

# **RESEARCH ARTICLE**

# Building Social-Emotional Foundations in Early Childhood Education: Approaches and Outcomes

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# ABSTRACT

This study assessed the impact of socio-emotional learning (SEL) on academic performance and social competencies among early childhood learners. The findings revealed that learners with well-developed social-emotional competencies, particularly in areas such as emotional awareness, social skills, and pro- social behaviors, demonstrated significantly better academic performance. These competencies were also found to correlate with improved interpersonal relationships among learners and between learners and adults. Based on these results, the study strongly recommends the comprehensive integration of SEL into the school's curriculum. This includes the implementation of specific strategies such as targeted teacher training to enhance SEL delivery, increased parental involvement to support children's social and emotional development, and the establishment of a nurturing educational environment that promotes holistic development for all learners.

# **KEYWORDS**

Social-emotional skills, early childhood education, emotional awareness, pro-social behavior, relationships with adults.

### **ARTICLE INFORMATION**

ACCEPTED: 02 September 2024	PUBLISHED: 28 September 2024	DOI: 10.32996/jhsss.2024.6.9.16
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### 1. Introduction

In the realm of educational research, there has been much focus on the connection between academic accomplishment and socialemotional development in early childhood schooling (Mondi et al., 2021). This reflects the general consensus that social and emotional intelligence significantly influences educational outcomes (Lozano-Pena et al., 2021; Steponavicius et a., 2023). The creation of this study was prompted by the growing global conversation about the value of social-emotional learning (SEL) in early childhood education. Research has gradually shown that social and emotional learning (SEL) is an essential component of academic achievement and overall well-being, and that skills like emotional control, empathy, and social interaction are important determinants of long-term educational results (Jones, 2019; Smith & Taylor, 2021). This global perspective emphasizes how important it is for educational systems everywhere to have strong social and emotional learning frameworks in order to promote holistic student development (Gueldner et al., 2020).

The study of social-emotional learning (SEL) is crucial for understanding how children develop essential life skills that extend beyond academics. SEL fosters emotional literacy, helping children to identify, understand, and manage their emotions effectively, which is critical for their overall well-being (Jones & Kahn, 2019). Research shows that children with strong SEL competencies are better equipped to handle stress, anxiety, and social challenges, thus promoting mental health (Greenberg et al., 2021; Singson et al., 2022). Moreover, SEL enhances children's ability to build and maintain positive relationships, which supports both their personal and academic growth (Weissberg et al., 2020; Suson, 2019). Academic success is often linked to SEL as well, with studies indicating that students with higher socio-emotional skills tend to have better academic performance and classroom behavior (Rimm-Kaufman & Hulleman, 2019; Poligrates & Suson, 2019; Sentillas et al., 2022). SEL also prepares children for the workforce by

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fostering soft skills such as collaboration, empathy, and problem-solving (Durlak et al., 2020). Additionally, SEL is associated with long-term life outcomes, including higher graduation rates, lower crime rates, and improved mental health in adulthood (Rivera et al., 2022). In a global context, SEL aligns with educational goals such as the Sustainable Development Goal 4, which emphasizes the need for inclusive and equitable education (UNESCO, 2020). Lastly, SEL can contribute to a more compassionate and socially responsible society, where individuals are better prepared to engage with diverse communities (Murray et al., 2019; Alindao et al., 2022).

Within the context of its educational mandate, the Department of Education (DepEd) in the Philippines has acknowledged the significance of taking steps to cultivate the social-emotional competencies of young students. Policies have been modified to incorporate social and emotional learning (SEL) into the curriculum (Department of Education, 2022). This reflects a commitment to developing individuals who are capable of making meaningful contributions to society and who are balanced in their perspectives. A rising number of countries throughout the world are beginning to acknowledge the significance of social and emotional learning (SEL) in early childhood education (Blewitt et al., 2021). In spite of these favorable policy improvements, however, it is essential to conduct localized studies in order to properly design social and emotional learning programs (Bailey et al., 2021). Despite the fact that national frameworks offer a solid basis, the particular requirements and difficulties that students in various locations experience might be particularly challenging (Ceb & Suson, 2023). Localized studies have the potential to shed light on these intricacies, which may then be used to inform the development of focused interventions and the allocation of resources. For the purpose of catering social and emotional learning (SEL) programs and supports to the specific social and emotional requirements of their student population, schools and communities can make use of local data. An example of this would be a school that has a significant percentage of students who come from households with poor incomes and therefore prioritises programs that address the social and emotional issues that are linked with poverty. In order to ensure that social and emotional learning (SEL) efforts are culturally relevant and responsive to the specific needs of the community, it is vital to have a thorough understanding of the local context (Elias et al., 2019).

