



Vol. 3 No. 12 (December) (2025)

Effect of Social Emotional Learning on Peer Relationship And Academic Achievement at University Level

Dr. Muhammad Shabbir

Assistant Professor, Department of Education, Government College University
Faisalabad, Punjab, Pakistan Email: drmuhammadshabbir@gcuf.edu.pk

Dr. Shafqat Rasool

Assistant Professor, Department of Education, Government College University
Faisalabad, Punjab, Pakistan Email: dr.shafqat.rasool@gcuf.edu.pk

Dr. Khuda Baksh (Corresponding Author)

Associate Professor, Department of Education, Government College University
Faisalabad, Punjab, Pakistan

ABSTRACT

This paper explored the impact of Social Emotional Learning (SEL) on the peer relationships and performance at the university level. The main aim was to investigate the effects of SEL competencies to interpersonal interactions and academic outcomes of students who are currently identified as vital elements of student success and well-being in the university. The research addresses the increased attention of educators and policy makers towards the implementation of SEL models to improve emotional intelligence and social skills in universities.

The type of the research design used was a quantitative correlational research design, the target population was students of the public sector universities in Faisalabad, Punjab. A structured questionnaire was used to gather data as the questionnaire was created in consideration of objectives of the study and it was validated by experts in the field. The sample size was 300 students who were chosen based on convenience sampling comprising of 150 students of Government College University Faisalabad and 150 students of the University of Education, Faisalabad Campus. Spreadsheet SPSS version 26 was used to do descriptive (frequencies, means, and standard deviations) and inferential (independent samples t-tests and Pearson correlation) statistics analysis. Internal consistency of the instrument was justified by the use of Cronbachs- alpha which produced a reliability coefficient of 0.781.

The results revealed that the positive correlation between Social Emotional Learning and peer relationships is strong implying that SEL can be used to reinforce the social interaction of students. Nevertheless, the association between SEL and academic performance was not statistically significant. The study will suggest, based on these findings, that universities should address the need to integrate organized SEL efforts into their curriculum, and foster socially supportive learning settings to foster the social growth and general well-being of students.

Keywords: Social Emotional Learning, Peer Relationship, Academic Achievement, University Students

Abbreviation: Social Emotional Learning (SEL), Peer Relationship (PR), Academic Achievement (AA), University Students (US)



Vol. 3 No. 12 (December) (2025)

INTRODUCTION

Academic performance of students is closely related to their social behaviour (Zins et al., 2007). Social skills of the students influence their academic achievements (Ray and Elliott 2006). The expectations and values are influenced by the social environment of colleges, which can make students remain engaged in their studies by generating their own ideas and collaborating with teachers and other learners (Belsky, Booth-LaForce et al. 2006). To receive a more helpful and improved education, students should acquire numerous skills in life. The most significant are social skills. Behaviour and social skills are different in school. It is the use of these behavioural elements that allow a person to integrate and understand the various social environments better rather than the inverse.

As it has been demonstrated, social-emotional learning (SEL) programs improve the academic, behavioral, and social-emotional progress of children and the classroom environment. Moreover, other programs assume that the enhanced classroom social processes like organization and emotional support will help clarify the influence of the programs on the results of the children. Most pre- and post-secondary instructors believe that students are active listeners who take part in numerous learning tasks including staying on track and problem solving. Although all people would prefer to have these social skills, students had a problem with problem-solving, active listening, and attention (Greenberg et al., 2017).

The research problem addressed in this study is how social-emotional learning affects peer relationships and academic performance in the case of university students. The social and emotional learning has become an important part of the learning process, which focuses on the acquisition of skills like self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship building and responsible decision making. The pressure of studying, interpersonal problems and emotional stressors usually constitute a complicated mixture of factors that university level students have to deal with. These aspects may have a strong influence on their social life and performance. In addition, this study aims to fill this research gap by exploring how much SEL interventions or competencies affect peer relationship and academic performance among college students.

Objectives of the Study

To identify the level of social emotional learning with peer relationship and academic achievement?

To access the nature of relationship among social emotional learning and academic achievement?

Research Questions

To identify the level of social emotional learning peer relationship and academic achievement?

