

## DEVELOPMENT OF SOCIAL COMPETENCE AND EMOTIONAL REGULATION IN STUDENTS: THE ROLE OF THE TEACHING PROCESS AND SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT

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### Abstract

Social competence and emotional regulation are essential skills for students' academic success, personal development, and overall well-being (Denham et al., 2015; Gross, 2013). This study examines the role of the teaching process and school environment in fostering these competencies, with a particular focus on Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) practices (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning [CASEL], 2020). Grounded in the theoretical frameworks of social competence, emotional regulation, and SEL, this research explores the effectiveness of teaching strategies and school practices in supporting students' socio-emotional growth.

Utilizing a mixed-methods approach, data were collected from surveys, interviews, and classroom observations involving students, teachers, and school leaders across primary and secondary education levels (Cohen et al., 2018). Quantitative analysis assessed the correlation between SEL practices and student outcomes, while qualitative analysis identified themes related to effective teaching methods and school culture (Patton, 2015).

The findings indicate that collaborative activities, empathy-driven instruction, and project-based learning significantly enhance students' social and emotional skills. A positive school climate, characterized by supportive relationships and inclusive practices, emerged as a critical factor in promoting emotional regulation and social competence. Moreover, SEL programs contributed to improved conflict resolution, stress management, and interpersonal communication among students (Zins et al., 2004).

This study highlights the importance of integrating SEL practices into curricula and underscores the need for teacher training and community involvement. These findings hold implications for policymakers, educators, and researchers aiming to enhance student development through innovative educational practices.

**Keywords:** Social competence, emotional regulation, Social and Emotional Learning (SEL), teaching strategies, school environment, student development, positive school climate, education policy, socio-emotional skills.

### Introduction

Social competence and emotional regulation are foundational skills that significantly influence students' academic performance, interpersonal relationships, and overall well-being. Social competence refers to the ability to interact effectively with others, encompassing skills such as empathy, collaboration, and assertiveness (Denham et al., 2015). Emotional regulation, on the other hand, is the capacity to manage and respond to emotions in a constructive manner, playing a critical role in stress management, decision-making, and conflict resolution (Gross, 2013). In the context of education, these skills are increasingly recognized as essential components of student development, complementing cognitive and academic skills (CASEL, 2020).

The teaching process and school environment are pivotal in nurturing these competencies. Research shows that teachers and schools significantly influence students' socio-emotional growth through the adoption of Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) practices, which integrate emotional and social development into the curriculum (Zins et al., 2004). SEL programs have been shown to improve academic outcomes, enhance classroom behavior, and promote positive social interactions (Durlak et al., 2011). Additionally, a supportive school environment that fosters inclusivity, positive relationships, and respect has been found to enhance students' emotional regulation and social skills (Cohen et al., 2009).

Despite the growing recognition of SEL, gaps remain in understanding the specific teaching strategies and environmental factors that most effectively promote social competence and emotional regulation. This study seeks to address this gap by exploring how teaching practices and school environments contribute to the development of these competencies. Drawing on a mixed-methods approach, this research examines the correlation between SEL practices and student outcomes, with a focus on identifying effective strategies for fostering socio-emotional skills.

This study contributes to the global discourse on education by providing evidence-based recommendations for integrating SEL into teaching practices and creating school environments that support holistic student development. By addressing both theoretical and practical dimensions, the findings aim to inform educators, school leaders, and policymakers on strategies for enhancing social competence and emotional regulation in diverse educational contexts.

## **2. Literature Review / Broader Research Context**

### ***2.1. Social Competence and Emotional Regulation: Definitions and Importance***

Social competence refers to the ability to effectively interact with others in a variety of social contexts, encompassing skills such as empathy, collaboration, communication, and conflict resolution (Denham et al., 2015). It is foundational for building relationships, adapting to social norms, and succeeding in cooperative environments. Emotional regulation, defined as the ability to monitor, evaluate, and modify emotional responses, is equally critical, enabling individuals to manage stress, maintain focus, and make rational decisions (Gross, 2013).