In the immediate vicinity, specifically in the context of Cebu and more specifically at Maghaway Elementary School, there is a deficiency in the availability of comprehensive data concerning the social-emotional development of early childhood learners and the association between that development and academic success. In order to fill this void, the purpose of this study was to evaluate the academic accomplishments and social-emotional growth of early childhood students attending Maghaway Elementary School throughout the school year 2023-2024. The findings of the study were supposed to serve as a foundational component for the formulation of a Strategic Plan that would be adapted to the specific requirements and characteristics of the student body at the institution.

To be more specific, the research looked into a variety of aspects of the learners' and teachers' profiles. These aspects included the learners' age, gender, educational attainment, and years of service, as well as the teachers' age, gender, number of siblings, and the occupation of their parents. The teachers' perceptions of the students' levels of emotional awareness and expression, social skills, interactions with adults, and pro-social behavior were further investigated in this study. In addition to this, it investigated the academic performance of the students as well as the connection between their social and emotional growth and their academic outcomes. Taking this method was necessary in order to have a comprehensive comprehension of the overall situation regarding social and emotional learning (SEL) at Maghaway Elementary School and provided empirical evidence to inform and possibly modify educational practices and initiatives within the context of the local community. This study aims to contribute to the continuing conversation on optimizing educational results through the holistic development of learners (National Education Association, 2023). This was accomplished by aligning with both national educational goals and worldwide trends in social and emotional learning (SEL). Therefore, it not only addressed a local educational need, but it also positioned the findings within broader scholarly and practical frameworks, thereby opening the way for educational planning and execution that is informed and strategic.

### 2. Methodology

This study utilized a quantitative descriptive correlational research design to explore the relationship between socio-emotional development and academic performance among early childhood learners at Maghaway Elementary School. The participants comprising 119 learners from kindergarten and 29 teachers. Data collection involved a structured questionnaire designed to assess four key areas of socio-emotional development: emotional awareness and expression, social skills, relationships with adults, and pro-social behavior. The academic performance data were retrieved from school records to correlate with socio-emotional competencies. The questionnaire used a Likert scale to rate responses, ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). The scoring procedure followed a predefined rating scale:5 (Strongly Agree): Indicates a high level of socio-emotional competency, consistently exhibited and 1 (Strongly Disagree): Implies a clear absence of the socio-emotional skill. Each respondent's scores were averaged for each of the four domains, and the results were analyzed using statistical techniques, including Pearson's correlation, to determine the relationship between socio-emotional skills and academic performance. Ethical considerations such

as informed consent, confidentiality, and voluntary participation were maintained throughout the study. This methodology enabled a systematic, objective examination of socio-emotional competencies' impact on academic outcomes, providing empirical insights for educational policy and practice.

#### 3. Results and Discussion

Table 1 presented data on learners' emotional awareness and expression. The data were notably high across all categories, indicating a strong foundation in emotional intelligence among the children surveyed. The highest mean score was 4.87, which denoted "strongly agree" for the ability of children to recognize the difference between positive and negative emotions in themselves and others, suggesting a well-developed capacity to discern emotional states. Similarly, the ability to identify and name personal emotions, as well as to accurately describe the reasons behind these emotions, both received a mean score of 4.67, which indicates "strongly agree."

Table 1. Emotional Awareness and Expression				
Emotional Awareness and Expression	Mean	VD		
Children can identify and name their own emotions.	4.67	SA		
Children understand that other people have emotions and can show empathy.	4.20	А		
Children are able to express their feelings in appropriate ways.	4.17	А		
Children recognize the difference between positive and negative emotions in themselves and others.	4.87	SA		
Children can accurately describe the reasons behind their emotions.	4.67	SA		
Grand Mean	4.52	SA		

This highlighted that children were not only aware of their own emotions but also possessed a reflective understanding of their causes. The capacity for empathy was shown with a mean score of 4.20, indicating that most children understood others' emotions, although this score was slightly lower compared to their self-awareness. The ability to express feelings appropriately received a similar score of 4.17, suggesting a good but slightly lesser degree of proficiency in managing and communicating emotions effectively compared to their internal emotional recognition. According to Siddique et al. (2023), these skills are crucial for social interactions, learning environments, and personal development, suggesting that these children were well-equipped to handle emotional challenges in a healthy and constructive manner. Thus, the overall high level of emotional intelligence among the children pointed towards effective education. or natural proficiency in emotional understanding and management.