To access the nature of relationship among social emotional learning and academic achievement?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Social emotional learning (SEL) is the process that enables people (and students in particular) to learn all the knowledge, skills and attitudes needed to control their emotions, build healthy relationships, as well as make moral and deliberate choices. The most important aspects of SEL are self-awareness, self-regulation, empathy, social skills, and responsible decision-making. Self-awareness entails an individual being aware of



Vol. 3 No. 12 (December) (2025)

his/her own feelings and values and how they affect actions. Self-management or self control is the capacity to manage one self in various situations in the most appropriate manner. One of the most important interpersonal skills in building and maintaining good relations is effective communication and social awareness is the skill that indicates how the person can learn to relate with people of different backgrounds. Making responsible decisions implies thinking about the decision based on individual and societal interests. These elements together constitute emotional intelligence which is an essential aspect of academic performance as well as personal development (Greenberg et al., 2017).

The inclusion of these SEL elements in academic programs creates the conditions in which students are encouraged to learn and control their feelings. As an illustration, academically strong students have better capacity to deal with stress and pressure when they have a good level of self-regulation. Also, an introduction to different cultural attitudes fosters concern, which results in greater tolerance and respectful communication between different groups of students- a vital quality in modern college environment (Sklad et al., 2012). Such an overall approach to strategy does not only increase academic engagement, but also minimizes disciplinary problems by fostering a learning environment that is inclusive and supportive to all students who feel respected and valued.

The actual framework of the application of social-emotional learning (SEL) in higher education has not been widely adopted yet but different attempts have been made to incorporate SEL into college education. Wang, Wilhite, Young, and Bleomker (2012) designed and implemented a social-emotional learning program based on freshman seminar as a study. They used the quasi-experimental design that combined both qualitative and quantitative approaches to the analysis that showed that the scores of emotional awareness, interpersonal communication, perspective-taking, and self-regulation decreased significantly between the pretest and the post-test. Moreover, students enrolled in the program had better GPAs than students that did not participate in the program.

On the same note, the University of Arizona adopted the Wildcat Track program that includes an organized SEL curriculum (Savitz-Romer et al., 2015). The program is aimed at improving cognitive strategies, meta-cognitive awareness and academic self-efficacy of the students. Workshops and one-on-one work with learning specialists help participants in the process of developing the necessary cognitive and emotional competencies. This led to one-third of the students taking part in the program being taken off academic probation during the next semester and their cumulative GPA improved to 70 percent as compared to 60 percent. Nevertheless, the research did not investigate the possibility that the change of academic performance was directly occasioned by participating in the program.

Social-psychological interventions have also been implemented in the efforts to develop social-emotional competencies in college. They are short and inexpensive strategies usually designed to build personal skills and are often marketed as being efficient (Yeager & Walton, 2011). These interventions are particularly convenient in the academic setting, as they are very simple (Yeager et al., 2016b). The most essential concepts that are tackled by K-12 SEL programs, including mindset, self-efficacy, and emotion regulation, are reflected in these psychological interventions as well. Both strategies are oriented toward the creation of more comprehensive SEL skills such as self-awareness and self-management.

The breadth of interventions with the use of SEL has expanded, and many programs are currently aimed at various processes of students (Harackiewicz and Priniski, 2018).



Vol. 3 No. 12 (December) (2025)

Despite such interventions being very effective in research, it cannot be assigned that individual tasks are developed to focus on each skill one at a time through out the college career of a student. Thus, a more comprehensive solution, which incorporates various interventions and competencies into unified curricula, can be required to promote the social-emotional side of college students. In order to achieve this, institutions need to ensure that they come up with an elaborate conceptualization of the effect of these skills on academic attainment and student retention. Nonetheless, studies in this field continue to be multifaceted as a result of inconsistent evidence and practices of implementation.

The positive outcomes of SEL are obvious, and the process of its implementation into the sphere of higher education is not always that simple:

Lack of Resources: In most colleges and universities, there are not enough qualified personnel, financial resources, and facilities to effectively implement SEL programs.

According to people, SEL is more applicable to elementary and middle school students, and it is why the university stakeholders are skeptical about the possibility of its application at this stage.

