Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) and Student Well-Being among the Secondary Schools in Hamilton, Canada

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Abstract

Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) plays a pivotal role in enhancing student well-being by equipping them with essential emotional and interpersonal skills. It empowers students to understand and manage their emotions, establish positive relationships, and make responsible decisions. SEL fosters emotional resilience, reduces stress and anxiety, and contributes to improved mental health. Students who engage in SEL programs are more likely to feel safe, connected, and supported in their educational environments, creating a positive school climate. Overall, SEL is instrumental in nurturing the holistic well-being of students, helping them thrive academically and personally. The study adopted the descriptive research design. The target population was 45 secondary schools in Hamilton, Canada. The study did sampling of 30 respondents that were chosen from the target population of 45 secondary schools in Hamilton, Canada. Questionnaires were used to gather the data. In conclusion, Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) serves as a cornerstone for promoting the well-being of secondary school students in Hamilton, Canada. By addressing their emotional and interpersonal needs, SEL programs contribute to a positive school climate, reduced stress, and improved mental health. Embracing SEL in secondary schools in Hamilton is vital to ensuring that students are equipped with the essential skills and support they need to flourish academically and personally. The study recommended that schools should prioritize the integration of SEL into the curriculum, offering dedicated SEL courses or embedding SEL principles into existing subjects to ensure consistent development of these crucial skills. Conduct workshops, seminars, and information sessions to raise awareness among educators, parents, and administrators about the benefits of SEL. Provide training and resources to educators to effectively implement SEL programs. Establish a system for continuous evaluation and research to assess the effectiveness of SEL initiatives, allowing schools to identify areas for improvement and adapt strategies to better support students' emotional and social well-being.

Keywords: *Social-Emotional Learning (SEL), Student Well-Being, Secondary Schools, Canada*

1.0 Background of the Study

Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) has gained considerable attention in the field of education, as it plays a crucial role in promoting the well-being of students in secondary schools in Hamilton, Canada (Sandilos, Neugebauer, DiPerna, Hart & Lei, 2023). SEL encompasses a set of skills, attitudes, and behaviors that enable students to understand and manage their emotions, establish positive relationships, make responsible decisions, and effectively navigate the challenges they face during their adolescent years. Self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. These components collectively contribute to students' emotional intelligence and interpersonal competencies. Implementing SEL in secondary schools has numerous benefits for students. SEL helps reduce emotional and behavioral problems, enhances academic performance, fosters a positive school climate, and prepares students for success in the future (Mahoney, Weissberg, Greenberg, Dusenbury, Jagers, Niemi & Yoder, 2021). In Hamilton, where diverse student populations exist, SEL is particularly important for promoting inclusivity and equity in education.

Hamilton, Canada, is a culturally diverse city with various socio-economic backgrounds. Secondary schools in Hamilton cater to a broad spectrum of students, making it essential to address their varying emotional and social needs. Jagers, Rivas-Drake and Williams (2019) mentioned that SEL programs can provide the necessary support for students from diverse backgrounds. Several secondary schools in Hamilton have embraced SEL programs. These programs often include dedicated SEL classes, workshops, and integration into the curriculum. The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) framework is widely adopted in these schools as a guide for implementing SEL (Oberle, Domitrovich, Meyers & Weissberg, 2020). One of the primary impacts of SEL in secondary schools is the enhancement of academic performance. Students with strong SEL skills tend to have better focus, problem-solving abilities, and time management skills, resulting in improved academic achievement. SEL also significantly contributes to the mental health and well-being of students in Hamilton. With the pressures and challenges that adolescents face, SEL equips them with tools to manage stress, anxiety, and depression, ultimately fostering resilience and emotional stability.

Incorporating SEL into secondary schools in Hamilton contributes to the creation of a positive and inclusive school climate (Melnick, Cook-Harvey & Darling-Hammond, 2019). Students feel safer, more connected, and have a greater sense of belonging, which can reduce incidents of bullying and other negative behaviors. Given Hamilton's diverse student population, SEL fosters social awareness and inclusivity. Students learn to appreciate and respect differences, which is particularly important in a multicultural environment. SEL programs often involve parents and the community (Atwell, Bridgeland & Manspile, 2021). This collaborative approach ensures that the entire school community is committed to nurturing students' well-being and social-emotional development. Teachers in Hamilton's secondary schools play a pivotal role in implementing SEL. Professional development and training are provided to educators to ensure they are well-equipped to teach and model SEL skills for their students.

