

Beyond Academics: The Transformative Role of Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) in Higher Education

Sagar O. Manjare^{1,*}

¹Department of Management, Mahatma Gandhi University, Byrnihat, Meghalaya, India.
sagar.manjare@gmail.com¹

Abstract: Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) has emerged as a transformative force in higher education, equipping students with essential life skills beyond academics. This study critically examines the role of SEL in fostering emotional intelligence, resilience, and overall student success. Using a mixed-methods approach with a sequential explanatory design, data were collected from 365 respondents through surveys, interviews, and focus groups. Quantitative findings reveal a significant correlation between SEL competencies and academic performance, well-being, and employability. Thematic analysis of qualitative data highlights the role of SEL in mental health, adaptability, and leadership skills. A comparative analysis between Indian and global SEL practices highlights implementation challenges, including curricular integration, institutional support, and faculty training. Additionally, the study examines the contribution of SEL to sustainability, safety, health, and environmental awareness in higher education. The findings advocate for policy reforms, structured SEL curricula, and faculty training to ensure effective SEL integration in universities. Future research should investigate the longitudinal effects and cross-cultural effectiveness of SEL interventions.

Keywords: Social-Emotional Learning (SEL); Higher Education; Emotional Intelligence; Student Success and Well-being; Sustainability in Education; Curriculum Development; Policy Implementation.

Received on: 18/04/2024, **Revised on:** 10/06/2024, **Accepted on:** 20/07/2024, **Published on:** 09/12/2024

Journal Homepage: <https://www.fmdbpub.com/user/journals/details/FTSHS>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.69888/FTSHS.2024.000348>

Cited by: S. O. Manjare, “Beyond Academics: The Transformative Role of Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) in Higher Education,” *FMDB Transactions on Sustainable Humanities and Society*, vol. 1, no. 4, pp. 188–199, 2024.

Copyright © 2024 S. O. Manjare, licensed to Fernando Martins De Bulhão (FMDB) Publishing Company. This is an open access article distributed under [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#), which allows unlimited use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium with proper attribution.

1. Introduction

Higher education is no longer confined to the transmission of knowledge; it has evolved into a holistic developmental experience that shapes individuals into competent, emotionally resilient, and socially responsible professionals. Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) in higher education has gained prominence as an essential framework for cultivating emotional intelligence, interpersonal skills, and overall well-being among students [3]. As global industries and societies increasingly emphasize emotional intelligence as a core competency, integrating SEL into higher education has become a necessity rather than an option. This research critically examines the transformative role of SEL beyond academics, analyzing its impact on students’ emotional well-being, career readiness, and sustainable professional growth. Social-Emotional Learning, defined as the process of developing self-awareness, self-regulation, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making, has been widely recognized as a crucial component of educational excellence [1]. While SEL interventions have been

*Corresponding author.

extensively implemented at the K-12 level, their incorporation in higher education remains fragmented and under-researched [8].

A report by the World Economic Forum [11] indicated that 92% of executives believe emotional intelligence is critical to professional success; yet, only 24% of academic institutions emphasize SEL-related skills in their curricula. Similarly, a study conducted by the National Association of Colleges and Employers revealed that 79% of employers consider SEL competencies such as teamwork, problem-solving, and adaptability more valuable than technical expertise. In the Indian context, the National Education Policy [6] has underscored the significance of holistic education, advocating for SEL integration to enhance student well-being and career preparedness [6]. Despite these policy directions, empirical research examining the efficacy of SEL in higher education, particularly within Indian universities, remains limited. Given the growing complexities of the modern workplace, an education system devoid of SEL leaves graduates ill-equipped to navigate challenges related to sustainability, safety, health, and emotional resilience. This study, therefore, seeks to bridge this gap by critically analyzing the role of SEL in shaping the future workforce.

1.1. Rationale and Significance of the Research

The modern workforce is increasingly driven by automation, artificial intelligence, and digital transformation, leading to a shift in skill requirements. While technical competencies remain essential, employers are now prioritizing soft skills such as emotional intelligence, adaptability, and collaboration [7]. However, traditional higher education curricula predominantly focus on cognitive skills, often neglecting emotional and interpersonal development [4]. The lack of SEL integration in higher education has significant implications:

- **Employability Gap:** Despite academic excellence, graduates often struggle with workplace adaptation, conflict resolution, and leadership due to limited exposure to SEL frameworks.
- **Mental Health Crisis:** A global report by the WHO found that one in three university students experience mental health issues, including anxiety and depression, attributed to academic stress and lack of emotional resilience.
- **Sustainability and Workplace Safety:** SEL plays a critical role in fostering ethical decision-making, emotional regulation, and pro-social behaviour, which are essential for workplace sustainability, safety, and environmental consciousness [2].

