Social and Emotional Learning

Background

The summary below presents the research evidence on social and emotional learning in the Arab World.

The Teaching & Learning Toolkit focuses on impact on outcomes for learners; it presents an estimate of the average impact of mastery learning on learning progress, based on the synthesis of a large number of quantitative studies from around the world.

This page offers a summary and analysis of individual studies on social and emotional learning in the Arab world. In contrast to the Toolkit it includes studies which do not estimate impact, but instead investigate the implementation of interventions and how they are perceived by school leaders, teachers and students using a range of research methods. This information is valuable for school leaders and teachers interested in finding out more about particular examples of social and emotional learning interventions that have been delivered in the Arab world.

Summary of the research in the Arab World

Interventions which target social and emotional learning (SEL) seek to improve achievement and learning in general, by improving the social and emotional dimensions of learning, as opposed to 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. A majority of adolescent students in the Arab world were identified with emotional and behavioral problems. Around 44.5% of adolescent students in Egypt had prosocial difficulties and behavioral and emotional problems. Females were reported to suffer emotional difficulties more than males did, mainly because of puberty and biological changes (Osman et al., 2019). Interestingly, students who come from families with high socio-economic status (high family income) expressed more difficulties than those coming from low status. Not only that but the lack of recreational facilities and closed communities especially in rural areas could be additional reasons behind the increased social and emotional difficulties especially among adolescents (Osman et al., 2019).

Furthermore, authoritative and permissive parenting style showed to have a negative association with students emotional intelligence. 100 kindergarten students (47 males and 53 females) with ages ranging between 5-6 years old in Jordan reported that when parents use threat and corporal punishment without explanation, obligation to obey, rather than positive reinforcement of desired behaviors tended to reduce the child's feeling of safety. On another hand, leaving children without care, attention, and discipline reflected negatively on their personalities and behaviors. As a result, children could not manage their emotions which had significant impact on their self-esteem (Al-Elaimat et al., 2018). In addition to anxiety /depression, parental divorce, father's low-socio economic status, and poor self-esteem; poor social relations are another variable that would impact students' psychosocial well-being (Al-Fayez & Ohaeri, 2011). That is why, literature in the Arab world highlighted for schools and curriculum designers to foster students social and emotional learning as an approach to nurture positive behavior and wellbeing inside the school. Textbook designers are also recommended to develop appropriate criteria for the distribution of life skills including decision making, problem solving, creative thinking, critical thinking, effective communication, interpersonal relationship skills, self-awareness, and

coping with emotions skills, in English textbooks. Infusing those life skills in the curriculum can be an effective approach to improve students' academic success and social and emotional development (Al Masri et al., 2016).

Moreover, in an experimental study, Hassan and Mouganie (2014) investigated the implementation of the Social Decision-Making Skills Curriculum (SDSC) on the emotional intelligence and the prosocial behaviors of primary students in Grades 1–3, in a private school in Lebanon. Students in the experimental group were trained on social problem-solving and social decision-making skills through using indirect and hypothetical examples when answering teacher's questions and linking them to real life issues. They were also trained on how to accept and acknowledge what they hear and were invited to share the use of social decision-making and problem-solving in everyday situations. They were given the opportunity to communicate with their peers, build friendships with and care for them. After the implementation of the SDSC curriculum for the period of nine weeks (42 sessions), students in the experimental group (n=29) showed higher levels of emotional intelligence and prosocial skills when compared with their peers in the control group (n=51) who received regular homeroom time every day during this period. Teaching social problem-solving skills was an effective intervention to help students recognize and manage their feelings and emotions and develop their prosocial skills.

Anti-bullying programs at schools are also considered as interventions to develop students' SEL. Students in the Arab world struggle mainly from bullying particularly among boys and in higher grades. Rigby, Haroun, and Ali (2018) found an association between bullying and students' social behavior. Students who were not socially active experienced bullying and felt quite unsafety in schools. In this cross-sectional survey design, middle school boys (N= 841) and girls (N= 938) from 20 government and non-government schools in the UAE reported that their interactions and social relationships with others declined with increasing grade level. However, students who made friends and supported others reported higher level of safety in schools.