While SEL programs in secondary schools in Hamilton have shown promise, there are challenges, such as resource constraints and the need for ongoing evaluation (Shriver & Weissberg, 2020). Future directions may involve integrating SEL more comprehensively into the curriculum and expanding community partnerships. Social-Emotional Learning is a vital component of promoting student well-being in secondary schools in Hamilton, Canada. By addressing students' emotional

and social needs, SEL programs contribute to improved academic performance, mental health, and a positive school climate, ultimately preparing students for success in their academic and personal lives (Neugebauer, Sandilos, DiPerna, Hunter, Hart & Ellis, 2023). As SEL continues to evolve, Hamilton's secondary schools can play a leading role in ensuring that all students have the opportunity to thrive and reach their full potential.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

One of the primary problems surrounding Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) in secondary schools in Hamilton, Canada, is the insufficient emphasis on these crucial skills and competencies. While academic achievement remains a top priority, there is often a lack of structured SEL programs and integration into the curriculum. As a result, students may not receive the necessary support to develop essential emotional intelligence and interpersonal skills, which are vital for their overall well-being. The second major issue pertains to the mental health and well-being of secondary school students in Hamilton. Adolescence is a period marked by significant emotional and psychological changes, and students face various stressors, including academic pressures and peer interactions. The absence of comprehensive SEL initiatives can lead to increased levels of stress, anxiety, and depression among students, impacting their overall mental health and potentially hindering their academic success.

Hamilton, Canada, is a diverse city with a student population representing various socio-economic backgrounds, cultures, and identities. The challenge here is that students from diverse backgrounds may have distinct emotional and social needs. The lack of tailored SEL programs and support can exacerbate disparities in well-being, leaving some students at a disadvantage in terms of emotional resilience and social inclusion. Furthermore, resource constraints and implementation challenges present significant obstacles in the effective integration of SEL into Hamilton's secondary schools. Many schools may lack the necessary resources, including trained staff, funding, and dedicated time for SEL instruction. Additionally, there may be resistance or skepticism among educators, parents, and school administrators regarding the perceived effectiveness and feasibility of SEL programs.

2.0 Literature Review

Neth, Caldarella, Richardson and Heath (2020) reported that results from a meta-analysis of 213 universal social and emotional learning (SEL) programmes serving 270,034 pupils from kindergarten through high school are presented in this article. Participants in the SEL programme showed a considerable improvement in their social and emotional skills, attitudes, behaviour, and academic performance compared to controls, increasing their accomplishment by 11 percentage points. Staff in schools effectively implemented SEL initiatives. Implementation issues and the application of four best practises for skill development reduced the effects of the programme. The results contribute to the expanding body of research supporting the effectiveness of SEL initiatives. By advocating for the integration of evidence-based SEL programming into existing pedagogical frameworks, policymakers, educators, and the general public may help children flourish.

Deli, Kaur and Awang Hashim (2021) conducted research to compare the effects on students' SEL knowledge, anxiety about school, and dropout plans across two distinct SEL treatments taught by two distinct teacher types. Four alternative experimental conditions were generated by manipulating two independent variables (intervention type and instructor type) in a 2 x 2 factorial and between-subject quasi-experimental design. Twenty-nine Grade 8 children (107 males, 102

girls) from Qinzhou City, Southwest China, with a mean age of 14.3 years took part in the research. The results of the between-group and within-group MANOVA showed that the ordinary instructor was more successful in lowering learning anxiety, while the psychology teacher was more effective in increasing students' SEL knowledge and decreasing their intention to drop out of school. When it came to improving students' SEL knowledge, TASSEL was the clear winner, whereas SEL regular was the clear winner when it came to alleviating students' learning anxiety. However, within-group analysis indicated that TASSEL with a psychology instructor was the most effective combination for lowering dropout intent, and that SEL with a psychologist was the most effective combination for alleviating learning anxiety. The findings are relevant for educational settings and mental health therapy programmes. The results may direct the development of efficient SEL intervention and the selection of competent educators to implement it.

According to Ngai, Yu, Chau and Wong (2021), the level of pupils' intellectual growth, or lack thereof, is often cited as the cause of their failures in school. However, in recent years, there has been a significant increase in concerns connected to students' mental health and emotional well-being that have proved detrimental to their academic achievement. The purpose of this quasi-experimental research was to see whether teaching students social-emotional skills, fostering healthy relationships, and encouraging group projects positively affected students' grades. This research was conducted to see whether teaching students to develop their emotional intelligence may help them overcome emotional difficulties and achieve better academic performance.