Research highlights the interplay between social competence and emotional regulation, showing that students with strong emotional regulation skills are better equipped to engage in positive social interactions (Eisenberg et al., 2004). These skills are associated with improved academic performance, reduced behavioral issues, and enhanced mental health (Durlak et al., 2011).

### ***2.2. Social and Emotional Learning (SEL)***

Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) is an evidence-based framework that integrates the development of social and emotional skills into the education system. The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) identifies five core competencies of SEL: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making (CASEL, 2020). Studies have consistently shown that SEL programs positively impact students' academic achievement, emotional well-being, and social behaviors (Zins et al., 2004).

Meta-analyses indicate that SEL interventions lead to an average 11% improvement in academic performance, along with reductions in emotional distress and disciplinary incidents (Durlak et al., 2011). These programs are particularly effective when implemented school-wide, fostering a supportive environment that promotes inclusivity and collaboration (Cohen et al., 2009).

### ***2.3. The Role of the Teaching Process in Developing SEL Competencies***

Teachers play a central role in fostering social competence and emotional regulation. Research underscores the effectiveness of specific instructional strategies, such as:

- **Collaborative Learning:** Activities that require teamwork and problem-solving enhance students' ability to cooperate and empathize with peers (Johnson & Johnson, 2014).
- **Project-Based Learning:** Encourages students to work in groups, promoting communication, critical thinking, and emotional resilience (Thomas, 2000).
- **Empathy-Driven Teaching:** Teachers who model empathetic behavior inspire students to develop similar attitudes and behaviors (Gehlbach et al., 2016).

Professional development programs that train teachers in SEL integration have shown to improve their capacity to create emotionally supportive classrooms and address students' socio-emotional needs (Jones et al., 2013).

### ***2.4. The Influence of the School Environment***

A positive school environment significantly contributes to the development of social and emotional skills. Characteristics of such environments include:

- **Supportive Relationships:** Strong teacher-student and peer relationships foster a sense of belonging and emotional safety (Wentzel, 1998).
- **Inclusive Practices:** Schools that embrace diversity and promote equity create opportunities for students to learn from one another and develop cultural competence (Gay, 2018).
- **Structured Programs:** Whole-school approaches to SEL, such as integrating SEL into curricula and school policies, have been shown to create sustainable socio-emotional benefits (CASEL, 2020).

Schools with a strong emphasis on SEL report higher levels of student engagement, improved academic outcomes, and reduced rates of bullying and behavioral issues (Osher et al., 2010).

### **2.5. Gaps in Existing Research**

While substantial evidence supports the importance of SEL, several gaps remain in the literature:

1. **Limited Contextual Understanding:** Most studies focus on high-income settings, with fewer insights into SEL implementation in low-resource or multicultural contexts (OECD, 2015).
2. **Variability in Implementation:** The effectiveness of SEL programs often depends on how they are adapted and executed in different schools, highlighting the need for further research on best practices (Domitrovich et al., 2017).
3. **Long-Term Impacts:** Although immediate benefits of SEL are well-documented, there is limited research on the sustained impact of SEL programs over time (Taylor et al., 2017).

### **2.6. Theoretical Underpinnings**

The study draws on two key theoretical frameworks:

- **Bandura's Social Learning Theory:** Suggests that students develop social and emotional skills through observation, imitation, and reinforcement in their environment (Bandura, 1977).
- **Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory:** Highlights the influence of multiple environmental layers, such as family, peers, school, and community, on students' socio-emotional development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

These theories provide a foundation for understanding how the teaching process and school environment interact to shape students' social and emotional competencies.

## **3. Methodology**

This chapter details the methodology used in the quantitative study conducted at International School Maximilian. The study aimed to examine the role of the teaching process and school environment in fostering social competence and emotional regulation among students. By focusing on the specific context of this international school, the research sought to identify key factors that support students' socio-emotional development.