Curriculum Overload: It requires proper planning to balance the programs of SEL with the academic programs so that both students and teachers do not get too much at a time.

Testing Concerns: The issue of measuring the effectiveness of SEL programs is difficult due to the subjectivity of socio-emotional skills and the numerous aspects of this topic.

METHODOLOGY

The researcher used a quantitative research design based on a correlational study to explore the correlation between Social Emotional Learning (SEL), peer relationships, and academic attainment at the university level. The sample population included students of a public sector universities in Faisalabad, Punjab especially those who were exposed to SEL practices in their school systems. A convenience sampling design was applied in the selection of the sample consisting of 300 students (150 students of Government College University Faisalabad and 150 students of the University of Education, Faisalabad Campus). A structured questionnaire based on the purposes of the study and other relevant literature was used to get data, and the reliability of the questionnaire was checked before the data were collected.

The analysis of data was performed by means of SPSS version 26. The sample and key variables characteristics were summarized with the help of descriptive statistics (frequency, percentages, means, standard deviations). To answer the research questions, inferential statistical tools were used: independent samples t -tests and ANOVA were used to compare demographics, Pearson correlation used to test the relationship between SEL, peer relationships, and academic achievement, and regression analysis was used to test the predictive value of SEL on peer relationships. The results are provided and explained in terms of tables, starting with an independent samples t-test by faculty.

Table 1

Independent Samples t-test by Faculty (Physical vs. Social Sciences)

Variable	Faculty	N	Mean	SD	t	p
SA	Physical	209	3.78	0.58	0.66	.510
	Social	100	3.83	0.58		
SM	Physical	209	4.56	3.22	0.23	.814
	Social	100	4.48	3.03		
So.A	Physical	209	7.92	10.90	0.57	.569



Vol. 3 No. 12 (December) (2025)

	Social	100	7.24	9.17		
RRA	Physical	209	8.34	11.95	-0.46	.651
	Social	100	9.02	12.50		
RDM	Physical	209	7.26	10.63	-0.30	.763
	Social	100	7.64	10.15		

Note. No statistically significant differences were observed ($p > .05$).

On the analysis of Table 1, the statistics have shown that there is no statistically significant difference between the students studying the physical sciences and social sciences in all of the mentioned dimensions of SEL (SA, SM, So.A, RRA, RDM). The average scores of both groups are strikingly close to each other, and all p-values are more than the standard result of .05, showing that faculty background does not have any significant effects on social-emotional learning competencies of students.

Table 2: Regression between SEL Components and CGPA.
Correlations Between SEL Components and CGPA (N = 309)

Variable	CGPA	SA	SM	So.A	RRA	RDM
CGPA	1	.02	-.01	-.02	-.02	-.01
SA	.02	1	.16**	.10	.09	.07
SM	-.01	.16**	1	.54**	.61**	.49**
So.A	-.02	.10	.54**	1	.76**	.78**
RRA	-.02	.09	.61**	.76**	1	.74**
RDM	-.01	.07	.49**	.78**	.74**	1

Note. ** $p < .01$.

As it can be seen in Table 2, CGPA does not significantly correlate with any SEL component. However, there are strong, statistically significant positive correlations between the SEL components themselves, implying that the dimensions of SEL are very interconnected and are likely to change simultaneously.

Table 3: Interrelationship Among the Peer Relationship Dimensions.
Intercorrelations Among Peer Relationship Dimensions (N = 309)

Variable	ISD	PSD	TSD	IS
ISD	1	.79**	.80**	.79**
PSD	.79**	1	.79**	.83**
TSD	.80**	.79**	1	.85**
IS	.79**	.83**	.85**	1

Note. ** $p < .01$.

Table 3 shows that there are significant positive correlations among all the dimensions of peer-relationships (ISD, PSD, TSD, IS). These results suggest that the improvement of one aspect of peer interaction is strongly connected with the improvement of other aspects, which speaks of the holistic nature of peer interaction.



Vol. 3 No. 12 (December) (2025)

Table 4: Peer Relationship and CGPA Correlations

Variable	CGPA	ISD	PSD	TSD	IS
CGPA	1	-.03	-.03	-.04	-.04
ISD	-.03	1	.79**	.80**	.79**
PSD	-.03	.79**	1	.79**	.83**
TSD	-.04	.80**	.79**	1	.85**
IS	-.04	.79**	.83**	.85**	1

Note. **p < .01.