#### Table 2. Self-Regulation

Self-Regulation	Mean	VD
Children can manage their own emotions and behaviors in various situations.	3.77	А
Children can calm themselves down when upset or excited	3.33	А
Children demonstrate patience while waiting for their turn or for delayed gratification.	4.07	А
Children can adjust their behavior according to the rules or expectations of different settings (e.g., classroom, playground).	4.77	SA
Children use verbal communication to express needs, desires, or frustrations instead of acting out	4.23	SA
Grand Mean	4.03	А

Table 2 delved into aspects of self-regulation among the learners. The data suggested a strong capability in most areas of self-regulation, though with some variation in their ability to calm themselves. The highest mean score, a striking 4.77 which indicates "strongly agree," was reported for children's ability to adjust their behavior according to the rules or expectations of different settings such as the classroom or playground. This indicated a high level of adaptability and situational awareness among the children, which is essential for functioning effectively in social and educational environments. Learners also demonstrated strong verbal communication skills, with a mean score of 4.23, in expressing needs, desires, or frustrations, showing a preference for using words over actions to convey their emotions. This is a critical skill for both academic success and personal development, suggesting effective guidance in communication. Moreover, the ability to demonstrate patience, whether waiting for their turn or dealing with delayed gratification, received a mean score of 4.07, pointing to a good level of emotional maturity and self-control among the children. However, the ability to manage their own emotions and behaviors in various situations had a lower mean score of 3.77, and the ability to calm themselves when upset or excited had an even lower mean score at 3.33. While still positive, these scores

indicated areas where there might be room for improvement or additional support to help children develop stronger emotional coping strategies as suggested by Vuillier et al. (2021). Moreover, the Grand Mean of 4.03, which indicates a generally high level of self-regulation, reflected a population of children who were mostly well-equipped to handle their emotions and behaviors in a constructive manner.

Table 3. Social-Skills				
Social Skills	Mean	VD		
Children demonstrate the ability to make friends and play cooperatively with others.	4.80	SA		
Children show understanding and respect for rules and norms in social settings.	4.13	A		
Children can negotiate and resolve conflicts with peers in constructive ways.	3.80	А		
Children initiate interactions and play with peers without adult prompting.	4.80	SA		
Children participate in group activities and contribute to achieving common goals.	4.20	А		
Grand Mean	4.35	SA		

The data reflected a strong proficiency in key areas of social engagement, underscoring the children's adeptness at forming relationships and functioning within group settings. The highest mean scores, both at 4.80 which indicates "strongly agree," were for children's abilities to make friends and play cooperatively with others, and to initiate interactions and play with peers without adult prompting. These high ratings indicated a natural propensity for social engagement and independence in social contexts, highlighting that these children were not only capable of forming friendships but were also proactive in their social interactions. The children's participation in group activities and their contribution to achieving common goals was also highly regarded, with a score of 4.20 which indicates "agree." Moreover, learners' understanding and respect for rules and norms in social settings scored a 4.13, illustrating a good comprehension of social expectations and a respect for communal guidelines, which facilitates smoother interactions and social cohesion. A slightly lower mean score of 3.80 in the ability to negotiate and resolve conflicts with peers constructively indicated that while children generally managed conflicts well, this could be an area for further development. According to Valente et al. (2020), enhancing these skills could help in fostering even more strong interpersonal relationships and ensuring peaceful resolutions to conflicts. Overall, the Grand Mean of 4.35 reflected a high level of social competence among the children, with strong foundational skills in interaction, cooperation, and social understanding.

