THE RELEVANCE OF SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING IN EDUCATION

LA RELEVANCIA DEL APRENDIZAJE SOCIOEMOCIONAL EN LA EDUCACIÓN

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Abstract: This article explores the relevance of emotions within education and the importance of social-emotional learning (SEL) in the learning process. It focuses on the benefits of developing social-emotional skills in students, including improved academic performance, social behavior, emotional well-being, attitudes and behaviors. The paper highlights the role of emotions in the learning process, and it emphasizes the need for teachers to master social-emotional competences for the creation of a positive classroom environment. Some effects that negative emotions have on cognitive and learning processes are also revised. The article focuses on the importance of social-emotional learning to foster personal and academic growth. It aims to discuss the relevance of emotions in education and the importance of social-emotional learning within the learning process in general. Through an in-depth analysis of emotions' effects on learning, this reflection reveals significant and meaningful outcomes of social-emotional learning (SEL) in promoting holistic development and maintaining a healthy classroom environment.

Keywords: Social-emotional learning, emotional management, teacher-student relationship.

Resumen: Este artículo explora la relevancia de las emociones en la educación y la importancia del aprendizaje socioemocional (ASE) en el proceso de aprendizaje. Se centra en los beneficios de desarrollar habilidades socioemocionales en los estudiantes, incluido el mejor rendimiento académico, el comportamiento social, el bienestar emocional, las actitudes y comportamientos. El documento destaca el papel de las emociones en el proceso de aprendizaje y enfatiza la necesidad de que los maestros dominen las competencias socioemocionales para crear un entorno positivo en el aula. También se revisan algunos efectos que las emociones negativas tienen en los procesos cognitivos y de aprendizaje. El artículo se centra en la importancia del aprendizaje socioemocional para fomentar el crecimiento personal y académico. Su objetivo es discutir la relevancia de las emociones en la educación y la importancia del aprendizaje socioemocional dentro del proceso de aprendizaje en general. A través de un análisis profundo de los efectos de las emociones en el aprendizaje, esta reflexión revela resultados significativos y significativos del aprendizaje socioemocional (ASE) para promover el desarrollo integral y mantener un ambiente saludable en el aula.

Palabras claves: aprendizaje socioemocional, manejo de las emociones, relaciones maestro-estudiante

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Introduction

Going to school involves more than putting on a uniform and taking a bag full of notebooks. As social beings, humans must interact with things and people around them. This is when going to school gets challenging for some students, because of maintaining interpersonal relationships, studying challenging subjects, or facing tight deadlines. Experimenting with frustration, excitement, sadness, or anger is something that can be dealt with calmly and intelligently if people learn how to be socially and emotionally competent.

Developing students' skills in the subjects each instructor teaches and skills that help them conform to society successfully can be done by giving importance to social-emotional learning.

Having a "good" student who gets good grades should not be the goal for teachers to achieve, but forming individuals with skills that help them deal with life situations successfully. Currently, knowing and mastering math, science, and language arts topics is equally as crucial as social-emotional skills.

An integral teaching process does not entail merely spreading subject knowledge but also helping students face future life situations and have an educational journey that is complete and covers most life aspects.
Social-emotional learning has been taken for granted in the past in institutions and schools; nevertheless, in the present, the academic community has recognized social-emotional learning as a necessary skill for students to succeed. A clear example of this is CASEL, which stands for Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning; it is an organization that promotes social-emotional learning in schools and communities. Through their mission and vision, which are helping make evidence-based social and emotional learning an integral part of education from preschool to high school, they see the future full of children and adults who are self-caring, responsible, engaged, and lifelong learners who work together to achieve their goals and create a more inclusive, just, and equitable world (CASEL, 2021).

Some of the benefits that people can have by mastering socioemotional skills include the ability to interact with others, maintain healthy relationships, oversee and control cognitive processes, and manage one's emotions and behavior. These advantages include the ability to get students motivated to achieve their goals, solve problems effectively, and communicate efficiently (Ahmed, Hamzah, & Abdullah, 2021). According to the former idea, being socially and emotionally competent means that a person can identify and control emotions effectively, and they can deal with strong feelings without it being a barrier to interacting successfully with others.

Social-emotional learning has some skill components that are vital to comprehend and master to reach the abilities mentioned before; the five components are included in the CASEL framework (2023): self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making.
Consequently, the main purpose of this paper is to reflect on the social-emotional learning concept and its components. Also, it is essential to include recognition and visibility of its importance in people's learning processes.

