

Research Article

Do Adolescents Know What They Feel? A Study Of Social–Emotional Learning Awareness In Haryana

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A B S T R A C T

As we prepare for the next century, we need to revamp the education system that strengthens emotional stability and prepares the learners to be resilient, compassionate and grounded. The rapid changes in the social, economic, and technological dimensions demand that our schools move beyond academics and embrace a more holistic student development. Studies have established the critical role of social-emotional competencies in fostering well-rounded, mentally healthy, and socially responsible individuals. The National Education Policy 2020 served as a catalyst for mainstreaming Social Emotional Learning (SEL) across Indian schools, though foundational SEL work had been undertaken through initiatives by some states and few NGOs prior to this policy. This study assesses SEL awareness among school-going adolescents in Sonipat district, Haryana. The survey was conducted on a sample of 81 middle school students from grade 6, 7 and 8 studying in the government as well as private schools in using CHISSEL2.0 for data collection. Results indicated moderate to high awareness across SEL domains, with notable gender differences in peer support competencies. Implications for school-based interventions include designing gender responsive classroom activities that strengthen peer relationship skills.

Keywords: Social Emotional Learning, Adolescents, CHISSEL 2.0, SEL Awareness, Social Emotional Development, Social Support, Self Management, Peer Support, Life Skills.

Introduction

Social Emotional Learning (SEL) represents a comprehensive developmental framework encompassing the knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary for individuals to establish healthy identities, regulate emotions, achieve personal and collective goals, demonstrate empathy, nurture supportive relationships, and make responsible decisions¹. According to the CASEL framework, the five interrelated competence areas within SEL include “self-awareness,

self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making”². These competencies are increasingly recognized as essential for academic success, social development, and long-term well-being throughout the lifespan³.

The contemporary educational landscape demonstrates growing recognition of SEL’s significance in child development. A comprehensive meta-analysis examining 82 school-based universal SEL interventions involving 97,406

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K-12 students revealed improvisation in social-emotional skills, attitudes, and indicators of well-being with follow-up post-intervention⁴. Furthermore, scientific evidence substantiates that carefully tested SEL programs improve the well-being, behavior, and academic achievement of children.⁵ Research demonstrates that social-emotional skills, including empathy, self-awareness, and responsible decision-making, are crucial for long-term academic and personal success⁶, with teachers reporting significant improvements in students' emotional regulation, empathy, and classroom behavior⁷.

Early adolescence represents a critical developmental period characterized by substantial neurobiological and psychosocial changes. During this phase, social and emotional competencies can be developed through interventions if applied rightly⁸. Research indicates that while the sensitive period for cognitive skill development occurs earlier in childhood, the window for developing social and emotional skills extends through late childhood and adolescence⁹. Despite this significance, disparities exist in evidence-based SEL program development for middle school students, with 63% of quality programs implemented in elementary settings compared to merely 37% in secondary education¹⁰.

The Indian educational context presents unique challenges and opportunities for SEL implementation. Currently, SEL remains relatively underemphasized in Indian schools due to working parents, nuclear family structure, lack of secured play spaces, combined with pandemic-related disruptions and insufficient educator training.^{11,12} Latest research demonstrates that life skills interventions have been effective in enhancing "school attendance, self-efficacy, resilience, and gender attitudes among Indian adolescents"¹³. UNESCO MGIEP comprehensive review emphasizes that "mainstreaming SEL into education systems contributes to achieving Sustainable Development Goal 4 by preparing learners to develop empathy, compassion, and global solidarity."¹⁴

Relevance of SEL for School Students in the Context of National Policy and Curriculum Frameworks

The integration of SEL into India's educational framework has gained significant policy recognition and institutional support in recent years. The National Education Policy 2020 (NEP 2020) explicitly emphasizes that the education system must aim to "develop good human beings capable of rational thought and action, possessing compassion and empathy," positioning SEL as a cornerstone of holistic child development¹⁵. This policy recognition has been operationalized through the National Curriculum Framework for School Education (NCF-SE) 2023, which integrates SEL competencies including self-awareness,