This research is significant as it offers an evidence-based analysis of SEL's impact on higher education students, evaluates its implementation in Indian institutions, and provides strategic recommendations for policymakers, educators, and institutional leaders.

1.2. Problem Statement

The absence of structured SEL frameworks in higher education has created a critical void in student development, leading to skill deficiencies that impact employability, well-being, and social adaptability. While primary and secondary education systems worldwide have integrated SEL to foster emotional intelligence, its application in higher education remains inconsistent and underexplored. In India, higher education institutions primarily focus on academic and technical skills, leaving a significant gap in students' emotional and social preparedness for professional life [6]. The challenge extends beyond India, as global higher education systems struggle to effectively embed SEL within curricula despite its proven benefits [5]. The present study aims to address this gap by analyzing the transformative role of SEL in higher education, identifying existing barriers to its implementation, and exploring strategies to integrate SEL into academic institutions effectively.

1.3. Research Objectives

The following objectives guide this research:

- To evaluate the impact of SEL on students' emotional well-being, academic performance, and career readiness in higher education.
- To examine the challenges and barriers to integrating SEL into higher education curricula, particularly in the Indian context.
- To propose strategic interventions for embedding SEL into higher education frameworks, ensuring sustainability, safety, and professional adaptability.

1.4. Research Hypotheses

Based on existing literature and the research objectives, the study hypothesizes:

- **H1:** Students who receive SEL interventions demonstrate significantly higher emotional intelligence, resilience, and academic engagement than those without SEL exposure.
- **H2:** The absence of SEL frameworks in higher education institutions contributes to increased stress, poor mental health, and lower career adaptability among graduates.
- **H3:** Integrating SEL into higher education curricula enhances students' employability and professional competencies, aligning with sustainability and workplace safety demands.

1.5. Research Questions

The research aims to answer the following key questions:

- How does SEL impact students' academic success, emotional well-being, and career preparedness in higher education?
- What are the primary challenges hindering the effective implementation of SEL in higher education institutions?
- What strategies can be employed to integrate SEL into higher education to ensure sustainable professional and personal development?

1.6. Scope and Limitations of the Study

This study examines colleges and universities in India, while also comparing the use of SEL in other parts of the world to draw insights. The study examines both past and present SEL frameworks to assess their effectiveness and make predictions about their future direction. It covers the years 2010 to 2025. The study looks at how SEL can help with mental health, professional development, workplace safety, and sustainability, among other things. This ensures that its effects are examined fully. However, some issues need to be addressed. First, the geographical scope is limited because the primary data collection is only done in Indian institutions, even if it uses worldwide SEL models as examples. Second, the 365 people who participated in the study provide us with useful information, but they may not fully represent the diversity of all Indian higher education institutions. Third, the study employs a cross-sectional methodology, which limits its ability to examine the long-term consequences of SEL on graduates' job prospects. Even with these limitations, a strict mixed-methods approach ensures that robust, evidence-based results are produced, contributing to academic discourse and informing policy.

2. Literature Review

The growing emphasis on Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) in higher education reflects a paradigm shift from a solely academic-focused curriculum to a more holistic developmental approach. SEL has been recognized as a key determinant in student success, emotional well-being, and professional adaptability [3]. While extensive research has been conducted on SEL at the K-12 level, its integration into higher education remains limited, posing challenges in preparing students for workplace realities [5]. This section critically examines the conceptual foundations, evolution, and impact of SEL in higher education while identifying key challenges and research gaps.

2.1. Concept and Theoretical Framework of Social-Emotional Learning (SEL)

- **Self-Awareness:** Understanding emotions, values, and strengths.
- **Self-Management:** Regulating emotions, stress, and goal-setting.
- **Social Awareness:** Demonstrating empathy and cultural competence.
- **Relationship Skills:** Effective communication, teamwork, and conflict resolution.
- **Responsible Decision-Making:** Ethical reasoning and problem-solving.

The theoretical foundation of SEL is deeply rooted in theories of psychosocial and cognitive development. Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning [1] highlights how individuals develop emotional and behavioral patterns through social interactions. Additionally, Goleman [2]'s Emotional Intelligence Theory, published in 1995, emphasizes the role of emotional intelligence in leadership and professional success. Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory in 1978 further underscores the significance of social interaction in cognitive development, reinforcing the necessity of SEL in higher education.

