EdTech Promoting Social-Emotional Learning in India

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Table of *Contents*

Abstract

Social-emotional Learning, has been emerging as an effective process for cultivating the necessary skills, attitudes, competencies, and knowledge to learn and achieve well-being. These skills help to create a safe space for children to learn together and grow into an understanding and empathic adult. According to various researches, people with strong socio-emotional skills are better equipped to manage daily challenges, build positive relationships and make informed decisions. More than ever, students across the world report rising levels of anxiety and depression during the pandemic. In such difficult times, Educational Technology has played a major role and has been leveraged by the various educational communities to reach out to the students and make them feel less isolated.

In the recent years , India has also seen a phenomenal shift in the approach where the focus of education is to develop human beings capable of rational thought and action, possessing compassion and empathy. The New education policy talks about socio-emotional learning for the holistic development of the child. Amid school closures, technology has been helping the educational communities to be in touch with the students with various platforms like WhatsApp, Video calling, Zoom, Google Classrooms, Radio, television, to be able to reach every part of the spectrum. In the Indian context, the lack of understanding of SEL and lack of necessary levers contextualizes SEL to the diverse environments is possibly the biggest challenge in adopting SEL practice. Together, collective actions towards integrating SEL into the education system will witness a new era of digital learning. It will be able to address all the core values which make us most human.

Introduction

Social-emotional Learning (SEL) is commonly defined as "the process of acquiring core competencies to recognize and manage emotions, set and achieve goals, appreciate the perspectives of others, establish and maintain positive relationships, make responsible decisions, and handle interpersonal situations constructively"[1]. In recent years, SEL has been emerging as an effective process for cultivating the necessary skills, attitudes, competencies, and knowledge to learn and achieve well-being and success. Research has shown that SEL is most effective when integrated into daily routine practices, with explicit learning goals pursued through sequenced, active approaches. These skills help to create a safe space for everyone to learn together and grow into an understanding and empathic adult. People with strong socio-emotional skills are better equipped to manage daily challenges, build positive relationships and make informed decisions.

According to Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL), "Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) is an integral part of education and human development. SEL is the process through which all young people and adults acquire and apply the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to develop healthy identities, manage emotions and achieve personal and collective goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain supportive relationships, and make responsible and caring decisions[2]. These skills can be taught and learned from preschool through adulthood. This becomes important as people are not born knowing how to manage emotions, solve problems and get along with others[3]. CASEL's mission is to help make evidence-based and emotional learning (SEL) an integral part of education from preschool through high school. CASEL supports educators and policy leaders and enhances the experiences and outcomes for all PreK- 12 students.

More than ever, students across the world report rising levels of anxiety and depression. The Pew Research Center states that 70% of teens report strong feelings of anxiety and pressure. Since the pandemic, there has been a spike in the percentage due to school closure. Technology has been leveraged by the various educational communities to reach out to the students and make them feel less isolated. The report titled " New Vision for Education: Fostering Social and Emotional learning through technology" by World Economic Forum and the Boston Consulting Group, concludes that technology can help students develop important social and emotional skills and character traits. India has also seen a phenomenal shift in the approach where the focus of education is to develop human beings capable of rational thought and action, possessing compassion and empathy.

The New education policy talks about socio-emotional learning for the holistic development of the child. In a similar direction, the Health and Wellness Curriculum for school-going adolescents[4] under the Ayushman Bharat Scheme has been launched. State Education Departments are also actively prioritizing the momentum around social-emotional learning. "Happiness Curriculum" is one such initiative, aimed at improving the mental well-being of students developing their level of mindfulness, critical thinking, problem-solving. Technology is seen as a potential tool for parents, educators, or caregivers to complement and extend such learning experience – especially given the host of emerging technologies that go beyond traditional screens. Technologies such as virtual augmented and "mixed" reality, robots, video chats on mobile devices, and virtual tutors allow for a much less passive and more interactive experience.

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[1] https://inee.org/collections/psychosocial-support-and-social-and-emotional-learning
[2] https://casel.org/what-is-sel/
[3] https://www.understood.org/articles/en/social-emotional-learning-what-you-need-to-know
[4] https://nhm.gov.in/New_Updates_2018/NHM_Components/RMNCHA/AH/Training_Materials/Curriculum-on-Health-and-Wellness-of-School-Going-Children-English.pdf

CASEL Framework

Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) defines "Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) as an integral part of education and human development. SEL is the process through which all young people and adults acquire and apply the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to develop healthy identities, manage emotions and achieve personal and collective goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain supportive relationships, and make responsible and caring decisions[5]. CASEL's mission is to help make evidence-based and emotional learning (SEL) an integral part of education from preschool through high school. CASEL supports educators and policy leaders and enhances the experiences and outcomes for all PreK- 12 students.