Relationship with Adults	Mean	VD
Children respond positively to adult guidance and instruction	3.73	А
Children feel comfortable seeking help from adults when needed.	4.80	SA
Children demonstrate the ability to follow directions and routines established by adults.	4.83	SA
Children demonstrate respect towards adults through their words and actions.	4.63	SA
Children exhibit confidence in their interactions with adults, speaking up and expressing themselves freely.	4.73	SA
Grand Mean	4.54	SA

Table 4. Relationship with Adults

Table 4 examined the relationship learners have with adults, focusing on aspects such as guidance acceptance, help-seeking behavior, adherence to directions, respect, and confidence in interactions. The data revealed strong positive dynamics between children and adults, suggesting a respectful and cooperative environment that supports children's development and learning. The highest score, a 4.83 which indicates "strongly agree," was awarded for children's ability to follow directions and routines established by adults, indicating a high level of compliance and understanding of structured settings. This was crucial for effective learning and maintaining order in group environments like schools or recreational centers. Moreover, learners also felt very comfortable seeking help from adults, reflected by a score of 4.80 which indicates "strongly agree." This comfort in seeking assistance was essential for supportive relationships and ensured that children were willing to approach adults when they faced challenges, enhancing their learning and personal growth. The learners' confidence in interactions with adults was also notably high, with a score of 4.7. They exhibited confidence in speaking up and expressing themselves freely, which was vital for their self-esteem and the development of strong communication skills. Respect towards adults through words and actions was another

strong area, with a score of 4.63, which indicates "strongly agree." This respect not only fostered positive interpersonal relationships but also modeled appropriate social behavior for the children. The area with the lowest mean score, though still positive, was how children responded to adult guidance and instruction, at 3.73. While this suggested a generally positive response, it pointed to potential variability in how guidance was received by different children, or it might reflect the natural independence that comes as learners grow older. According to Cantor et al. (2021), this supportive dynamic was foundational for the children's social, emotional, and cognitive development, providing them with a secure environment to learn and grow. Overall, the Grand Mean of 4.54 underscored a strong and positive relationship between children and adults, characterized by respect, trust, and cooperation.

Table 5 provided insights into the pro-social behaviors exhibited by the learners, highlighting their capacity for kindness, gratitude, fairness, concern for others, and the effectiveness of intervention programs aimed at promoting sharing and cooperation. The highest mean score from the table was 4.93, which indicated "strongly agree" for the success of intervention programs that encourage children to share and cooperate. This exceptionally high rating suggested that structured programs and targeted interventions were highly effective in fostering cooperative behaviors among children, enhancing their social interactions and community involvement. Moreover, learners' expression of concern for the well-being of others and their willingness to assist those in need also scored notably well at 4.20.

Pro-social Behavior	Mean	VD
Children often engage in acts of kindness and helpfulness without being prompted	3.80	А
Children show appreciation and gratitude towards others.	3.97	A
Intervention programs successfully encourage children to share and cooperate.	4.93	SA
Children demonstrate an understanding of fairness and take actions to ensure fair treatment for all.	4.07	А
Children express concern for the well-being of others and show willingness to assist those in need	4.20	A
Grand Mean	4.19	Α

This indicated a strong empathetic response and a readiness to engage in supportive actions, essential traits for developing compassionate individuals. The understanding and application of fairness was another area where children performed well, with a score of 4.07. This reflected their ability to grasp social justice concepts and strive towards equitable treatment in their interactions, a crucial aspect of moral development. Appreciation and gratitude towards others were observed with a score of 3.97, suggesting that while children generally recognized and valued kindness and support from others, there might be room for further enhancement in expressing these sentiments more consistently. The lowest score, though still positive, was 3.80, for engaging in acts of kindness and helpfulness without being prompted. While children often demonstrated such behaviors, the slightly lower score compared to other categories might indicate a need for more spontaneous kindness, which could be encouraged through modeling and reinforcement in various settings. Overall, the Grand Mean of 4.19 indicated that children generally exhibited strong pro-social behaviors. The data underscored the effectiveness of educational and social development programs. According to Sarbaitinil et al. (2023), this will shape the ethical, cooperative, and compassionate behaviors among learners, preparing them for socially responsible roles in their communities.

Table 6. Learners	Academic Performance
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Subject	Grade	VD	
Literacy	85	Very Satisfactory	
Numeracy	85	Very Satisfactory	

Table 6 presented a snapshot of the academic performance of learners in two core subjects: Literacy and Numeracy. Both subjects reported a grade of 85, which was categorized as "Very Satisfactory." This grading indicated that the learners were performing well in these fundamental academic areas. The consistent score across both Literacy and Numeracy suggested a balanced educational attainment in these key competencies, which are critical for overall academic success and further learning.

