat, ²Dr. Meenakshi Sharma

Department of Psychology, SAM Global University, Bhopal¹

Dr. Meenakshi Sharma, School of Arts, Social Science and Humanities, SAM Global University, Bhopal²

ABSTRACT

Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) has emerged as a fundamental pillar of holistic child development, particularly during the sensitive period of middle childhood. This research investigates the efficacy of the SEED Curriculum—a culturally adapted SEL intervention designed for the Indian educational context. A sample of 100 children (ages 7–11) from urban co-educational schools was assessed using a multi-method approach, including self-reported questionnaires, teacher rating scales, and direct behavioral observations. The study focused on five core CASEL competencies: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. Quantitative analysis via paired-sample t-tests revealed statistically significant improvements across all domains ($p < .001$). Notably, relationship skills exhibited the most substantial growth, with mean scores rising from 3.5 to 4.3. The findings demonstrate that structured SEL interventions effectively bridge the gap between internal emotional regulation and external social success, advocating for the systemic integration of SEL into the primary education framework in India.

Keywords: Social-Emotional Learning, Relationship Skills, SEED Curriculum, Middle Childhood, Emotional Regulation, Child Psychopathology.

1. INTRODUCTION

Core Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) represents the process through which children acquire and effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, and establish and maintain supportive relationships. The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) identifies five interrelated competencies: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. These competencies are not isolated traits but function as an integrated system that supports both academic achievement and lifelong well-being.

Among these competencies, relationship skills stand out as the essential link between personal growth and social success. These skills empower children to communicate effectively, cooperate with peers, resolve conflicts constructively, and develop empathy. Middle childhood, specifically between the ages of 8 and 9, is recognized as a particularly formative



developmental period. During this stage, children move beyond egocentric thinking and begin to solidify their social identity, making it a unique window for impactful intervention.

2. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To assess the existing level of relationship skills among primary school students.
- To evaluate the impact of the SEED Curriculum on core SEL competencies.
- To examine the relationship between emotional regulation strategies and peer interactions.
- To provide empirical evidence for the cultural adaptation of SEL frameworks in the Indian context.

3. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The theoretical framework of SEL is rooted in the five-competency model. Self-awareness involves recognizing one's emotions and values, while self-management focuses on regulating impulses and stress. Social awareness builds empathy and respect for diversity, leading directly into relationship skills—the ability to build healthy connections and resolve disagreements peacefully. Finally, responsible decision-making guides ethical choices that sustain trust within these relationships.

Global empirical evidence suggests that SEL programs improve academic performance by approximately 11 percentile points. Furthermore, these gains persist over time, predicting better employment outcomes and life satisfaction in adulthood. However, much of this research is based in Western contexts. In India, factors such as large class sizes, academic pressure, and a collectivist culture necessitate specific adaptations. The SEED Curriculum was developed to bridge this gap, offering contextually appropriate activities that respect local social nuances while maintaining scientific rigor.

4. METHODOLOGY

4.1 Participants and Sampling

The study involved a sample of 100 participants (50 boys and 50 girls) aged 7 to 11 years. This age range corresponds to middle childhood, a phase characterized by the shift toward stable peer relationships and advanced communication needs. Participants were drawn from urban co-educational schools using convenience sampling, ensuring environmental consistency to minimize variability related to different school systems.

4.2 Research Design and Tools

A descriptive and correlational pre-post test design was adopted. The following tools were utilized:

- Structured Questionnaires: 30 items divided into five sections (12 items dedicated to relationship skills).
- Teacher Rating Scales: 20 items assessing observable classroom behaviors such as teamwork and empathy.
- Direct Observation: Structured checklists used during regular classroom and free-play activities (Cohen's kappa = 0.82).



- Psychometric Scales: The PANAS-SF for emotional affect and the ERQ for cognitive reappraisal and expressive suppression.

4.3 Ethical Considerations

Strict ethical safeguards were maintained. Written informed consent was obtained from parents, and verbal assent was secured from children. All data were anonymized using unique identification codes. Participants were informed of their absolute right to withdraw from the study at any stage without consequence.

5. RESULTS AND FINDINGS

Data analysis was conducted using paired-sample t-tests to compare pre-intervention and post-intervention scores across all SEL domains. The significance level was set at 0.05.

Table 1: Comparative Mean Scores of SEL Domains

SEL Domain	Pre-Test Mean	Post-Test Mean	t-value
Relationship Skills	3.5	4.3	13.67
Social Awareness	3.4	4.1	12.03
Self-Awareness	3.2	3.9	10.85
Self-Management	3.0	3.7	11.42

The analysis confirms statistically significant improvements ($p < .001$) in every competency. Relationship skills showed the most pronounced growth (mean difference = 0.8), suggesting that children are particularly responsive to social interaction exercises. Self-management showed the highest variability ($SD = 0.68$), indicating that individual temperament and home environments play a larger role in emotional regulation.

6. DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The results demonstrate that the SEED Curriculum successfully cultivated children's capacity to understand their feelings and manage social responses constructively. Improved relationship skills were evidenced by better communication, active listening, and peaceful conflict resolution. The study validates the 'Skill Transfer Hypothesis,' showing that internal emotional regulation competencies directly translate to healthier external peer bonds.

6.1 Educational and Clinical Implications

For educators, this study advocates for the mainstreaming of SEL as a foundational component of holistic child development rather than an extracurricular activity. Teachers, with adequate training, can serve as frontline facilitators of emotional growth. Clinically, these findings support the adoption of early preventive intervention models. Building these skills at ages 7–11 acts as a proactive mental health strategy, reducing the long-term risk of anxiety and behavioral disorders.

6.2 Limitations and Future Research

The study is limited by its single-group design, which lacks a control group to rule out maturation effects. Future research should employ longitudinal designs to track the sustainability of these skills into adolescence and explore the role of digital technology in SEL development.



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7. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, Core SEL skills and relationship skills are fundamental to a child's holistic development. The successful implementation of the SEED Curriculum highlights the tangible benefits of culturally sensitive, structured interventions. By nurturing emotionally intelligent and socially responsible citizens, we equip the next generation with the vital life skills necessary to thrive in an increasingly complex and interconnected world.

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