Fostering students' social interactions was also examined among children with autism in the United Arab Emirates. Using a video role modelling instruction which presented two individuals interacting in a role-play setting., five autistic boys were

able to imitate the role modeled behavior and showed a better performance on their conversational skills and answering/ asking informational questions as well as on the social initiation and non-verbal communication. However, the challenge here is to create videos that draw child's attention to the cues most relevant to the desired learning outcome (Alzyoudi, Sartawi, & Almuhiri, 2015).

Giving access for videogames on Ipads for underprivileged students in Saudi Arabia improved their social skills when compared with their peers who did not have an Ipad. In this quasi-experimental study, Al Saud (2017) noticed that kindergarten students who played videogames were able to better communicate and build friendships with their peers. As a result of a successful social interaction, the author also noticed an improvement of their behaviors. These students were able to follow rules, waiting for their turn, say thank you, and apologize to others. With the Ipad use, children were also able to work and solve problems together and suggested ideas to support each other.

To date, technology use in schools in the Arab world remains controversial. Despite the importance of using technology as a tool to improve students' social learning and create positive emotions, students are generally advised to limit their use of technology in order to have more time for communicating with their parents. Data collected in Egypt from 230 students (92 boys and 138 girls), with their ages ranging from 12 to 18 years showed a highly statistical correlation between adolescents' technology usage and social interaction with their parents. Hence, Moawad & Ebraham (2016) recommended that parents need to educate themselves about social media and the ways their teens may use it, as well as the common risks, to help them understand and navigate the technologies. Moreover, increasing parent discussions with their teens is an effective way to nurture positive relationships and trust and can lower any risky online behaviors. In order to increase the parent-child relationship, schools should create workshops and awareness programs for parents to participate in activities that teach them how to deal and interact with their children which will eventually positively impact children's learning and emotional intelligence (Al-Elaimat et al., 2018).

When developing students' SEL, schools and community contribute indirectly to improving students' academic achievement. That is why, studies like Hassan and

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Mouganie (2014) and Al Masri et al. (2016), suggested ways to equip students with tools to manage their emotions and communicate effectively with others. Nurturing students' problem-solving skills is an effective intervention to help students recognize and manage their feelings and emotions and develop their prosocial skills. Providing students with opportunities to communicate and work with each other and encourage them to demonstrate positive behavior such as empathy and care towards others will have a positive impact on their SEL.

Summary paragraph:

Improving students Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) is an effective approach to develop their overall wellbeing and academic achievement. Studies in the Arab world have not yet investigated the association of these variables but have focused, instead, on the reasons behind social and emotional difficulties for K-12 students.

In Egypt, the lack of recreational facilities and closed communities especially in rural areas and family socio-economic status were behind the increased social and emotional difficulties especially among adolescents. In Jordan, authoritative and permissive parenting style were factors that have a negative association with kindergarten students emotional intelligence. As a result, children could not manage their emotions and had lower self-esteem.

To date, educators, mostly teachers, views about SEL are not examined. That is why, literature lacks data around the best effective teaching strategies to improve SEL. Furthermore, teachers' understanding about these skills and how they can integrate them in their instruction for the benefit of students is very limited. When these have been explored, researchers have recommended that curriculum designers create textbooks that are based on social and emotional learning and include certain life skills that teachers can incorporate into their everyday educational practices. For instance, in an experimental study conducted in a private school Lebanon in 2014, primary students who were taught based on the Social Decision-Making Skills Curriculum (SDSC) gained greater benefits on their emotional intelligence and prosocial behaviors in comparison with their peers in the control group.

Lastly, researchers are recommended to conduct comparative analyses to examine the most effective social and emotional interventions programs and determine their impact on students' academic, communication, and language skills. Experimental studies are highly needed in this area to determine the causal relationship between these variables in order to imply causality. Longitudinal studies are also needed to have a better understanding about the psychosocial determinants of adolescent behavioral and emotional problems

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Search terms

Social and emotional learning; SEAL/SEL interventions; prosocial, social interaction; social skills; skills for life; self-esteem; empathy; emotional intelligence; emotional regulation; emotional management; positive school ethos; interpersonal intelligence; gregariousness; mindfulness.

Databases searched

Academic Search Complete

ERIC (EBSCO)

Education Source

Google scholar

ProQuest Central

ProQuest Dissertations

Web of science