self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making—across the 5+3+3+4 pedagogical structure spanning ages 3-18. The NCF-SE 2023 mandates that school curricula encompass not only subject content but also values and dispositions essential for developing well-rounded individuals, including empathy, inclusion, ethical reasoning, and citizenship skills¹⁶. At the state level, pioneering initiatives such as Delhi's Happiness Curriculum, launched in 2018 and now implemented across 20,000 government schools through mandatory daily 30-minute SEL classes, demonstrate large-scale commitment to fostering emotional resilience, mindfulness, and social competencies¹⁷. The role of Non Government Organizations in SEL implementation is quite appreciable. Labhya Foundation, an NGO has collaborated with state governments in Delhi for Happiness Curriculum and Uttarakhand for Anandam Pathyacharya curriculum respectively which are culturally adapted SEL programs and serving over 2 million vulnerable children¹⁸. Another NGO, Leadership for Equality (LFE) collaborated with Flame University for the CHISSEL project and developed a culturally appropriate and reliable SEL assessment tool specifically tailored for grades 6-8 students in government schools, integrating established frameworks such as CASEL with India's NIPUN Bharat policy¹⁹. These national-level guidelines, curriculum frameworks, and state-level implementation programs reflects India's recognition that SEL is indispensable for students' academic success, mental well-being, healthy relationships, and preparation for responsible citizenship in the twenty-first century²⁰.

This study aims to assess the level of social emotional learning awareness among school-going adolescents in Sonipat district of Haryana which falls in the NCR region and has been a major educational hub in Northern India. The objective of the study is to examine the relationship between SEL competencies and demographic variables. For this study, due permission was sought from the developers of CHISSEL 2.0 which is used to collect data in order to assess SEL awareness among school-going adolescents and identify the gaps in SEL implementation and understanding within the Indian education system.

Materials and Methods

Study Design and Setting

This cross-sectional descriptive study was conducted in Sonipat district, located in Haryana state, North India. The research encompassed 81 school-going adolescents from both government and private educational institutions, across rural and urban settings.

Sample Characteristics

The demographic profile of the study sample consisted of males and female adolescents. The participants were

studying in schools affiliated to the State Board, Board of Secondary Education, Haryana (B.S.E.H.) or Central Board of Secondary Education (C.B.S.E.). The participants were in government owned schools or in private schools. Geographically, the respondents were from rural schools or urban schools. Grade-wise, participants were from Grade VI to Grade VIII with ages ranging from 10 to 15 years (M = 12.1 years).

Assessment Tool

The CHISSEL 2.0 instrument was utilized for this investigation. CHISSEL 2.0 is a culturally adapted SEL assessment tool specifically designed for Indian adolescent populations in grades 6-8. The instrument comprises 25 statements measuring five core SEL domains: (1) Social Emotional Development, (2) Social Support, (3) Self-Management, (4) Peer Support, and (5) Life Skills. Each domain is assessed using a Likert-type scale with responses ranging as "Always" & "Sometimes" or "Never," enabling quantitative analysis of SEL competency levels. The reliability (Cronbach Alpha) of the tool as reported by the developers of the tool is 0.75. The norms for administration and scoring have been followed as per the guidelines of the tool developers.

Data Collection and Analysis

After obtaining permission for the use of CHISSEL 2.0 from its developers, the tool was firstly translated into Hindi. The data were collected through google forms which were sent across school going adolescents' parents who gave their consent for their ward's participation in the study. Demographic information was recorded for all participants. Raw response data were analyzed to calculate domain-wise mean scores and percentage distributions across response categories. Gender-based comparative analysis was conducted to identify potential disparities in SEL competencies between male and female adolescents. Descriptive statistical analyses were employed to characterize the sample and present findings in tabular and graphical formats.

Results

Demographic Profile

The sample demonstrated substantial representation across gender, school type, location, and board affiliation. Female participants constituted a slight majority at 53%, while male participants comprised 47% of the sample. Private schools represented 60% of the sample, compared to 40% from government institutions. Urban schools accounted for 64% of participants, while rural schools represented 36%. Grade VIII students constituted the largest group at 50%, followed by Grade VI (31%) and Grade VII (19%). Age distribution revealed the majority of participants (28%) were 12 years old, with 26% aged 13 years, creating a modal age range concentrated around early adolescence (Table 1).