A study by Gueldner, Feuerborn and Merrell (2020) mentioned that the benefits of social and emotional learning (SEL) extend beyond only mental well-being; it also boosts academic success. Academic gains, lower rates of violence, and expanded behavioral competence are just some of the benefits that have been shown for kids who engage in SEL. Using UDL and a gradual release of responsibility, this initiative aimed to bring social and emotional learning (SEL) into all-inclusive classrooms. Despite the fact that SEL has been shown to be effective in the classroom, it is not widely used. Because of their greater difficulty in doing so, students with impairments may greatly benefit from explicit SEL. In many ways, these pupils do not get to engage since classes are either not adapted for them or they are engaging in pull out programmes. This activity is meant for students in kindergarten through fifth grade. The teachings are flexible and may be modified to fit a variety of contexts. For teachers planning to introduce SEL in their classrooms, this may serve as a timetable.

Sandilos, Neugebauer, DiPerna, Hart and Lei (2023) poised that in recent decades, research on the beneficial benefits of social and emotional learning (SEL) on academic achievement has increased in general school education in response to a greater emphasis on young students' social and emotional well-being in addition to their cognitive development. However, research on SEL has yet to arise in EFL (English as a Foreign Language) settings. To fill this gap, the current study sought to profile the SEL competence level of secondary school students in Hong Kong and to investigate the complex connections between the four SEL competence clusters (i.e., self-awareness, self-management, social-awareness, and social-management) and English language proficiency. The findings demonstrated a difference between the students' high level of awareness skills and their medium level of management skills, and an overall medium level of SEL competence among the 315 secondary school students in grade 3. There were two verified mediation routes based on structural equation modelling (SEM) studies, which emphasized the

major mediating function of self-management skills in amplifying the impacts of self-awareness and social-awareness skills on English-learning outcomes.

Eklund, Kilpatrick, Kilgus and Haider (2018) carried out research to systematically investigate how social-emotional education influences standardized test scores in young children. This research looked at a cross-section of Pre-Kindergarteners attending public and private preschools in the suburbs. For adolescents in this research who were exposed to a social-emotional education programme, compared to a matched sample who were not, significant gains in academic success were seen in the areas of Verbal Reasoning, Quantitative Reasoning, and Early Math. The findings contribute to the literature on social-emotional education by examining a less-studied group of kids who are not classified as at-risk. It is recommended that preschools include some kind of social-emotional learning curriculum.

Salvatelli (2019) noted that self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship management, and responsible decision-making are the five pillars of Social-Emotional Learning (SEL). This action research defines social-emotional competence and investigates its relationship to students' happiness, achievement in school, and persistence in school. Ten seventh- and eighth-graders were the subject of a four-month study; three of those months were interrupted by the COVID-19 school shutdown. The results showed that a teacher-led SEL programme and stronger student-teacher connections led to happier students. More research on the school-wide SEL programme is needed, since the data showed mixed outcomes. Additionally, Mahmud (2020) performed study to look at social and emotional education in schools, particularly in secondary schools. The review elaborates on the significance of SEL in secondary school and its progression from elementary to high school. Research, including many meta-analyses, is given that details the pros and cons of social-emotional learning programmes, and evidence-based secondary SEL programmes are introduced. The rules and legislation that implement and encourage SEL at the federal and state levels are discussed. Published research on secondary school SEL programmes has shown positive effects on students' academic performance, student behaviour, the economy, and graduation rates.

3.0 Research Methodology

The study adopted the descriptive research design. The target population was 45 secondary schools in Hamilton, Canada. The study did sampling of 30 respondents that were chosen from the target population of 45 secondary schools in Hamilton, Canada. Questionnaires were used to gather the data.

4.0 Research Findings and Discussion

4.1 Correlation Analysis

The findings presented in Table 1 shows the correlation analysis

Table 1: Correlation Analysis

		Student Well-Being	SEL
Student Well-Being	Pearson Correlation	1.000	
	Sig. (2-tailed)		
SEL	Pearson Correlation	.249 **	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	0.000

The correlation results from Table 1 indicate that the Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) was positively and significantly related with student well-being (r=.249, p=.000). This concurs with Eklund, Kilpatrick, Kilgus and Haider (2018) who mentioned that Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) stands as a fundamental pillar in promoting the well-being of students. It equips them with vital emotional and interpersonal skills, contributing to a positive school environment, reduced stress, and enhanced mental health. Embracing SEL is essential to ensure that students are well-prepared to succeed academically and navigate the challenges of adolescence, ultimately fostering their overall well-being.