Understanding Social-Emotional Learning

Social-emotional skills are lifelong competences that every person needs to succeed. According to CASEL (2023), Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) is the process through which all young people and adults acquire and apply the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to develop healthy identities, manage emotions, achieve personal and collective goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain supportive relationships, and make responsible and caring decisions. In other words, social-emotional skills are abilities that allow people to actively participate in a community where they are listened to and can contribute.
CASEL proposes the following five main components of SEL in their framework (2023):

> • Self-awareness: The capacity to understand one's emotions and shape a positive self-concept, fostering individual growth.

• Self-management: The skill to regulate emotions and behaviors, enabling individuals to navigate challenges and make intentional choices aligned with their values and beliefs.
• Social awareness: The ability to perceive others' emotions and social dynamics, cultivating empathy and meaningful connections through active engagement and sensitivity.
• Relationship skills: The ability to establish and maintain healthy and rewarding relationships with diverse individuals and groups.
• Responsible decision-making: The ability to make constructive and ethical decisions about personal and social behaviors.

Relative to the previously defined competences, including these skills in intrapersonal and interpersonal relationships can significantly benefit individuals. The development of self-awareness allows for deeper introspection, recognizing personal strengths, weaknesses, and complexities that contribute to individual uniqueness (Martínez Percy, 2013). By engaging in critical self-examination, individuals gain the ability to shape their self-perception and foster personal growth. On the other hand, effective self-management is crucial, involving regulating emotions, thoughts, behaviors, and actions in alignment with personal values and long-term goals. Through self-reflection and discipline, individuals strive to overcome impulsive tendencies and make intentional decisions that lead to personal development and success.

While the first two competences primarily focus on individual self-perception and recognition, it is equally important to integrate our internal understanding and comprehension with external interactions. Developing social awareness demands a critical understanding of the complexities of human interaction and the ability to perceive emotional cues. Active engagement with the social environment and critical observation of social dynamics allow for managing relationships with sensitivity and understanding. Moreover, acquiring relationship skills involves critically examining communication styles, active listening, and constructive conflict resolution. Ferreira, Martinsone, and Talić (2020) mention that continuously assessing and improving these skills empowers individuals to establish and maintain bonds built on trust, respect, and mutual growth.

Maintaining a balance between internal and external aspects becomes possible when individuals learn to take responsibility for their words, actions, and thoughts. Concerning Conley (2015) and considering it as a more general idea, responsible decision-making involves critical thinking and considering the potential consequences of our actions. It entails acknowledging personal accountability for the potential impact on one's own life, the lives of others, and the broader community. By critically analyzing our circumstances, understanding the underlying values, and assuming responsibility for the outcomes, we can make decisions that align with our principles and contribute to a more compassionate and supportive society.

In brief, a thorough understanding of these competences is essential, as they provide a valuable perspective for navigating the complexities of life. According to Conley's work (2015), these competences in an individual's life can foster personal development, enhance intrapersonal insight, and promote healthy and meaningful interpersonal relationships. By improving these skills, individuals can manage their emotions, make responsible decisions, and build relationships based on trust and empathy. Integrating these competences into everyday life gives individuals the tools to thrive in diverse social contexts, promoting well-being and resilience and fostering a caring and inclusive society.

Effects of Negative Emotions on the Learning Process
Emotions and feelings are inevitable and essential in human life. From the very beginning of life, a newborn shows emotions through crying. In the rest of life stages, such as childhood, adolescence, and adulthood, people face many emotions; for instance, sharing toys, having a couple, and breaking up or getting and losing a job are some examples of situations that can cause the experimentation of strong emotions.

Going to school is a complex process for some individuals because this situation can place them in new social

dynamics, and they may not feel ready for it. Meeting new people, delivering tasks within tight deadlines, or learning new topics throughout the school year are some examples of situations that any student may face in school. It is vital to remark that for some people, these situations may not affect them at all. However, some others may feel uncomfortable and annoyed. Due to these situations, emotions like high stress levels, frustration, sadness, anxiety, and disinterest may be produced by students, interrupting the learning process in many ways.

