

Highlights

Mainstreaming social and emotional learning in education systems

Policy guide



Why this policy guide?

Social and emotional learning (SEL) has a crucial role to play in the collective efforts to transform education as called for by [SDG 4, Transforming Education Summit, Report of the International Commission on the Futures of Education](#), the [2023 UNESCO Recommendation on Education for Peace, Human Rights and Sustainable Development adopted unanimously in 2023](#). SEL encourages greater attention to the role of social relations and emotional dynamics of learning, in addition to the cognitive and behavioural aspects. If conceptualized and implemented within a broader social, relational and ecological foundation, SEL can not only strengthen the individual, relational and systemic aspects of learning, but revitalize existing efforts within education for positive social transformation towards long-lasting peace and sustainable development.

UNESCO's policy guide unpacks SEL as a broadening of the educational process, from a focus on cognitive aspects to a balance between cognitive, social and emotional, and behavioural dimensions of learning, putting forward initial action ideas to guide its systematic mainstreaming in education. It builds on and extends previous work undertaken by UNESCO on SEL from the perspective of [Global Citizenship Education \(GCED\) and Education for Sustainable Development \(ESD\)](#), [Building Strong Foundations for Health and Well-being Education](#), the [Happy Schools Framework](#), and in multiple UNESCO Offices and Institutes such as the [Mahatma Gandhi Institute of Education for Peace and Sustainable Development \(MGIEP\)](#).

Who is this policy guide for?

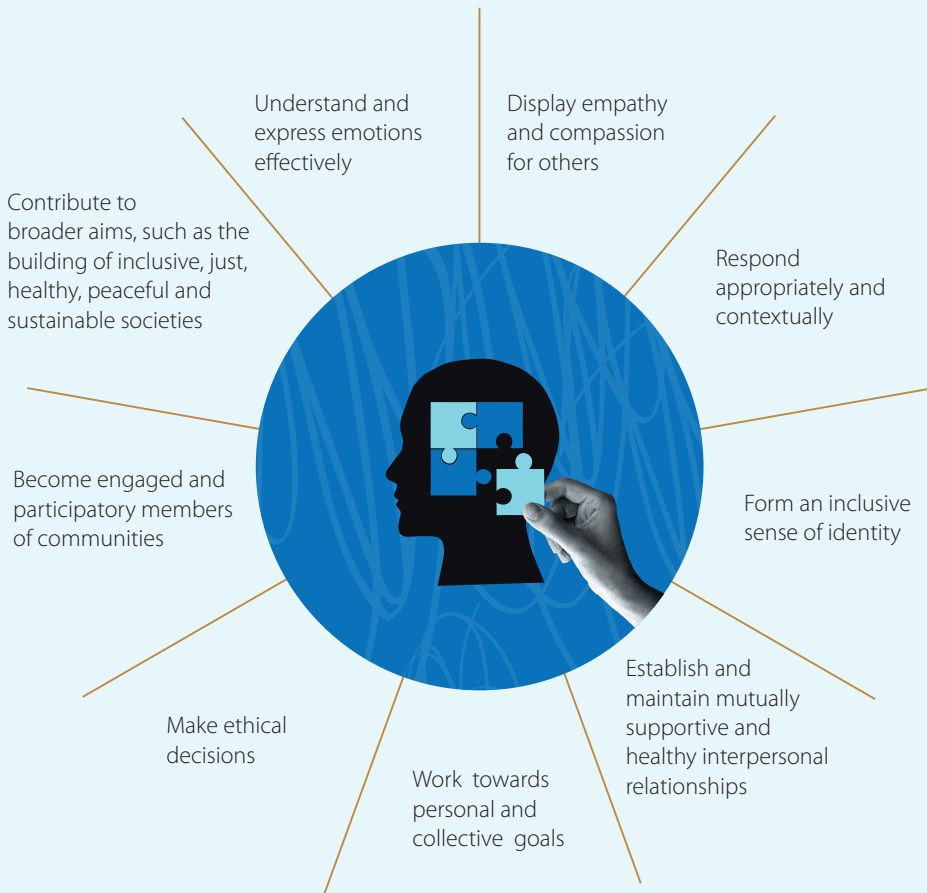
The guide is aimed at policy-makers, especially those in Ministries of Education tasked with curriculum development, teacher training and professional development, development of learning materials, pedagogies and assessment, and those responsible for ensuring that learning environments are safe and supportive. The guide can also be used by school administrators, supervisors and also teachers and educators passionate about mainstreaming SEL in every aspect of their learning spaces. Lastly, the guide provides a curation of current scientific literature on SEL that education researchers might find useful.