Table 4 shows that the peer-relationship dimensions have no significant relationships with CGPA. On the other hand, the peer relationship variables show very close interrelationships which confirm that even though peer relationships are socially significant, their direct effect on academic performance is not pronounced.

Table 5: Core Correlations Among SEL, Peer Relationship, and CGPA

Variable	SEL	Peer Relationship	CGPA
SEL	1	.78**	-.03
Peer Relationship	.78**	1	-.04
CGPA	-.03	-.04	1

Note. **p < .01.

Table 5 indicates that there is a strong positive relationship between Social-Emotional Learning and Peer Relationship that is statistically significant. Conversely, CGPA does not show significant correlation with either SEL or peer relationships, perhaps suggesting that SEL is an upsurger of social development and not academic success.

Table 6: Regression of Peer Relationship on SEL

Model	R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	SEE
1	.78	.61	.61	5.79

Table 6 shows that Social-Emotional Learning explains the variation with peer relationships to the tune of about 61.9%. The large values of R and R² show that SEL is a strong predictor of peer-relationship quality.

Table 7: ANOVA Regression model

Source	SS	df	MS	F	p
Regression	16054.38	1	16054.38	479.13	<.001
Residual	10286.78	307	33.51		
Total	26341.16	308			

The fact that the regression model is statistically significant as shown in Table 7 means that SEL is a valid predictor of peer relationships. This finding shows that the association that is observed cannot be due to chance.



Vol. 3 No. 12 (December) (2025)

Table 8:
Regression Coefficients Predicting Peer Relationship

Predictor	B	SE	β	t	p
Constant	0.51	0.46		1.10	.273
SEL	1.12	0.05	.78	21.89	<.001

Table 8 reveals that the Social-Emotional Learning is a powerful positive indicator of peer relationships. One unit of growth in the area of SEL results in a significant increase in the peer-relationship scores, which also shows the practical value of SEL of developing positive social interactions.

Conclusion

Using the outcomes of the current research, we can draw a conclusion that the concept of Social Emotional Learning (SEL) has a great and positive influence on the development of peer relations among college students. The findings again and again proved that the social-emotional competencies of students self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making are closely interrelated and jointly result in healthier and more supportive relationships among students.

The analysis also found that the university affiliation (physical sciences vs. social sciences) does not play a major role in determining SEL competencies which means that social-emotional competencies are acquired in the same way regardless of academic discipline. This implies that SEL is a universal concept that can be used on students in any discipline.

The main conclusion of this study is that SEL and peer relationship does not have a significant direct correlation with academic achievement (CGPA). Although SEL is a strong predictor of the quality of peer relationships, it seems that academic performance is affected by other issues other than social-emotional and interpersonal spheres. This means that SEL has more to do with social well being of students, emotional adjustment and interpersonal effectiveness and not change in grades.

The empirical evidence of the predictive value of SEL was also strong as regression analysis revealed that SEL predicts about 61 percent of the variance in peer relationships. This underscores the fact that SEL is a strong predictor of positive social interaction and peer support in the university level. All in all, the results indicate that SEL is critical to promoting a positive, collaborative and inclusive university environment despite its indirect effects on academic performance.

Recommendations

According to the findings of this paper, it is possible to suggest the following recommendations:

Curriculum Inclusion of SEL at Universities

Social Emotional Learning must be formally included in academic and co-curricular programs in universities. Peer relationships can be considerably improved with the help of structured SEL activities devoted to the emotional regulation, empathy, communication skills, and conflict resolution.



Vol. 3 No. 12 (December) (2025)

Staff and Faculty Development in SEL

University teachers and academic staff should be provided with professional development programs that will help them to become familiar with SEL-based instructional strategies. Instructors that serve as role models in social-emotional skills are capable of impacting on the interpersonal growth of students in a positive way.

Encouraging Teamwork and Cooperation

The institutions should promote group learning, group projects, and peer mentoring systems where students would have a chance to apply SEL skills in actual academic and social settings.