CASEL has proposed an integrated framework for systemic social and emotional learning that highlights five SEL competencies promoted through multiple contexts. The framework is widely used by researchers, educators, and policymakers to help establish systematic, equitable, evidence-based social and emotional learning for all preschool to high school students. It guides the design, implementation, and continuous improvement of school-family-community partnerships, to enhance the social, emotional, and academic competencies of young people. The framework addresses five broad, interrelated areas of competencies that can be taught and applied at various developmental stages from childhood to adulthood and across diverse cultural contexts to articulate what students should know and be able to do for academic success, school and civic engagement, health and wellness and fulfilling careers.

Source: https://casel.org/sel-framework/

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[5] https://casel.org/what-is-sel/
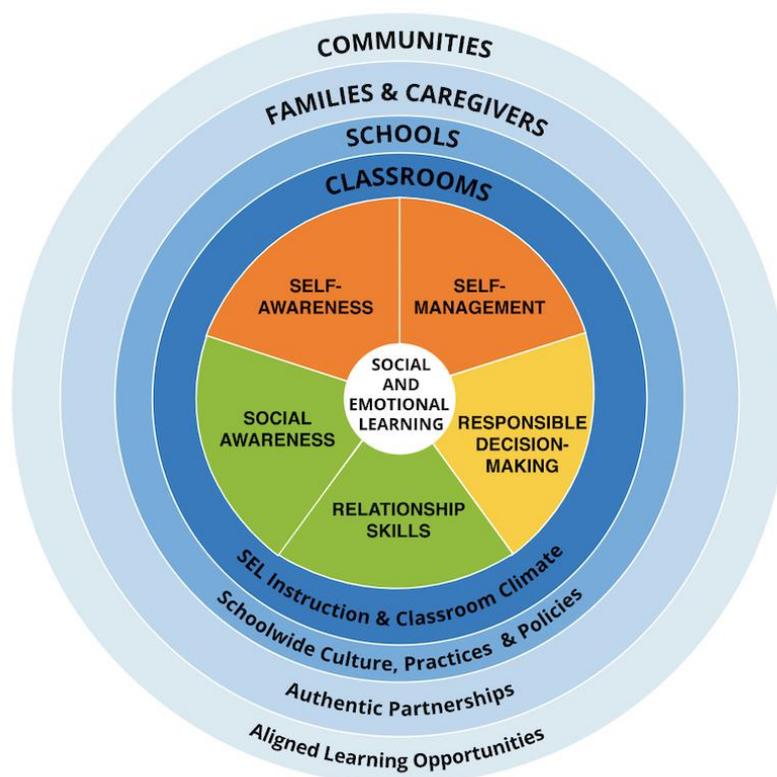
1) **Self-Awareness**: The ability to understand the perspectives of and empathize with others, including those from diverse backgrounds, cultures, and contexts. The ability to accurately assess one's strengths and limitations and possess a well-grounded sense of confidence and optimism. Includes: recognizing one's emotions and thoughts, assessing one's strengths and limitations, confidence, growth mindset.

2) **Self- Management**: The ability to manage one's emotions, thoughts, and behaviors effectively in different situations and to achieve goals and aspirations. Includes managing stress, controlling impulses, motivating oneself, and setting and working toward achieving personal and academic goals.

3) **Social Awareness**: The abilities to understand the perspectives of and empathize with others, including those from diverse backgrounds, cultures & contexts. Includes: taking the perspective of others from diverse backgrounds and cultures, empathy, understanding social and ethical norms for behavior, recognizing family, school, community resources, and support.

4) **Relationship Skills**: The abilities to establish and maintain healthy and supportive relationships and to effectively navigate settings with diverse individuals and groups. Includes clear communication, active listening, cooperation/teamwork, resisting inappropriate social norms, the realistic evaluation of consequences of various actions, and the well-being of self and others.

5) **Responsible Decision Making**: The abilities to make caring and constructive choices about personal behaviors and social interactions across diverse situations. Includes: identifying problems, analyzing a situation, solving problems, evaluation, reflection awareness of ethical responsibilities.