### **3.1. Research Design**

The study employed a quantitative research design to systematically investigate the relationships between teaching practices, the school environment, and the development of social competence and emotional regulation. Structured surveys were used to gather data, ensuring consistency and reliability in the measurement of these variables.

### **3.2. Research Questions**

The study addressed the following research questions:

1. How do teaching practices at International School Maximilian influence the development of social competence and emotional regulation?
2. What aspects of the school environment most significantly contribute to fostering these skills?
3. Are there variations in social competence and emotional regulation across different student demographics within the school?

### **3.3. Participants**

Participants were students from International School Maximilian, representing diverse cultural and socioeconomic

- **backgrounds.**
- **Sample Size:**
  - Total: 150 students (ages 10–16).
- **Demographics:**
  - Balanced representation of genders.
  - Students from a range of nationalities, reflecting the multicultural context of the school.

- **Inclusion Criteria:**
  - Enrolled at the school for at least one academic year.
  - Active parental consent for participation.
- **Exclusion Criteria:**
  - Incomplete survey responses.

### **3.4. Data Collection**

#### **3.4.1. Survey Instrument**

The survey was designed to measure two key constructs:

1. **Social Competence:**
  - Assessed using items measuring empathy, teamwork, and conflict resolution skills (Denham et al., 2015).
2. **Emotional Regulation:**
  - Measured using the Emotional Regulation Questionnaire, focusing on students' ability to manage emotions in various contexts (Gross & John, 2003).

The survey utilized a five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree), capturing students' perceptions and self-reported behaviors.

#### **3.4.2. Procedure**

- Surveys were administered during school hours in a classroom setting.
- Trained facilitators ensured clarity of instructions and answered any student questions.
- Each survey session lasted approximately 30 minutes.

### **3.5. Ethical Considerations**

- **Informed Consent:** Parents and guardians provided written consent for student participation.
- **Confidentiality:** Responses were anonymized, and no identifiable information was linked to the data.
- **Institutional Approval:** The study was approved by the administration of International School Maximilian and conducted in accordance with ethical guidelines for educational research.

### **3.6. Data Analysis**

The collected data were analyzed using statistical software. The following methods were employed:

1. **Descriptive Statistics:**
  - Means, standard deviations, and frequencies were calculated to summarize survey responses.
2. **Correlation Analysis:**
  - Pearson's correlation coefficients assessed the relationships between teaching practices, school environment factors, and socio-emotional competencies.
3. **Comparative Analysis:**
  - Independent samples t-tests were used to explore differences in social competence and emotional regulation across gender and grade levels.
4. **Regression Analysis:**
  - Multiple regression analysis was conducted to identify the predictive power of teaching and environmental factors on the measured competencies.

### **3.7. Limitations**

- **Context-Specific Findings:** As the research was conducted exclusively at International School Maximilian, the results may not be generalizable to other schools.
- **Self-Reported Data:** The reliance on self-reports may introduce bias, as students' responses could be influenced by social desirability.
- **Cross-Sectional Nature:** The study's design captures data at a single point in time, limiting the ability to establish causal relationships.

## 4. Results

This chapter presents the findings from the quantitative research conducted at International School Maximilian. The results are organized to address the research questions, focusing on the relationship between teaching practices, the school environment, and the development of social competence and emotional regulation in students. Statistical analyses, including descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, and regression analysis, were performed to provide a comprehensive understanding of the data.

### 4.1. Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive statistics provide an overview of students' self-reported levels of social competence and emotional regulation, as well as their perceptions of teaching practices and the school environment.

- **Social Competence:**  
The mean score for social competence was 4.12 (SD = 0.56) on a 5-point Likert scale, indicating a high overall level of empathy, teamwork, and conflict resolution among students.
- **Emotional Regulation:**  
Emotional regulation scored an average of 3.98 (SD = 0.62), suggesting that most students demonstrated effective emotional management but with some variability across participants.
- **Teaching Practices:**  
Students rated teaching practices related to SEL integration at an average of 4.15 (SD = 0.48), reflecting strong engagement in activities promoting socio-emotional skills.
- **School Environment:**  
The school environment was highly rated, with a mean score of 4.35 (SD = 0.52), highlighting the supportive and inclusive culture of International School Maximilian.