SEL Competency Levels

Analysis of mean scores across SEL domains revealed variations in competency levels among the adolescent sample (Table 2). Social Support demonstrated the highest mean score of 0.8160, indicating strong awareness and availability of social support systems. Social Emotional Development followed closely with a mean score of 0.7657. Self-Management achieved a mean score of 0.7574, reflecting moderate to high competency in emotional regulation and goal-directed behavior. Peer Support scored 0.7104, indicating moderate competency in maintaining supportive peer relationships. Life Skills recorded the lowest mean score at 0.6791, suggesting relative weakness in practical life skill competencies compared to other domains.

Gender-Based Differences

Gender-comparative analysis revealed minimal yet notable differences in certain domains (Table 2). Males demonstrated marginally higher scores in Social Support (0.8227 versus 0.8093) and Self-Management (0.7626 versus 0.7521), suggesting slightly stronger competencies in these areas. Conversely, females exhibited higher scores in Social Emotional Development (0.7711 versus 0.7603) and notably higher scores in Peer Support (0.7245 versus 0.6962), with a gender gap of 0.0142 favoring females. Life Skills showed negligible gender difference (gap = -0.0012). The Peer Support domain demonstrated the largest absolute gender difference, indicating that female adolescents report greater competency in maintaining supportive peer relationships compared to their male counterparts.

Response Distribution Across Competency Levels

Percentage distribution analysis across response categories provided fine insights into SEL awareness distribution (Table 3). Social Emotional Development demonstrated predominantly positive responses, with 34.57% reporting "Very High" and 55.56% reporting "High" competency, together accounting for 90.13% of responses in the positive range. Only 9.88% reported low competency.

Social Support showed the strongest positive distribution, with 56.79% reporting "Very High" competency the highest percentage across all domains and 24.69% reporting "High," together comprising 81.48% of positive responses. This validates the high mean score observed for this domain.

Self-Management responses demonstrated 39.51% "Very High" and 48.15% "High," totaling 87.66% in positive categories. Only 12.35% reported low or very low competency, suggesting adequately developed self-management capabilities among the majority.

Peer Support exhibited more dispersed distribution, with 25.93% reporting "Very High" and 33.33% reporting "High."

However, notably, 35.8% reported “Low” competency in peer support the highest percentage in any “Low” category across all domains suggesting vulnerability in peer relationship maintenance. This contrasts with the moderate mean score and reveals substantial heterogeneity in this competency area.

Life Skills responses displayed 29.63% “Very High” and 50.62% “High,” totaling 80.25% positive responses. However, 12.35% reported “Very Low” competency, representing the second-highest percentage of very low responses, corroborating the lowest mean score for this domain (Figure 1).

Table 1. Demographics of the Sample

Demographic Variable	Category	Percentage
Gender	Males	47
	Females	53
Category of School	Government	40
	Private	60
Location of School	Rural	36
	Urban	64
Affiliation to Board	B.S.E.H.	30
	C.B.S.E.	70
Grade	VI	31
	VII	19
	VIII	50
Age	10	16
	11	17
	12	28
	13	26
	14	9
	15	4

Table 2. Comparison of Means of Competency Index with respect to gender

SEL Domain	Female	Male	Total (Female + Male)	Gap (Female - Male)
Social Emotional Development	0.7711	0.7603	0.7657	0.0054
Social Support	0.8093	0.8227	0.8160	-0.0067
Self-Management	0.7521	0.7626	0.7574	-0.0052
Peer Support	0.7245	0.6962	0.7104	0.0142
Life Skills	0.6779	0.6803	0.6791	-0.0012

Table 3. Percentage Distribution of SEL Competency Responses by Domain

Domains of SEL	Very High	High	Low	Very Low
Social Emotional Development	34.57	55.56	4.94	4.94
Social Support	56.79	24.69	9.88	8.64
Self-Management	39.51	48.15	9.88	2.47