Whole Child Vision of Student Success

Administrators and policymakers need to have a more comprehensive definition of student success and no longer view CGPA as the sole outcome and start incorporating social competence, emotional well-being, and interpersonal effectiveness as the major outcomes of higher education.

Counseling Programs and Support Services

Universities must enhance counseling and student supporting services which facilitates emotional well being and healthy peer relationships especially among students who have social or emotional difficulties.

Future Research Directions

It is recommended that future research indicate the indirect mechanisms by which SEL can be related to academic success, including motivation, engagement, resilience, and stress management. It is suggested to use longitudinal and mixed-method research designs to address the long-term effects.

REFERENCES

- Al-Mazroui, H., Al-Fahim, A., & Al-Hammadi, Y. (2018). The role of social-emotional learning programs in enhancing academic achievement in the UAE. *International Journal of Educational Research*, 89, 133–144.
- American Psychological Association. (2020). *Publication manual of the American Psychological Association* (7th ed.).
- Arnett, J. J. (2000). Emerging adulthood. *American Psychologist*, 55(5), 469–480.
- Asher, S. R., Parker, J. G., & Walker, D. L. (1998). Distinguishing friendship from acceptance. In W. M. Bukowski et al. (Eds.), *The company they keep* (pp. 366–405).
- Bavarian, N., Kessler, R. S., & Durlak, J. A. (2012). Social emotional learning and character development. *Prevention Science*, 13(4), 414–428.
- Belsky, J., Booth-LaForce, C., et al. (2006). Classroom contexts and social behavior. *Developmental Contexts in Middle Childhood*, 3(1), 217–236.
- Brackett, M. A., Rivers, S. E., & Salovey, P. (2012). Emotional intelligence. *Social and Personality Psychology Compass*, 5(1), 88–103.
- CASEL. (2020). What is social and emotional learning (SEL)?
- Corcoran, R. P., Cheung, A. C., Kim, E., & Xie, C. (2018). Universal SEL programs and achievement. *Educational Research Review*, 25, 56–72.
- Creswell, J. W., & Creswell, J. D. (2018). *Research design* (5th ed.).
- DeLay, D., Hanish, L. D., Martin, C. L., & Fabes, R. A. (2016). Peer relationships and



Vol. 3 No. 12 (December) (2025)

- achievement. *Developmental Psychology*, 52(4), 599–610.
- Durlak, J. A., Domitrovich, C. E., Weissberg, R. P., & Gullotta, T. P. (2011). Enhancing students' SEL. *Child Development*, 82(1), 405–432.
- Elias, M. J., & Arnold, H. (2006). *The educator's guide to emotional intelligence and academic achievement*.
- Greenberg, M. T., Domitrovich, C. E., & Bumbarger, B. K. (2017). SEL and prevention of school failure. In *Handbook of SEL*.
- Harackiewicz, J. M., & Priniski, S. J. (2018). Improving outcomes with interventions. *Advances in Motivation Science*, 5, 1–47.
- Jones, S. M., Doolittle, E. J., & McLaughlin, J. A. (2017). Beyond the classroom. *Review of Educational Research*, 87(1), 1–40.
- Mahoney, J. L., Durlak, J. A., & Weissberg, R. P. (2021). SEL competencies. *Educational Psychologist*, 56(4), 238–259.
- Savitz-Romer, M., Rowan-Kenyon, H., & Fancsali, C. (2015). SEL in postsecondary settings. *Change*, 47(5), 26–34.
- Sklad, M., Diekstra, R., & De Ritter, M. (2012). SEL and academic performance. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 104(1), 138–150.
- Walberg, H. J. (2005). SEL and achievement. *International Journal of Educational Research*, 43(1–2), 5–15.
- Wang, M. T., Wilhite, S. C., Young, J. P., & Bleomker, D. (2012). SEL in college freshmen. *Journal of College Student Development*, 53(5), 745–760.
- Yeager, D. S., & Walton, G. M. (2011). Social-psychological interventions. *Review of Educational Research*, 81(2), 267–301.
- Zins, J. E., & Elias, M. J. (2007). SEL and academic achievement. *Educational Leadership*, 64(1), 6–11.