What is social and emotional learning?

Social and emotional learning is a process of acquiring the competencies to recognize and manage emotions, develop care and concern for others, establish positive relationships, make responsible decisions and handle challenging situations effectively. It is a holistic process of learning

grounded in ethics of care that links the cognitive with the social and emotional as well as relational aspects of learning toward supporting learners' well-being, academic attainment, and active global citizenship for positive social change.



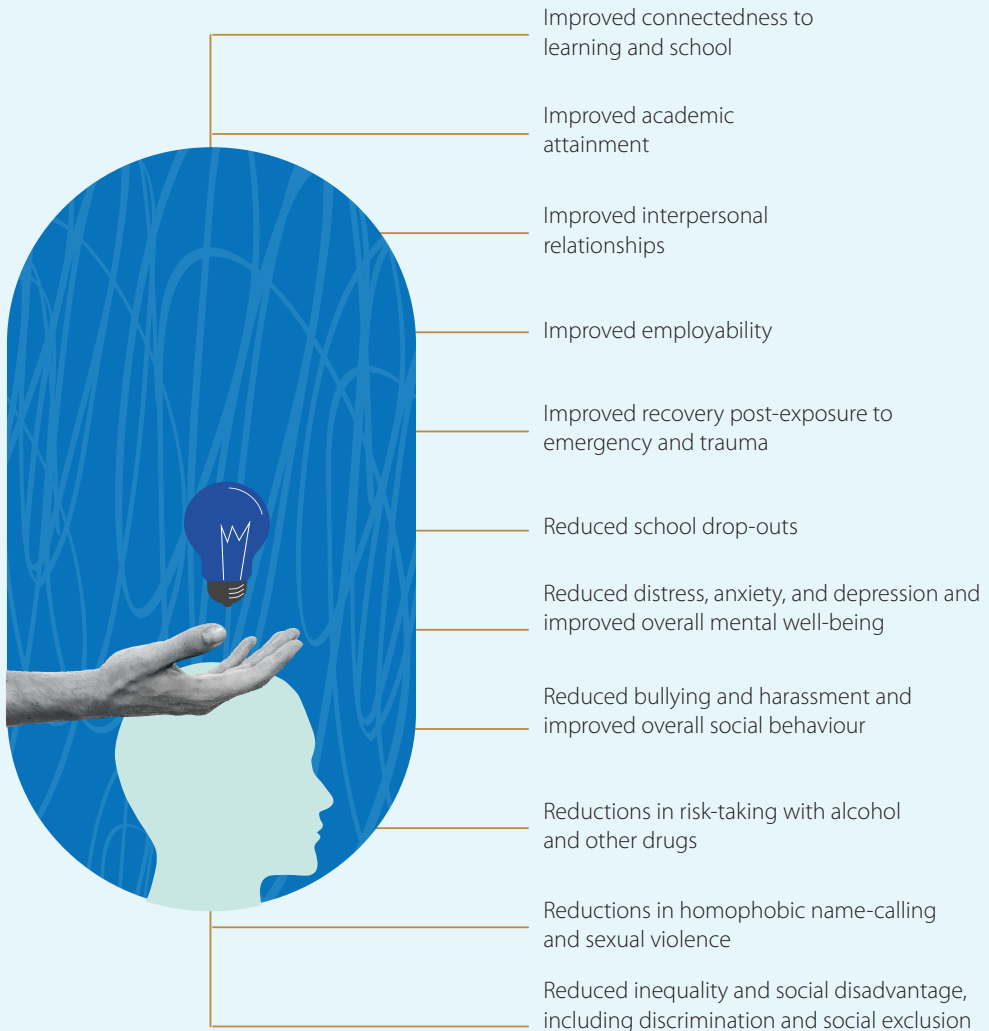
Where can social and emotional learning be integrated?

Social and emotional learning comes to life differently in diverse contexts - it is equated and closely associated, and at times used

interchangeably, with and in relation to the following approaches:



What is the impact of social and emotional learning?