Peer Support	25.93	33.33	35.8	4.94
Life Skills	29.63	50.62	7.41	12.35

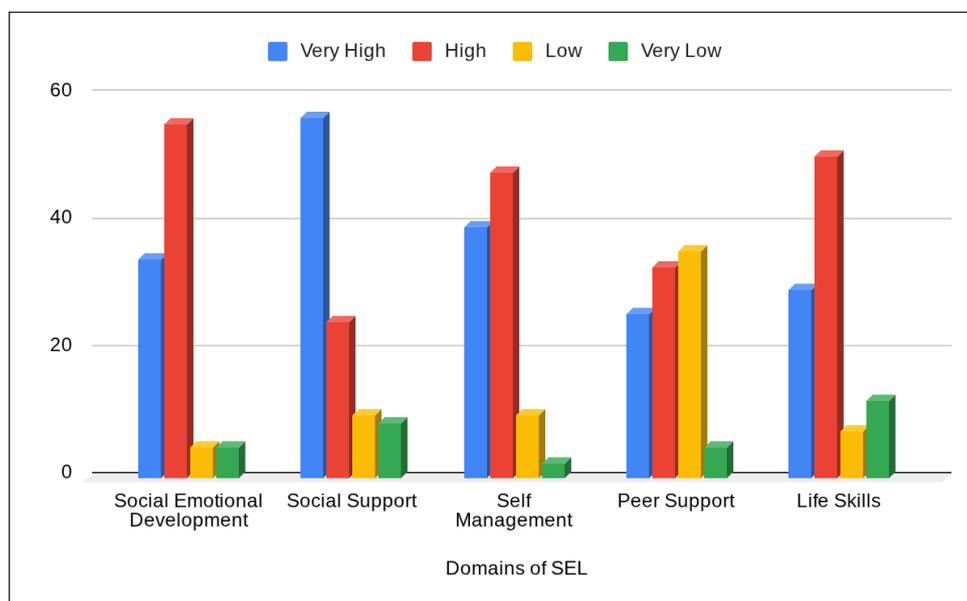


Figure 1. SEL Competency Awareness Across Five Domains: Response Distribution Among Adolescents

Discussion

The findings of this study provide important insights into the current state of SEL awareness among adolescents in Sonapat, Haryana, and contribute to understanding SEL implementation in school education contexts. The predominance of positive SEL competency awareness across domains suggests that the sampled adolescents possess foundational social-emotional capabilities. The highest performance in Social Support aligns with the research by Mahoney et al.(2020). The strong performance in Social Emotional Development and Self-Management indicates that adolescents have developed capacity for emotional awareness and behavioral regulation.

However, the findings reveal relative weakness in Life Skills and Peer Support domains which require attention. The lowest mean score in Life Skills suggests that practical competencies for managing daily challenges, such as problem-solving, goal-setting, and coping strategies, require targeted intervention. The 12.35% reporting very low life skills competency indicates a vulnerable subgroup requiring specialized support. This finding aligns with the study by Neelakantan et al. (2024) suggesting that life skills interventions require intentional implementation and structured curricula.

The peer support findings present a paradox: while the mean score (0.7104) appears moderate-to-high, the re-

sponse distribution reveals 35.8% of adolescents reporting low peer support competency. This discrepancy suggests heterogeneous development of peer relationship skills, which may reflect the developmental challenges inherent in early adolescence, where peer relationships undergo significant reorganization and complexity²¹. Gender differences in this domain, with females demonstrating higher competency (gap = 0.0142), may reflect documented gender socialization differences in relationship maintenance and emotional expression²².

The minimal gender differences across most domains suggest that SEL competency development is relatively equitable between male and female adolescents. However, the notable gender gap in Peer Support (0.0142 favoring females) and the slightly higher male scores in Social Support and Self-Management suggest further investigation.

The overrepresentation of private school students (60%) and urban residents (64%) in the sample limits generalizability to rural and government school contexts. Furthermore, the cross-sectional design prevents causal inference regarding factors influencing SEL competency development. The study does not include comparison groups or longitudinal follow-up data necessary to assess intervention impacts or developmental trajectories. The findings underscore the necessity for targeted SEL interventions addressing identified gaps, particularly in life skills and peer support domains.

Conclusion

This study assessed SEL awareness among school-going adolescents in Sonipat, Haryana using the CHISSEL 2.0 instrument. Results indicate moderate to high overall SEL competency, with particular strength in social support and social emotional development. However, relative weaknesses in life skills and heterogeneous peer support competencies identify domains requiring more attention. Gender differences remain minimal across most competencies. The findings reveal the need for incorporation of more collaborative activities in the classrooms to enhance peer support. Future research should employ longitudinal designs and evaluate intervention effectiveness while addressing the identified competency gaps through targeted school-based programs.

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Conflict of Interest: None

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