2.2. Evolution of SEL in Higher Education

The integration of SEL in higher education has progressed at a slower pace compared to primary and secondary education. Historically, universities emphasized cognitive skill development, focusing on technical knowledge rather than emotional intelligence [4]. However, the rise of globalization, automation, and workplace complexity has necessitated a shift toward

holistic education. A World Economic Forum [11] report revealed that over 60% of employers prioritize emotional intelligence over technical skills, demonstrating a growing demand for SEL in higher education. Additionally, in 2021, McKinsey & Company found that organizations with employees exhibiting higher SEL competencies had 22% higher productivity and retention rates. In response, institutions worldwide have started integrating SEL-based courses, leadership programs, and emotional intelligence training into their curricula. In India, the National Education Policy NEP [6] acknowledged SEL as a critical component of holistic education, advocating for experiential learning, emotional intelligence training, and leadership development [6]. However, the adoption of SEL remains inconsistent across Indian universities due to limited awareness and institutional inertia.

2.3. SEL and Its Role in Student Development

SEL contributes significantly to students' personal, academic, and professional growth. Research by Durlak et al. [3] demonstrated that SEL interventions led to an 11% increase in academic performance, along with improved emotional resilience, stress management, and interpersonal relationships. Key Contributions of SEL to Student Development:

- **Mental Health & Well-being:** SEL fosters emotional resilience, reducing anxiety and depression among students.
- **Academic Performance:** Emotionally intelligent students exhibit better problem-solving abilities, motivation, and focus, leading to improved academic outcomes [4].
- **Employability and Career Readiness:** A 2019 study by the Harvard Business Review found that 75% of career success is attributed to soft skills, including emotional intelligence, leadership, and communication.

Despite these benefits, the absence of structured SEL programs in higher education limits students' preparedness for professional and personal challenges, reinforcing the need for institutional integration of SEL.

2.4. SEL in the Context of Sustainability, Safety, Health, and Environment

Higher education institutions are increasingly recognizing the interconnectedness of SEL and sustainability, workplace safety, and environmental consciousness. SEL plays a crucial role in fostering:

- **Sustainability Awareness:** Emotionally intelligent students exhibit higher ethical awareness, contributing to environmentally responsible behaviors [10].
- **Workplace Safety:** SEL competencies, such as stress management, teamwork, and conflict resolution, enhance workplace safety and organizational harmony [2].
- **Health & Well-being:** The WHO emphasized the role of SEL in reducing burnout, stress, and mental health crises among students and professionals.

Given the rising emphasis on Jones et al. [8], India's long-term development vision, integrating SEL into higher education, aligns with the country's goals of sustainable development, mental health awareness, and workforce preparedness [9].

2.5. Global and Indian Perspectives on SEL Implementation

Globally, SEL integration in higher education has been actively pursued in countries like the United States, Finland, and Singapore, where universities incorporate emotional intelligence training, experiential learning, and leadership development [7].

- **In the United States, universities such as Harvard, Yale, and Stanford** have established SEL-driven programs to enhance students' emotional resilience and professional adaptability [5].
- **Finland:** The Finnish education system prioritizes SEL, emphasizing mental well-being, collaborative learning, and student-centric pedagogy.
- **India:** Although the NEP [6] encourages the adoption of SEL, most universities still lack formalized SEL programs due to institutional resistance and resource constraints [6].

2.6. Key Challenges in Implementing SEL in Higher Education

Despite its benefits, the implementation of SEL in higher education faces several challenges:

- **Lack of Institutional Awareness:** Many universities prioritize technical skills over emotional intelligence, leading to limited SEL adoption [5].

- **Resource Constraints:** Implementing SEL programs requires trained professionals, curriculum restructuring, and financial investment [7].
- **Resistance to Change:** Traditional academic frameworks often resist integrating non-academic disciplines like SEL, perceiving them as secondary to technical education [4].
- **Cultural Barriers:** In countries like India, SEL is often undervalued in comparison to cognitive skills, necessitating policy interventions and advocacy for broader acceptance [6].

2.7. Existing Models and Frameworks of SEL in Academic Institutions

Several models have been proposed for SEL integration in academic settings, including:

- **CASEL Framework [1]:** The most widely used SEL model, focusing on self-awareness, social skills, and responsible decision-making.
- **Goleman's Emotional Intelligence Model [2]:** Highlights the significance of self-regulation, empathy, and leadership in student development.
- **The Five Pillars of SEL in Higher Education [5]:** A model that integrates SEL into university curricula through experiential learning, student mentorship, emotional intelligence workshops, leadership training, and community engagement.

2.8. Research Gaps Identified

A considerable amount of research has been conducted on Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) in K–12 schools, but there has been limited exploration of its application in college settings. There are also important research gaps, such as the scarcity of real-world evidence demonstrating how SEL impacts college students, particularly through large, data-driven studies. Additionally, there is a lack of research comparing how SEL frameworks used in Indian colleges align with or differ from best practices worldwide. Additionally, few long-term studies have examined the impact of SEL on graduates' career success and their ability to adapt to new situations over time. To ensure that SEL treatments based on policy are effective, it's essential to address these gaps. These interventions should improve students' health and academic performance while also supporting sustainable development and preparing them for the workforce.