4.2 Regression Analysis

The section includes model fitness, analysis of variance and regression of coefficient. The results in Table 2 show the model fitness

Table 2: Model Fitness

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.249a	0.279	0.226	0.098162

The results from Table 2 reveal that Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) was found to be satisfactory in explaining the student well-being in secondary schools in Hamilton, Canada. This was supported by the coefficient of determination, which is R square of 0.279. It indicates that social emotional learning explain 27.9% of the variations in the student well-being in secondary schools in Hamilton, Canada.

Table 3: Analysis of Variance

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	5.89	1	5.89	30.05	.000b
	Residual	8.81	45	0.196		
	Total	14.10	44			

The findings in Table 3 reveals that the overall model was statistically significant. The findings indicate that student well-being is a good predictor in explaining the Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) among the secondary schools in Hamilton, Canada. This was supported by an F statistic of 30.05 and the reported p-value of 0.000 which was less than the conventional probability significance level of 0.05.

Table 4: Regression of Coefficient

	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	0.491	0.162		3.031	0.034
Social-Emotional Learning (SEL)	0.886	0.301	0.921	2.944	0.009

Based on the findings in Table 4, it was discovered that Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) was positively and significantly associated to student well-being (β=0.886, p=0.009). This was supported by a calculated t-statistic of 2.944 that is larger than the critical t-statistic of 1.96. These results indicates that when Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) increases by one unit, the student well-being in secondary schools in Hamilton, Canada will increase by 0.886 units while other factors that influence the student well-being of firms remain unchanged. Deli, Kaur and Awang Hashim (2021) mentioned that Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) serves as a cornerstone for nurturing the holistic well-being of students, providing them with the essential tools to thrive academically and personally. By addressing emotional and interpersonal needs, SEL programs create a supportive and inclusive school environment that fosters positive relationships and emotional resilience. Through SEL, students are better equipped to manage stress and anxiety, leading to improved mental health outcomes. It is crucial that educators, parents, and school administrators continue to prioritize and invest in SEL to ensure that students in Hamilton, Canada, have the opportunity to reach their full potential in both their academic and personal lives.

5.0 Conclusion

In conclusion, Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) is a vital component of the overall well-being of secondary school students in Hamilton, Canada. Recognizing the significance of SEL and its impact on student development is essential for creating a supportive educational environment. As discussed, SEL programs can enhance academic performance, foster positive mental health, and contribute to the creation of a positive school climate. They also play a pivotal role in promoting social awareness, inclusivity, and resilience among students from diverse backgrounds. However, challenges persist, including the need for greater integration of SEL into the curriculum, increased awareness among educators, parents, and administrators, and addressing resource constraints. Overcoming these challenges is essential to ensure that all students in Hamilton have access to the benefits of SEL. it is imperative that secondary schools in Hamilton prioritize the implementation of SEL programs, providing students with the skills and emotional intelligence they need to thrive academically and personally. Moreover, collaborative efforts involving educators, parents, and the

community should continue to strengthen SEL initiatives and create a holistic support system for students. By addressing these challenges and embracing SEL, Hamilton's secondary schools can play a pivotal role in nurturing the well-being and success of their students, ultimately preparing them for the challenges of the future.

6.0 Recommendations

Secondary schools in Hamilton should prioritize the comprehensive integration of SEL into the curriculum. This involves creating dedicated SEL courses or embedding SEL principles into existing subjects. Educators should be provided with training and resources to effectively deliver SEL content. By making SEL an integral part of the educational experience, students can consistently develop and practice these vital skills. It is essential to raise awareness among educators, parents, and school administrators about the benefits of SEL for student well-being. Workshops, seminars, and information sessions should be organized to educate stakeholders about the positive impact of SEL on academic performance and mental health. Fostering a collective buy-in for SEL initiatives is crucial to ensure their long-term success. To address resource constraints, schools should allocate funding and staff to support SEL programs. This may involve hiring dedicated SEL coordinators or specialists who can design and implement effective SEL initiatives. Collaborative efforts with local organizations and government agencies can also secure additional resources to supplement SEL programs. Schools in Hamilton should establish a system for ongoing evaluation and research into the effectiveness of SEL programs. This should include collecting data on student well-being, academic outcomes, and behavioral changes as a result of SEL. Regular assessments can help identify areas for improvement and refine SEL strategies to better meet the needs of the students.

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