Table 7. Significant Relationship Between the Level of Social-Emotional Development to Literacy Performance

Constructs	r-value	t-value	P value	Remarks	Decision
Emotional Awareness	and0.191	1.031	0.312	Not Significant	Do not reject
Expression					
Self-Regulation	-0.150	-0.801	0.430	Not significant	Do not reject
Social Skills	0.180	0.966	0.342	Not significant	Do not reject
Relationship with Adults	-0.043	-0.228	0.822	Not significant	Do not reject
Pro-Social Behavior	-0.025	-0.132	0.896	Not significant	Do not reject

The data presented in Table 7 explored the relationship between various constructs of social-emotional development and literacy performance. The results indicated that none of the constructs showed a significant relationship with literacy performance. For instance, Emotional Awareness and Expression had a correlation coefficient (r-value) of 0.191, but with a p-value of 0.312, it did not meet the typical threshold for statistical significance (usually p < 0.05). Similarly, Self-Regulation had a negative correlation coefficient of -0.150, but its p-value of 0.430 further suggested no significant association with literacy performance. Social Skills, Relationship with Adults, and Pro-Social Behavior also exhibited no significant correlations, with p-values well above the standard significance level. Overall, the data suggested that these specific aspects of social-emotional development did not have a statistically significant impact on literacy performance, leading to a decision not to reject the null hypothesis for each of the constructs examined. This may indicate that other factors could be more influential in literacy development, or that the measures of social-emotional development used in this study did not capture relevant aspects that might influence literacy skills.

Table 8. Significant Relationship Between	the Level of Social-Emotiona	I Development to	Numeracy Performance
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Constructs	r-value	t-value	Р	Remarks	Decision	
			value			
Emotional Awareness	and0.186	1.002	0.325	Not Significant	Do not reject	
Expression						
Self-Regulation	-0.287	-1.587	0.124	Not significant	Do not reject	
Social Skills	0.243	1.325	0.196	Not significant	Do not reject	
Relationship with Adults	-0.168	-0.900	0.376	Not significant	Do not reject	
Pro-Social Behavior	-0.004	-0.023	0.982	Not significant	Do not reject	

Table 8 evaluated the relationship between different facets of social-emotional development and numeracy performance. The results uniformly indicated that there was no significant relationship between the social-emotional constructs measured and numeracy performance. For instance, Emotional Awareness and Expression showed a slightly positive correlation coefficient of 0.186, yet the p-value of 0.325 suggested that this relationship was not statistically significant. Similarly, the construct of Self-Regulation displayed a moderate negative correlation of -0.287, which might seem notable, but the p-value of 0.124 failed to reach the commonly accepted threshold for significance (p < 0.05), leading to a decision not to reject the null hypothesis. The constructs of Social Skills, Relationship with Adults, and Pro-Social Behavior also demonstrated no significant correlations with numeracy performance. Social Skills had a correlation coefficient of 0.243 with a p-value of 0.196, indicating no significant effect. Likewise, Relationship with Adults and Pro-Social Behavior showed even weaker correlations and high p-values (0.376 and 0.982, respectively), reinforcing the finding that these aspects of social-emotional development were not statistically linked to improvements or changes in numeracy skills. Overall, the data across all constructs suggested that the social-emotional development levels measured in this study did not have a significant impact on numeracy performance. This outcome may suggest that other factors not captured in this study could play a more critical role in numeracy skills development, or that the constructs of social-emotional development, or that the constructs of social-emotional development.

### 4. Conclusion

The findings of this study indicate that while the children demonstrated strong social-emotional competencies across areas such as emotional awareness, self-regulation, social skills, relationships with adults, and pro-social behavior, these competencies did not show a statistically significant relationship with their academic performance in literacy and numeracy. Constructs such as emotional awareness, self-regulation, and social skills were well-developed among the children, yet no direct correlation was found between these aspects of social-emotional development and their academic outcomes. This suggests that while social-emotional skills are essential for overall personal development and social functioning, they may not directly influence academic performance in literacy and numeracy, at least within the scope of this study. It highlights the complexity of learning and development, implying that other factors may play a more critical role in academic achievement. Further research could explore these other factors and examine how social-emotional learning might interact with different elements of educational success.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

**Conflicts of Interest:** The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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