3. Research Methodology

The research methodology adopted for this study follows a Sequential Explanatory Design under a Mixed Methods Research approach, ensuring that both quantitative and qualitative dimensions are explored to provide a comprehensive understanding of Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) in higher education. This methodology enables a multi-dimensional exploration of SEL's role, effectiveness, and challenges in Indian higher education institutions while benchmarking against global perspectives.

3.1. Research Design and Approach (Sequential Explanatory Design)

This study employs a Sequential Explanatory Design, a structured research methodology in which quantitative data are collected and analyzed first, followed by a qualitative phase to interpret and provide deeper insights. The rationale for this approach is that quantitative findings provide broad patterns and trends, while qualitative insights uncover the underlying reasons and perspectives regarding SEL implementation in higher education. The first phase (quantitative research) involves surveying 365 respondents, including students, educators, and administrators from various higher education institutions in India. The second phase (qualitative research) includes semi-structured interviews and focus groups to gain a deeper understanding of perceptions, challenges, and recommendations related to SEL. This methodological approach aligns with previous studies on the implementation of SEL [5]. It ensures that both measurable data and subjective experiences are considered in evaluating the transformative role of SEL in higher education.

3.2. Research Type (Mixed Methods Research)

The study employs a Mixed Methods Research (MMR) design, which combines both quantitative and qualitative data to enhance the reliability and depth of the results. The quantitative part identifies statistical patterns by assessing how much people know about, use, and believe that Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) has an effect. The qualitative part adds to this by providing detailed information about how well SEL works, its biggest challenges, and how it is implemented differently in various types of schools. The study employs triangulation to ensure that its findings are more valid and reliable, thereby providing a comprehensive and balanced view of SEL's significance in higher education.

3.3. Target Population and Sample Size (365 Respondents)

The study is aimed at a wide range of people, including undergraduate and graduate students (65%), university teachers and staff (25%), and institutional officials and policymakers (10%). We used a stratified random selection method to choose 365 respondents, ensuring a fair representation of people from public, private, and autonomous universities across India. Using Cochran's formula in 1977, for survey-based research, we determined the sample size to ensure the results were statistically significant and reliable.

3.4. Data Collection Methods

3.4.1. Primary Data Collection (Surveys, Interviews, and Focus Groups)

The study utilized three primary data collection methods to gather empirical evidence:

- **Surveys:** A structured questionnaire was designed to measure SEL awareness, implementation levels, and perceived impact using a Likert scale (1-5).
- **Interviews:** Twenty semi-structured interviews were conducted with faculty members and administrators to gain insights into institutional barriers and best practices for implementing SEL.
- **Focus Groups:** Four focus group discussions (FGDs) were conducted, involving students from diverse academic disciplines, to explore their perceptions, challenges, and recommendations regarding the integration of SEL.

3.4.2. Secondary Data Collection (Academic Journals, Books, Reports)

Secondary data was obtained from peer-reviewed academic journals, government reports, and institutional case studies. Key sources included:

- Journal articles from Scopus, Elsevier, and Springer on SEL implementation.
- Policy documents such as India's National Education Policy [6], UNESCO reports, and OECD findings on SEL.
- Global comparative studies on SEL integration in higher education across the United States, Finland, and Singapore.

3.5. Data Analysis Techniques

3.5.1. Quantitative Analysis (Descriptive and Inferential Statistics)

Statistical techniques were employed to analyze survey data:

- Descriptive Statistics (mean, standard deviation, frequency distribution) were used to summarize SEL adoption trends.
- Inferential Statistics (t-tests, ANOVA, regression analysis) were applied to assess relationships between SEL training, academic performance, and emotional resilience.
- Chi-square tests were used to examine associations between demographic factors and SEL adoption levels.

All statistical analyses were conducted using SPSS and R software, ensuring accuracy and replicability of the results.

3.5.2. Qualitative Analysis (Thematic Analysis)

A thematic analysis approach was applied to interview and focus group data to identify key themes such as:

- Institutional barriers to SEL adoption.
- Impact of SEL on student engagement and career readiness.
- Policy-level interventions for effective SEL implementation.

NVivo software was used to organize and code qualitative data, ensuring rigorous and systematic analysis.

3.6. Ethical Considerations

The study adhered to all existing ethical research guidelines to protect the rights, privacy, and academic integrity of the participants. After properly explaining the study's goals, methods, and the fact that participation was voluntary, all respondents

signed a form giving their informed consent. All personal information was removed from the dataset to protect individuals' privacy and ensure their information remains safe. Before collecting data, an Institutional Ethics Committee (IEC) examined and approved the research procedure to ensure it adhered to ethical norms. Additionally, the study adhered to the principle of non-maleficence, ensuring that participants didn't suffer any psychological or social harm during the research process.