Continuing with this line of thought, Moreno, Rodríguez, and Rodríguez (2018) presented some findings on the consequences that negative emotions can cause in cognition. They highlighted how catastrophic it can be for people experiencing high stress levels in their learning process. A stressed person overproduces cortisol (stress hormone), which blocks cognitive activities, such as learning something new and memory skills. In addition, the neurons of the hippocampus, an essential structure for acquiring knowledge, get damaged by the high levels of cortisol.

This evidence supports the idea that socio-emotional skills are essential for a person. One needs to know how to deal with these inevitable emotions throughout life since people find overwhelming situations in every context of their lives: family, friends, classmates, colleagues, and partners. This is what makes it so significant to cope with these emotions so they do not represent a barrier but rather a growth opportunity. Identifying and managing emotions can provide more probabilities of success that go beyond school life, and every life stage an individual experiences.

On the other hand, some of these stressful situations may have causes that encompass teachers. In a classroom, teachers find a great variety of student types. Some might be disruptive students who do not get engaged or cry before, during, or after the lesson. In these situations, teachers must refrain from misjudging students and jumping to conclusions without digging deeper into the students' issues. It is necessary because the cause of students' misbehavior may be a response to an intimidating atmosphere inside the classroom caused by the teacher. As a result, students might be afraid of failing or making mistakes since they could be punished by having recess detention or extra homework, forgetting that making mistakes is vital in every learning process. Osika, MacMahon, Lodge, and Carroll in Times Higher Education web campus (2022) stated that:

> If a learner perceives a threat, their attention will be drawn to this, interfering with their ability to learn. In a learning environment, threats might be in the form of failure, being unprepared or feeling disconnected from other learners or the teacher. (para. 6)

In other words, having a menacing atmosphere is one of the worst things a teacher can allow because students will feel afraid, ashamed, or bored during classes. With it, there will be some classroom dynamics between teacher and students that might be difficult to handle, such as students with poor performance, as they feel distracted and disinterested during the lessons because their negative emotions can decrease information processing skills and long-term memory development (Cooks-Campbell, 2023). Additionally, bad management of negative emotions can also affect health directly when people cannot sleep appropriately or follow an eating schedule, which, in the end, causes fatigue, making it difficult to think clearly and retain new information when learning.

Indeed, negative emotions that are not well-managed can affect people in many ways. Inadequate management of strong emotions does not allow a successful acquisition of knowledge. It is valid to conclude that if people cannot cope with their emotions appropriately, it will be more complicated for them to learn something new.

Are Social-Emotional Competences Vital for Teaching and Learning?
Positive emotions also have profound effects on the learning process. Various elements play a part in an educational environment. On the one hand, students are observers, active participants, communicators, and practitioners. On the other hand, teachers are knowledge deliverers, coaches, listeners, and supporters. Both roles are essential entities in the class. One exists because the other one does. It is crucial to remember that more than students

and teachers, they are human beings who can improve their inter and intrapersonal relationships through social-emotional skills to take advantage of learning experiences.

Firstly, school is one of the first places where children experience interpersonal dynamics. For instance, sharing seats with classmates, eating snacks at the table, arranging teams for playing, and others. Nevertheless, home is where people interact for the first time. Children create bonds with their moms, dads, siblings, and other family members around them. According to Denham, Bassett, and Zinsser (2012), all human beings should teach social-emotional skills at home as the child grows up. Now, the second place people get to interact, and these skills are needed, is school. Teachers will also be coaches and counselors, so teachers must know about social-emotional competences.

Consequently, it is necessary to highlight that for teachers to impact lives positively, they need to be socially and emotionally stable. The idea is that teachers recognize and deal with their emotions, providing good experiences for the students and themselves inside the classroom. Teachers who know why and how emotions affect also give students tips on how to deal with them (Hosotani & Imai-Matsumura, 2011). Having teachers with these competences can help students when any of them experience an anxiety attack, anger episode, or frustration incident during the class.

Unfortunately, this research field has few studies done on this subject. However, it was possible to find some experts, such as Bisquerra (2003; 2007) and Extremera and Berrocal (2005), to support the argument that the teaching staff needs to know the importance of emotional training from the very beginning of their education for being teachers. Teachers must have a strong base in terms of socioemotional training so that the teaching process is conducted effectively and efficiently.

Bearing the former ideas in mind, it can be claimed that teachers, like any other social being, need to learn about socioemotional skills for their occupation and personal lives. In addition, teachers surrounded by positive environments will be able to work better since they can manage their emotions intelligently. Another imperative aspect to highlight is that to have teachers teaching socio-emotional education in institutions, they first should have been taught to be socio-emotionally intelligent; it is the same as for teachers to teach English; they should speak the language beforehand.