SEL in Education promoting SDGs

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are not necessarily a set of consistent objectives but rather a series of potentially conflicting goals[6]. Emotional resilience is the capacity to draw upon positive emotions to cope with negative and stressful experiences[7]. This requires individuals to be mindful, recognize emotional information, identify positive and negative emotions, mindfully self-regulate emotion to maintain a positive impact. Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) has emerged as a competency through which individuals recognize and regulate emotions, identify positive purpose, demonstrate empathy for others to take constructive action, and promoting human flourishing[8]. According to a report by UNESCO MGIEP titled "Rethinking Learning: A review of Social and Emotional for Education Systems", mainstreaming SEL into education can contribute to achieving the Sustainable development Goal (SDG) 4 by allowing learners to be better prepared to learn and to help develop empathy, compassion and a sense of solidarity with humanity.

The education system needs to engage all learners in a meaningful way to order to motivate them to become responsible actors at the personal, community, national and global levels. SEL effectiveness increases when it is tailored to contextual factors, such as students' emerging language skills, teachers' capacities, and realistic options for young people's engagement in SDG target 4.7 themes

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[6] Dasgupta P, Duraiappah A, Managi S, Barbier E, Collins R, Fraumeni B, Gundimeda H, Liu G, Mumford K., J. (2015) How to measure sustainability progress. Science 350:748. doi: 10.1126/science.350.6262.748

[7] ugade, M. M., & Fredrickson, B. L. (2004). Resilient individuals use positive emotions to bounce back from negative emotional experiences. Journal of personality and social psychology, 86(2), 320–333. doi:10.1037/0022-3514.86.2.320

[8] Salovey, P., & Mayer, J. D. (1990). Emotional Intelligence. Imagination, Cognition and Personality, 9(3), 185–211

beyond their schools[9]. In India, the New Education Policy introduced in 2020, recognizes the need to conceive education in a more encompassing fashion, ensuring that students become both academically as well as socially and emotionally competent. The goal is to attain holistic education using 21st-century skills with equivalent emphasis on academic as well as areas of community engagement and services, environmental education, and value-based education. While understanding of SEL as a necessary component of an effective education has gained traction in recent years, the COVID- 19 public health crisis has presented education communities with an overwhelming magnitude of fears and concerns which can lead to major psychological risk factors like anxiety, depression or even self-harm, making it even more crucial to integrate SEL into teacher and student learning. Thus, SEL becomes even more valuable in light of the reality to be able to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education supporting healthy lifelong learners.

How EdTech supports SEL among students

The classroom is the place where students are initially exposed to people who hail from a range of different backgrounds, hold different beliefs, and have unique capabilities. To account for these differences and help put all students on an equal footing to succeed, SEL aims to help students and adults. It helps them to better understand their thoughts and emotions, to become more self-aware, and to develop more empathy for others within their community and the world around them. EdTech solutions can help the education community to assess how students are developing in the socio-emotional realm. It has the potential to play a pivotal role in fostering SEL efficiently and cost-effectively. The new EdTech innovations are capable of mixing the physical and virtual worlds and facilitating forms of human interaction. Technologies such as virtual augmented and mixed reality, robots, video chats on mobile devices, and virtual tutors for a much less and more interactive experience[10]. SEL can be difficult to implement across time, geographic regions, and diverse populations. This is where digital technology plays a crucial role, these tools can provide not only a powerful supplement to existing SEL instructions but also address many of the barriers educators encounter when balancing academic instruction with SEL[11]. The potential depends upon the design of the environments wherein those digital tools provide the opportunity for social and emotional skill development.

According to a report titled "New Vision for Education: Fostering Social and Emotional Learning through Technology", by World Economic Forum in collaboration with The Boston Consulting Group, there are three key opportunities to use technology to advance SEL:

1) Capitalize on what works – Parents, educators, and caregivers can benefit from existing "ed-tech" products with features that already promote SEL. Standards based on SEL-related features can help identify products with the potential to have the greatest impact on teaching social and emotional skills.
2) Embed SEL into foundational ed-tech products – Creatively embedding SEL features into products that support foundational academic skills such as literacy and numeracy can extend SEL to areas where the vast majority of investment. Is already flowing.
3) Expand the realm of the possible – Innovative new technologies- such as wearable devices, virtual reality, and apps – can enable students to master important social and emotional skills. Not only do these technologies embrace and extend tried and true ways of fostering SEL, but they also offer the potential for exciting learning strategies.