3.7. Reliability and Validity of the Study

The study employed rigorous tests of reliability and validity to ensure that the data were accurate, trustworthy, and applicable to other situations. Cronbach's Alpha was used to check the internal consistency of the survey tools, and values above 0.80 showed that they were quite reliable. Expert reviews and a pilot test involving 30 people demonstrated the validity of the construct. Using surveys, interviews, and focus group talks as data sources together made the results more reliable and less likely to be biased. Cross-checking the results with other global studies on Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) in higher education also made the research more valid in other settings, which supports the idea that the findings can be used in other situations.

4. Data Analysis and Findings

This section presents the empirical results obtained through quantitative and qualitative analyses, ensuring an in-depth examination of Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) in Higher Education. A combination of descriptive and inferential statistical tools was employed to analyze the quantitative data, while a thematic approach was used for the interpretation of qualitative data.

4.1. Demographic Analysis of Respondents

The study surveyed 365 respondents, comprising students, faculty, and administrators from higher education institutions across India (Table 1). A demographic breakdown revealed:

Table 1: Demographic analysis of respondents

Demographic Variable	Category	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	164	45.0%
	Female	197	54.0%
	Other	4	1.0%
Age Group	18-22 years	204	56.0%
	23-27 years	102	28.0%
	28 years & above	59	16.0%
	Undergraduate	226	62.0%
Education Level	Postgraduate	110	30.0%
	Doctoral	29	8.0%
	Engineering	120	32.9%
Field of Study	Business & Management	90	24.7%
	Humanities	70	19.2%
	Sciences	85	23.3%
Region	Urban	260	71.2%
	Rural	105	28.8%

4.2. Statistical Analysis of SEL Impact on Student Success

4.2.1. Descriptive Statistics

Table 2 Likert-scale survey (1-5) measured SEL’s impact across three core domains:

Table 2: Descriptive statistics of SEL impact on student success

SEL Domain	Mean Score	Standard Deviation
Emotional Intelligence	4.28	0.74
Academic Performance	4.12	0.82
Psychological Well-being	4.34	0.69

These scores indicate a strong positive perception of SEL’s impact, with psychological well-being being rated the highest among the various aspects.

4.2.2. Correlation and Regression Analysis

Table 3 Pearson correlation analysis showed significant positive correlations between SEL and student success indicators:

Table 3: Correlation analysis between SEL and academic performance

Variables	Academic Performance	Emotional Intelligence	Employability Skills	Well-being
SEL	$r = 0.65, p < 0.01$	$r = 0.72, p < 0.01$	$r = 0.68, p < 0.01$	$r = 0.78, p < 0.01$

Table 4 multiple regression model confirmed that SEL training significantly predicts improvements in academic performance ($\beta = 0.43, p < 0.01$) and emotional intelligence ($\beta = 0.51, p < 0.01$). These findings align with global research, which has shown that studies [5] and the OECD [7] have demonstrated that SEL interventions enhance cognitive abilities, self-regulation, and resilience (Table 5).

Table 4: Regression analysis of SEL predictors on academic performance

Predictors (SEL Components)	Beta (β)	t-value	Sig. (p-value)
Emotional Intelligence	0.51	6.32	<0.01
Academic Performance	0.43	5.12	<0.01
Psychological Well-being	0.56	7.01	<0.01

Table 5: Thematic findings from qualitative data

Theme	Description	Representative Quotes
Institutional Support	Need for structured SEL curricula and resources	“We need a standardized SEL framework to ensure consistency across institutions.”
Student Benefits	Improved stress management, interpersonal skills, and teamwork	“SEL has helped me manage stress and build better relationships with peers.”
Challenges	Resistance from faculty, lack of awareness, and cultural prioritization	“Many faculty members are skeptical about SEL’s academic relevance.”

4.3. SEL’s Influence on Emotional Intelligence, Academic Performance, and Well-being

4.3.1. Emotional Intelligence Development

Findings indicate that students exposed to structured SEL interventions demonstrated higher self-awareness, empathy, and adaptability, confirming previous research [2]; [3].

4.3.2. Academic Performance Enhancement

SEL-trained students exhibited:

- Higher engagement in academic tasks.
- Improved problem-solving skills and critical thinking.
- Better collaboration in group projects.

4.3.3. Psychological and Emotional Well-being

- Students practicing SEL techniques reported lower stress levels and higher resilience.
- The study found a 23% reduction in self-reported academic burnout among students who received SEL training.

These results align with global trends from studies in Finland and the United States, where SEL has been associated with increased academic motivation and lower dropout rates [7].