Numerous studies have shown how beneficial social-emotional competences are in human life since they show benefits for children, adolescents, and adults. Lopes et al. (2011) showed that emotionally intelligent people are less likely to maintain difficult relationships involving conflicts. Also, people with these emotional competences tend to have healthier relationships. Based on the former evidence, having teachers who are socially and emotionally competent will allow them to teach more effectively.

On the other hand, there is the student mentioned before for their importance in the classroom dynamic. Fostering positive emotions in students has many advantages. Firstly, considering the fourth competence, which is relationship skills, this would allow students to maintain supportive relationships. Yoder, Ward, and Wolforth (2021) affirmed that "when students feel valued and seen, they will have the ability to communicate more effectively, engage in meaningful interactions with their peers, and provide feedback and support to others" (p. 13). This means that maintaining good relationships between students and teachers is more likely to create a supportive classroom environment.

In addition, evidence supports the idea that implementing SEL programs in schools has many benefits for students and teachers. According to Greenberg (2023), he found out that the advantages go from pre-K to twelfth grade. He claimed that these socioemotional skills have helped students facilitate positive, prosocial behaviors and positive relationships with others, which means that if they are used in classes, menacing atmospheres could decrease. Among the other benefits is that socioemotional learning fosters these competences and increases students'

engagement in learning, leading to improvement in students' cognitive and academic performance.

Durlak and Mahoney and CASEL (2019) used a value-added approach to analyze the practical benefits of SEL for students. They compared students who were taught with SEL programs and another group that was not. The categories evaluated were skills, academics, social behavior, emotional distress, attitudes, and conduct problems. The results showed that students with social-emotional competences stood out in all the categories examined. In one of the categories, they were ahead by more than 50% compared to the other group of students, which was the skills category—supporting the idea that being socioemotionally competent fosters the acquisition of new knowledge and skills.

Conclusions

To put it simply, social-emotional learning is a valuable tool for personal growth. What sets SEL apart is its far-reaching impact beyond the classroom. Social-emotional learning is applicable throughout all stages of life. As stated by Usakli and Ekici (2018), "Social-emotional learning is a necessity for enhanced social relations, not only in schools but also in society while learning adult roles and communicating with others" (p.74).

Improving both the quality of life and learning heavily relies on the development of socio-emotional skills. The former can be substantiated since these skills enable individuals to make insightful choices and enhance relationships with others as well as themselves. As seen in the case of self-awareness and self-management, prioritizing personal welfare and effectively handling strong emotions guide people toward consistent, good, and healthy intrapersonal relationships. Similarly, social awareness and relationship skills foster meaningful connections with others, leading to fruitful and genuine relationships.

Moreover, the socio-emotional skills look after individuals and what is around them. With self-awareness and self-management, people can care for themselves, since they recognize what they are, and they can deal with strong emotions. This means that they improve their intrapersonal relationships. On the other hand, it also enhances their interpersonal skills, putting into practice social awareness and relationship skills competences. When people are able to connect with others' feelings to be empathetic and assertive, they are more likely to maintain healthy relationships.

Socioemotional learning plays a crucial role in enhancing the learning experience as well as improving overall quality of life. A person who lacks competences related to socioemotional learning may face significant challenges in learning new things compared to someone who is socioemotional competent. This is because an individual who is uncontrollably sad, unmotivated or angry may find it difficult to learn, unlike someone who experiences negative emotions but knows how to manage them effectively to ensure they do not interfere with the learning process.

Lack of socioemotional competence can lead to physical and health issues, as well as problematic behavior. Thus, it is crucial for both teachers and students to possess these skills for a successful learning process. Specifically, teachers should develop these competences to enhance their effectiveness and energy during teaching. By being self-aware and managing their emotions, teachers can maintain a positive classroom environment. Furthermore, social awareness and relationship skills enable teachers to establish a strong bond with students, which can significantly contribute to the learning process.

Emotions are crucial in education. How students and teachers handle their emotions can have positive or negative effects on the learning process. Therefore, it's important to manage emotions comprehensively and sensitively to make learning accessible to everyone. Social-emotional learning doesn't just address emotions but also enhances cognitive processes, self-relationships, and relationships with others in the environment, making the learning experience more enjoyable.

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