
Synthesis

Social and emotional learningⁱ

Moderate impact for high cost, based on extensive evidence



+4

Interventions which target social and emotional learning (SEL) seek to improve pupils' interaction with others and self-management of emotions, rather than focusing directly on the academic or cognitive elements of learning. SEL interventions might focus on the ways in which students work with (and alongside) their peers, teachers, family or community.

Three broad categories of SEL interventions can be identified:

- universal programmes which generally take place in the classroom;
- more specialised programmes which are targeted at students with particular social or emotional needs; and
- school-level approaches to developing a positive school ethos, which also aim to support greater engagement in learning.

How effective is it?

On average, SEL interventions have an identifiable and valuable impact on attitudes to learning and social relationships in school. They also have an average overall impact of four months' additional progress on attainment.

Although SEL interventions are almost always perceived to improve emotional or attitudinal outcomes, not all interventions are equally effective at raising attainment. Improvements appear more likely when SEL approaches are embedded into routine educational practices and supported by professional development and training for staff. In addition, the implementation of the programme and the degree to which teachers are committed to the approach appear to be important.

SEL programmes appear to be particularly beneficial for disadvantaged or low-attaining pupils.

SEL approaches have been found to be effective in primary and secondary schools, and early years settings.

Latin American Evidenceⁱⁱ

Social and emotional learning is a field of educational research that has a good level of development in Latin America. Studies conducted in the region have explored the effects that socio-emotional learning strategies have in different dimensions of the student life; self-esteem, self-concept, school behaviour, violence, aggressive behaviour, student well-being, and also academic performance.

These empirical studies on social and emotional learning tend to be divided between those that seek to establish a relationship between social-emotional skills and academic performance, and those that describe and quantify the impact of specific programs on the student life. In general, they highlight not only the positive relationship with learning outcomes, but also the development of skills that help to improve the school environment.

A study that provides specific evidence regarding the relationship between socio-emotional features and academic achievement shows positive and significant correlations between individual self-esteem, socio-emotional well-being, school social climate and academic success. Thus, well-being, good perception of school social climate and peer relations were significantly related to improvements in academic achievement. These results are consistently observed in different studies across the region and also in the international evidence. However, Latin American evidence about which specific social and emotional learning programs are effective in raising academic achievement is more limited.

How secure is the evidence?

There is extensive international research in this area, including a number of meta-analyses. More research has been undertaken in primary than in secondary schools, and a number of studies have specifically evaluated the impact on pupils who are low-attaining or disadvantaged.

What are the costs?

The main financial cost of implementing a whole-school social and emotional learning approach will be the cost of professional development. However, targeted programmes are likely to be much more expensive, so the overall average cost is rated as moderate.

What should I consider?

Before you implement this strategy in your learning environment, consider the following:

1. How will you link the teaching of social and emotional skills with academic content?
2. How will you provide appropriate professional development for teachers and other school staff to effectively support SEL approaches?
3. How will you ensure that you support all staff to consistently apply aspects of SEL more widely in school and embed them in routine school practices?
4. How will you sensitively target social and emotional approaches to benefit at-risk or vulnerable pupils?
5. The impact on attainment of social and emotional aspects of learning is not consistent, so it is important to evaluate the impact of any initiative. Have you considered how you will do this?

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