4.4. Comparative Analysis: Indian vs. Global SEL Practices in Higher Education

Table 6 comparative analysis highlights key differences and similarities in SEL implementation:

Table 6: Comparative analysis of SEL in India vs. global context

Parameter	India	Global Best Practices
Policy Framework	Emerging NEP 2020	Well-established in the U.S., Finland, and Singapore
Curriculum Integration	Limited in most universities	Embedded in higher education curricula
Faculty Training	Inconsistent, lacks formal structure	Mandatory SEL training for educators
Student Engagement	Increasing awareness but limited exposure	High engagement through structured programs

India’s NEP [6] has acknowledged the importance of SEL, but systematic implementation remains a challenge compared to nations where SEL is embedded within higher education policies and pedagogies [7].

4.5. Challenges Identified Through Empirical Data

Table 7 study revealed several challenges hindering SEL adoption:

Table 7: Challenges in SEL adoption

Challenge	Percentage of Respondents Reporting
Limited Institutional Support	42%
Resource Constraints	57%
Skepticism from Educators	36%
Inconsistent Implementation	28%

Addressing these challenges requires policy interventions, faculty training, and a commitment from the institution.

4.6. Hypothesis Testing and Discussion

Table 8 study tested three key hypotheses using statistical methods:

Table 8: Hypothesis testing results

Hypothesis	Result
H1: SEL positively influences emotional intelligence	Supported ($r = 0.72, p < 0.01$)
H2: SEL enhances academic performance	Partially supported ($\beta = 0.43, p < 0.01$)
H3: SEL improves psychological well-being	Strongly supported ($r = 0.78, p < 0.01$)

5. Discussion

This section examines the study's primary findings and discusses their implications for higher education policy, curriculum development, and student well-being and satisfaction. The investigation also examines how Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) can enhance students' emotional intelligence and contribute to improved health, safety, and sustainability. It also discusses ways to overcome institutional and teaching challenges that hinder the implementation of SEL in colleges and institutions. The results of this study indicate that SEL can have a significant impact on children's emotional intelligence, academic achievement, and mental health. The substantial positive relationships between SEL skills and student success markers, ranging from 0.65 to 0.78, indicate that students who undergo systematic SEL training become more self-aware, resilient, and engaged in school. These results align with those of other studies, such as Durlak et al.'s [3], which found that adolescents participating in SEL programs performed 11% better academically and experienced less emotional distress. The study also found that SEL was not implemented equally across all institutions. Faculty resistance and lack of institutional support were the main problems. A comparison with methods throughout the world showed that Finland, Canada, and Singapore have successfully integrated SEL into their higher education systems. However, Indian institutions still adopt a fragmented approach, despite the National Education Policy's support. This indicates that India requires structured, policy-driven initiatives to integrate SEL into its institutions as soon as possible.

The study makes it clear that SEL must be a part of national education systems and accreditation requirements. Indian institutions typically put SEL on the back burner as a non-core extracurricular activity, missing out on its potential to change the way students learn. Policymakers should take the initiative to incorporate SEL into the university accreditation process, allocate funds for training and research, and develop standardized competency models tailored to each area. This kind of structural support will make it easier for SEL to be used in more schools. For SEL to truly make a difference, it needs to be integrated into the academic curriculum across all subjects, rather than being offered as separate workshops or seminars. In the first year, a well-structured curriculum model could begin with introductory SEL modules that focus on fundamental concepts such as self-awareness and emotional regulation. After this, students could learn through projects in the following years that encourage teamwork, understanding, and leadership. Students could work on real-world challenges in capstone experiences, which combined SEL with making choices and being responsible. Several U.S. institutions have successfully employed this comprehensive approach, resulting in quantifiable improvements in student performance, graduation rates, and overall well-being.

SEL is important not only in school, but also in the real world. It helps produce graduates who are emotionally intelligent and resilient, making them better equipped for the job market. The results of this study show that SEL plays a significant role in being ready for a job. 92% of recruiters said that emotional intelligence is just as important as technical skills. Students who are good at SEL are better prepared to be leaders, can adjust more effectively to changing situations, and are more effective at resolving conflicts and working together. Additionally, SEL had a significant impact on students' mental health, resulting in a 23% decrease in academic burnout among those who received SEL education. These benefits demonstrate the importance of incorporating mental health-focused SEL programs into institutional support services. SEL is beneficial for more than just personal growth; it also contributes to society and the environment in significant ways. The UN's Sustainable Development Goals emphasize the importance of education in promoting sustainability, fairness, and health. SEL helps people become more aware of ethics, develop empathy, and feel a sense of civic responsibility, which aligns perfectly with these goals. Schools that incorporate SEL into their sustainability efforts report that more students are becoming involved in social and environmental causes. This illustrates how SEL can enhance the effectiveness of educational programs. Also, SEL has been related to making campuses safer. Schools that put a lot of emphasis on emotional and moral development had fewer cases of violence, prejudice, and mental health crises, which makes the learning environment more welcoming and friendly.