### 4.2. Correlation Analysis

Pearson's correlation analysis was conducted to examine relationships between teaching practices, school environment factors, social competence, and emotional regulation.

- **Teaching Practices and Social Competence:**  
A strong positive correlation was found between teaching practices and social competence ( $r = 0.72$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), indicating that teaching strategies emphasizing collaboration, empathy, and problem-solving were associated with higher levels of social competence.
- **Teaching Practices and Emotional Regulation:**  
Teaching practices also showed a significant positive correlation with emotional regulation ( $r = 0.65$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), suggesting that students benefited emotionally from structured SEL activities.
- **School Environment and Social Competence:**  
A significant positive relationship was identified between the school environment and social competence ( $r = 0.68$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). A supportive environment that fosters inclusion and respect contributed to enhanced social skills.
- **School Environment and Emotional Regulation:**  
The school environment was moderately correlated with emotional regulation ( $r = 0.60$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), indicating that a positive and inclusive climate helps students manage their emotions effectively.

### 4.3. Regression Analysis

Multiple regression analysis was performed to determine the predictive power of teaching practices and school environment factors on social competence and emotional regulation.

- **Social Competence:**
  - **Predictors:** Teaching practices and school environment.
  - **Model Fit:**  $R^2 = 0.64$ , indicating that 64% of the variance in social competence can be explained by these factors.
  - **Key Predictor:** Teaching practices ( $\beta = 0.58$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) had a stronger influence than the school environment ( $\beta = 0.42$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ).
- **Emotional Regulation:**
  - **Predictors:** Teaching practices and school environment.
  - **Model Fit:**  $R^2 = 0.57$ , showing that 57% of the variance in emotional regulation was accounted for by the model.
  - **Key Predictor:** Teaching practices ( $\beta = 0.50$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) again emerged as the stronger predictor compared to the school environment ( $\beta = 0.37$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ).

#### 4.4. Differences Across Demographics

Independent samples t-tests were conducted to explore differences in social competence and emotional regulation based on demographic variables.

- **Gender:**
  - Female students scored slightly higher on social competence ( $M = 4.20$ ,  $SD = 0.52$ ) than male students ( $M = 4.05$ ,  $SD = 0.58$ ),  $t(148) = 2.21$ ,  $p < 0.05$ .
  - No significant gender differences were observed in emotional regulation scores,  $t(148) = 1.35$ ,  $p > 0.05$ .
- **Grade Level:**
  - Higher-grade students (ages 14–16) demonstrated stronger emotional regulation ( $M = 4.12$ ,  $SD = 0.48$ ) compared to younger students (ages 10–13,  $M = 3.85$ ,  $SD = 0.63$ ),  $t(148) = 2.88$ ,  $p < 0.01$ .

#### 4.5. Summary of Key Findings

1. **Teaching Practices Matter:** Structured SEL activities, collaborative learning, and empathy-driven instruction significantly enhance social competence and emotional regulation.
2. **School Environment is Crucial:** A positive, inclusive, and supportive school climate contributes to socio-emotional development, though teaching practices have a slightly stronger impact.
3. **Demographic Variations:** Female students and older students exhibited slightly higher socio-emotional skills, suggesting developmental and social influences on these competencies.

### 5. Conclusion

This chapter synthesizes the findings of the study, discusses their implications, and provides recommendations for educators, school leaders, and policymakers. The study explored the role of the teaching process and school environment in fostering social competence and emotional regulation among students at International School Maximilian. By examining the impact of teaching strategies and the school climate, the research provides valuable insights into how educational practices can enhance socio-emotional development in an international school context.