Key recommendations of the policy guide

Defining, framing and prioritizing SEL

- Prioritize social and emotional learning as foundational, just as literacy and numeracy have been identified as foundational to a good education.
- Ensure that the definition, understanding, and practice of SEL is intrinsically tied to cultural norms, beliefs, values, and behavioural expressions of the place in which it is implemented and the learners who compose the learning space.
- Provide all necessary support for comprehensive SEL mainstreaming in all aspects of education guided by a lifelong and life-wide approach that spans all education levels and extends into work and community contexts.

Curricula and pedagogy (digital and otherwise)

- Identify and harness pedagogies that advance SEL, such as problem-based learning, collaborative learning, service learning, and reparative pedagogies.
- Take advantage of digital pedagogies to advance SEL, while taking necessary measures to ensure that they are culturally appropriate and sensitive, as well as developmentally appropriate for all learners.

- Ensure that SEL pedagogies are inclusive and support learners' agency and confidence. They should ideally also be active and relational.
- For transformative impact, ensure that SEL is not only integrated as an add-on but comprehensively woven into all aspects of the curriculum.

Assessment

- In line with the 2023 UNESCO Recommendation on Education for Peace, Human Rights and Sustainable Development, adopted unanimously in 2023, rethink assessment to ensure equal balance between the cognitive, social and emotional, affective and behavioural domains and areas of knowledge, competencies, skills and attitudes and other domains of learning that are usually not prioritized.
- Special attention should be paid to a differentiated approach to assessment and evaluation which is context-specific and adaptive to all learners, including persons with disabilities, persons belonging to minorities, and those in vulnerable situations.
- Ensure that a SEL assessment, monitoring, and evaluation system collects information to continuously improve SEL delivery systems. It should be formative, comprehensive, balanced, aligned, evidence-based, and ethical.

- Co-create all the elements of SEL assessment with all the stakeholders, especially the learners.

Teacher education and professional development

- Since SEL does not occur in a vacuum, strengthen the capacities of teachers and other educators throughout their professional lives, and equip them with evidence-based tools to embody and model SEL and transmit it through their interaction with learners.
- Invest in the well-being of teachers and other educators by ensuring job security, professional support to develop both pedagogically and emotionally competent teachers capable of effective classroom management and empathic interactions while also being cognizant of their well-being. This also requires systemic and structural interventions to ensure teachers have a healthy and safe workplace conducive to good teaching and learning.

Wider school leadership for SEL

- Support the establishment and smooth functioning of participatory school leadership mechanisms for SEL that realign school processes toward safety and inclusive social support, and consequently, engages the entire school, including the hidden curriculum, to take full ownership of the design and implementation of SEL.
- Provide the resources and necessary support to ensure that school leadership is dynamic and integrates individual

capabilities, school and community resources, and relationships among school staff, students, families, and the wider community through the lens of an ethic of care that highlights strengths, caring, inclusion, and equity.

- Harness and support the role of schools as avenues where the wider community can learn and practice SEL. This entails providing the wider school leadership, teachers and other educators, and learners with the necessary support to co-create school activities that bring together and engage diverse members of the community.

Community and learner inclusion in SEL

- Ensure that policy and planning for SEL allows ample room for community spaces as sites for expanding SEL introduced and practiced in schools.
- Develop a systemic, transformative, equitable, inclusive, and social justice grounded approach to SEL that adopts a lifelong and life-wide learning perspective; a socio-ecological community view; and an asset-based approach as frameworks for action.
- Provide all the necessary support for the local situatedness of SEL as a key starting point for considering the validity of SEL in education. Much inspiration for SEL can be found in the world's cultures and communities, their languages and cultural expressions.

UNESCO – a global leader in education

Education is UNESCO's top priority because it is a basic human right and the foundation for peace and sustainable development. UNESCO is the United Nations' specialized agency for education, providing global and regional leadership to drive progress, strengthening the resilience and capacity of national systems to serve all learners. UNESCO also leads efforts to respond to contemporary global challenges through transformative learning, with special focus on gender equality and Africa across all actions.



The Global Education 2030 Agenda

UNESCO, as the United Nations' specialized agency for education, is entrusted to lead and coordinate the Education 2030 Agenda, which is part of a global movement to eradicate poverty through 17 Sustainable Development Goals by 2030. Education, essential to achieve all of these goals, has its own dedicated Goal 4, which aims to *“ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.”* The Education 2030 Framework for Action provides guidance for the implementation of this ambitious goal and commitments.



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