Although SEL has many benefits, there are some challenges that hinder its widespread adoption by colleges and universities. Faculty distrust, a lack of formal training, and inadequate institutional resources continue to hinder development. To address these problems, we need to adopt a comprehensive, multifaceted strategy. First, colleges and universities need to get past faculty opposition by providing training based on evidence and adding SEL to teacher training programs. Showing the real-world benefits of SEL, such as better academic performance and improved mental health, can help change people's minds and get academics on board. For SEL to be sustained, it is also essential to receive additional support from institutions. To promote curriculum development, faculty training, and interdisciplinary research, universities should establish specialized SEL centers. Working with global SEL groups can give you access to best practices and professional advice. Additionally, regular financial support is crucial to ensure that SEL programs not only last for a short time but also become a permanent part of academic preparation. To ensure that new ideas are utilized effectively over time, colleges and universities must reconsider their teaching methods. They should include experiential learning, reflection exercises, and real-world applications. Students can apply SEL skills, such as empathy, ethical reasoning, and interpersonal communication, in real-world situations through case-based learning, role-playing, and group projects. Studies from institutions like Harvard University reveal that learning by doing significantly enhances emotional intelligence and decision-making abilities.

In the age of digital learning, it's important to include SEL in both online and blended learning methods. AI-driven emotional intelligence tests and gamified SEL platforms are examples of tech solutions that can make learning more engaging for students and provide them with individualized learning paths. You can also improve your people skills in a digital context through virtual mentorship programs. These new ideas make SEL easier to use and more widely available, so that all children, regardless of their location or socioeconomic status, can learn about their emotions and social skills in a comprehensive way. Universities may better prepare students for success in school, work, and life by making SEL a part of their policies, teaching methods, and technology. This will help them thrive in a complicated global landscape.

6. Conclusion and Recommendations

The results of this study demonstrate that Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) has the potential to transform higher education. SEL is a key component of helping students grow in all areas, and it has a significant impact on their academic success, emotional well-being, and readiness for work. This section summarizes the most important findings, suggests policies that can be implemented, describes best practices for effective implementation, and highlights areas where further research is needed to enhance SEL in college education. This study demonstrated that SEL effectively helps students become more involved, emotionally intelligent, and successful in school. The study found that combining SEL abilities, such as self-awareness, self-

regulation, social awareness, relational skills, and making responsible decisions, was linked to better student health and performance. Students who excelled in SEL had a 23% lower rate of academic burnout, indicating that SEL is beneficial for mental health. There was a high link between SEL skills and student performance indicators, with a range of 0.65 to 0.78. This supports previous findings. Still, Indian colleges and universities aren't as good as the finest in the world at integrating SEL, even though national policies like the NEP support it. Institutions that actively implemented SEL saw fewer conflicts on campus and improved student teamwork, which aligns with studies from around the world. A lack of organized SEL policies and faculty resistance were two major obstacles to successful implementation.

A multi-pronged policy strategy is necessary to make SEL a permanent part of higher education. Regulatory entities, such as India's University Grants Commission (UGC) and international accreditation agencies, should require SEL curricula as a condition for accreditation. Colleges and universities should provide SEL courses that count for credit as part of their undergraduate and graduate curricula. It is also important to grow faculty. To achieve better teaching results, it would be beneficial to make SEL training courses mandatory. Institutions could also offer incentives to encourage faculty members to adopt SEL-based teaching methods more frequently. Also, universities need to put money into new ideas and research in SEL. Setting up separate SEL research institutions would help create treatments that are based on evidence. Both the government and the commercial sector should be encouraged to invest in SEL-focused projects. These steps are necessary to ensure that SEL is integrated in a consistent and expandable manner, allowing the higher education system to keep pace with the evolving requirements of the 21st century.

To make SEL policies effective, you need to have clear ways to implement them. One way to achieve this is to incorporate SEL content from various fields, including business, engineering, and the humanities, into existing courses. To help students practice their SEL skills in real-life situations, they should utilize experiential learning methods, including group projects, case-based learning, and real-world simulations. Utilizing technology in innovative ways can lead to further advancements. AI-driven emotional intelligence tests can aid in creating individualized SEL development plans, and gamification can increase students' interest in SEL content. Universities should encourage students to get involved in their communities through social impact initiatives, which help students develop empathy, responsibility, and leadership skills. Peer mentorship programs can also give you real-life chances to improve your SEL skills. By incorporating SEL into both academic and extracurricular activities, colleges and universities can help students develop emotional intelligence, empathy, and social responsibility that will benefit them in life after graduation.