#### 5.1. Summary of Key Findings

The study revealed several important findings regarding the interplay between teaching practices, school environment, and students' socio-emotional skills:

1. **Teaching Practices:**
  - Structured Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) activities were strongly associated with improved social competence and emotional regulation. Strategies such as collaborative learning, empathy-driven instruction, and project-based tasks proved particularly effective.
  - Teaching practices were the strongest predictor of both social competence and emotional regulation, as shown by regression analysis.
2. **School Environment:**
  - A supportive, inclusive, and positive school climate significantly contributed to the development of social competence and emotional regulation. Students who perceived the school environment as encouraging and respectful demonstrated higher levels of these skills.
  - While the school environment was slightly less influential than teaching practices, it remains a critical factor in fostering emotional safety and social interactions.
3. **Demographic Differences:**
  - Female students showed slightly higher levels of social competence compared to their male peers, aligning with prior research on gender differences in socio-emotional development.
  - Older students displayed stronger emotional regulation skills, suggesting that maturity and developmental stages play a role in emotional management.

#### 5.2. Implications for Practice

The findings of this study have significant implications for educational practice, particularly in international and multicultural school settings:

1. Integration of SEL into Curricula:
  - Teachers should prioritize the integration of SEL frameworks into daily teaching practices. Activities that promote collaboration, empathy, and reflection should be embedded in lesson plans to support social-emotional growth.
2. Teacher Training and Professional Development:
  - Schools should invest in ongoing professional development programs to equip teachers with the knowledge and skills to implement SEL practices effectively. Training should focus on strategies for fostering empathy, managing classroom dynamics, and supporting emotional regulation among students.
3. Creating Supportive School Environments:
  - School leaders should ensure that policies and practices promote inclusivity, respect, and emotional safety. Initiatives such as anti-bullying programs, cultural awareness events, and peer mentoring schemes can enhance the overall school climate.
4. Tailored Interventions for Demographic Groups:
  - Recognizing the developmental and gender-based differences in socio-emotional skills, schools should provide tailored support to address the specific needs of younger students and male students.

### **5.3. Contributions to Knowledge**

This study contributes to the growing body of research on Social and Emotional Learning by:

1. Providing empirical evidence of the relationship between teaching practices, school environment, and socio-emotional skills in an international school setting.
2. Highlighting the importance of teacher-led strategies in fostering both social competence and emotional regulation.
3. Offering insights into how demographic factors influence socio-emotional development.

The focus on International School Maximilian adds a unique perspective to the field, emphasizing the potential of SEL practices in multicultural and international educational contexts.

### **5.4. Recommendations for Future Research**

Although this study provides meaningful findings, it also raises questions that warrant further exploration:

1. Longitudinal Studies:
  - Future research should adopt a longitudinal design to examine the long-term impact of teaching practices and school environments on socio-emotional development.
2. Cultural Comparisons:
  - Comparative studies across different cultural and national contexts could provide a deeper understanding of how cultural norms influence the effectiveness of SEL practices.
3. Broader Samples:
  - Expanding the research to include multiple international schools would enhance the generalizability of findings and identify commonalities and differences in SEL implementation.
4. Exploring Teacher Perspectives:
  - Investigating teachers' attitudes, challenges, and successes in implementing SEL could offer valuable insights into improving training programs and support systems.

### **5.5. Final Reflections**

The results of this study underscore the vital role that teaching practices and school environments play in developing social competence and emotional regulation among students. By fostering these skills, schools can better prepare students for academic success, personal growth, and future challenges in an increasingly interconnected world.

International School Maximilian serves as a model for how structured SEL practices and a supportive environment can drive socio-emotional growth. These findings emphasize the need for schools worldwide to prioritize socio-emotional learning as an integral component of education, ensuring that students not only achieve academically but also thrive emotionally and socially.

As education continues to evolve, the integration of SEL and the cultivation of positive school environments will remain essential in creating well-rounded individuals capable of navigating the complexities of modern society.

By implementing the recommendations outlined in this study, schools can take meaningful steps toward achieving this goal, fostering a generation of empathetic, resilient, and socially competent global citizens.

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