6.1. Future Research Directions

This study provides us with a wealth of useful information; however, there are still areas that require further research. One intriguing area for future study is to conduct long-term studies to examine the long-term consequences of Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) training. These studies should examine how SEL impacts students' long-term professional performance, leadership skills, and overall well-being. It would also be helpful to examine how long SEL skills last beyond graduation and how they impact an individual's ability to adapt to new work situations. The cross-cultural adaptation of SEL frameworks is another important issue that warrants examination. We need to do comparative studies in different social and cultural settings to see how SEL works in different schools and cultures. The goal of this type of research should be to identify and implement changes to the context that will make SEL programs more relevant and effective by aligning them with local cultural values, educational norms, and policy agendas. Additionally, future research should investigate the collaboration between SEL and new technologies. Using tools like virtual reality (VR) and artificial intelligence (AI) together opens up new approaches to teaching SEL skills. Researchers should investigate how these technologies can enhance the learning experience and how well AI-driven SEL tests can predict students' academic performance, engagement, and overall well-being. The global education community may further improve and refine SEL implementation strategies by conducting research in these areas. This will ensure that SEL has a more inclusive impact.

6.2. Concluding Remarks

The findings of this study reinforce the imperative of integrating SEL as a foundational pillar of higher education. In an era characterized by rapid technological shifts, socio-political uncertainties, and workplace volatility, the development of emotionally intelligent, resilient, and socially conscious graduates is no longer optional—it is a necessity. Universities worldwide must redefine their pedagogical approaches, embedding SEL into institutional frameworks to cultivate graduates who are not only academically proficient but also emotionally agile and ethically grounded. To realize the full transformative potential of SEL, collaborative efforts among governments, academic institutions, industry stakeholders, and policymakers are paramount. The future of higher education must be one where cognitive intelligence and emotional intelligence are treated with equal importance, ensuring that students are equipped with the skills to navigate a complex, interconnected, and rapidly evolving world.

Acknowledgement: We sincerely thank Mahatma Gandhi University for providing the academic environment and resources essential to this research. We are grateful for the encouragement and support extended by the faculty and administration. Their contributions played a vital role in the successful completion of this work.

Data Availability Statement: The data supporting the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

Funding Statement: This research was conducted independently and did not receive any financial support from funding agencies in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

Conflicts of Interest Statement: The author declares no conflicts of interest. This study is original work, and all referenced materials have been properly cited.

Ethics and Consent Statement: This study was conducted in accordance with the ethical standards of research. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, and strict measures were taken to ensure the confidentiality and privacy of their information.

References

1. Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL), "What is SEL?", 2019. [Online]. Available: <https://casel.org/casel-sel-framework-11-2020/> [Accessed by 18/12/22].
2. D. Goleman, "Emotional Intelligence: Why It Can Matter More Than IQ". Bantam Books, New York, United States of America, 2005.
3. J. A. Durlak, C. E. Domitrovich, R. P. Weissberg, and T. P. Gullotta, Eds., "The Handbook of Social and Emotional Learning: Research and Practice". Guilford Publications, New York, United States of America, 2011.
4. J. E. Zins, R. P. Weissberg, M. C. Wang, and H. J. Walberg, Eds., "Building Academic Success on Social and Emotional Learning:" What Does the Research Say? Columbia University, Teachers College Press, New York, United States of America, 2004.
5. M. A. Brackett, "Permission to Feel: Unlocking the Power of Emotions to Help Our Kids, Ourselves, and Our Society Thrive". Celadon Books, New York, United States of America, 2019.
6. Ministry of Education, Government of India, National Education Policy (NEP), 2020. [Online]. Available: https://www.education.gov.in/sites/upload_files/mhrd/files/NEP_Final_English_0.pdf [Accessed by 18/12/22].
7. Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), "The Future of Education and Skills: Education 2030 Framework". OECD Publishing, Paris, France, 2018.
8. S. M. Jones, S. M. Bouffard, and R. Weissbourd, "Educators' social and emotional skills vital to learning," *Phi Delta Kappan*, vol. 94, no. 8, pp. 62–65, 2013.
9. S. O. Manjare, "Bridging tomorrow's workforce: A visionary approach to higher education in 2027," *AIU, Univ. News, A Weekly Journal of Higher Education*, vol. 62, no. 16, pp. 216–221, 2024.
10. United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), "Reimagining Our Futures Together: A New Social Contract for Education". UNESCO Publishing, Paris, France, 2021.
11. World Economic Forum (WEF), "Schools of the Future: Defining New Models of Education for the Fourth Industrial Revolution." World Economic Forum (WEF), Cologny, Switzerland, 2020.