Some of the technological tools helping students develop their social-emotional skills are:-

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[9] https://www.nissem.org/SEL
[10] http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_New_Vision_for_Education.pdf
[11] https://medium.com/inspired-ideas-prek-12/fostering-social-emotional-learning-through-technology-8da6974e54bb

Digital Games, if designed well with research-based pedagogical properties can bring transformational changes in the attitudes, knowledge, and skills of students. They provide a platform to encourage efforts and persistence, which produce emotions relating to reward and delight. Games also offer experience and help manage a wide range of emotions such as pride, frustration, gratitude, betrayal, and fear. Educators must utilize these games by integrating them into in-class and out-of-class activities, including discussions, self-reflections, peer-to-peer interaction, and creative activities. One of the greatest benefits of EdTech use in social-emotional learning is enabling students to direct their own learning experiences. Incorporating technology in SEL helps students work to their strengths and enjoy a more personal experience in the classroom. Teachers can also use various tools to better understand how students are doing with SEL skill development and their overall mindsets.

Source: https://mgiep.unesco.org/rethinking-learning
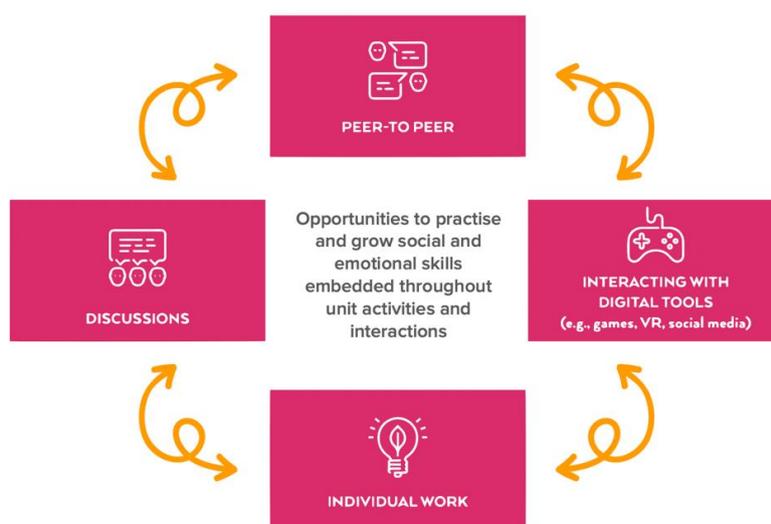
Robotics has shown promising results as a technology that helps with socio-emotional development in students. Especially for students having any social or language disorder, various robotics tools are helping in communicating them better to express how they are feeling. One such educational robotics tool, NAO Robot takes things to another level. This highly advanced humanoid is very effective with special populations, particularly students with Autism. It offers a calming presence and truly helps them get more comfortable. Platforms like Flipgrid or Wakelet, helps students to share their thoughts or new things they have learned or important topics. By voicing their real emotions, they can better connect with the content, their peers, and themselves most importantly[12]. While robots cannot replace the presence of a teacher in a classroom, but they can help retain a child's attention for more periods. They can potentially contribute to bridging the gap for students from technology to real-life interaction.

Classroom Hardware including a simple range from mic systems that are synced with other technology like a simple karaoke machine can help students with overcoming their fear of public speaking. It helps in providing opportunities to speak in front of their peers interestingly. Students get to hear their voices and being heard by others improving their confidence.

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[12] https://www.eduporium.com/blog/eduporium-weekly-edtech-and-its-place-in-social-emotional-learning/

Classroom Management Apps are designed to help teachers with better communications and classroom management skills. Such apps contribute to the social and emotional well-being of the students by making them reflect on their behavior. Apps like Class Dojo, where students can earn points in areas designated by the teacher. They can see their progress and also helps teachers and parents communicate with each other. Another such app is Bloomz, which also helps students in a similar domain. Having a simple way to track a student's choices throughout a school day gives the student the ability to reflect at the end of the day. Teachers can also look at the trends in the class overall, and set goals for improvement, and discuss with the students. This kind of regular reflection builds classroom community and empowers students to improve themselves.[13]

Such technological tools help students to work on several skills at one time. Teachers can also use these tools to their best judgments depending on what works best for the students. Linking instructional content to both their emotions and the use of technology makes the content much more real. These practices are designed to empower each student to have a voice and to expand their minds. The focus remains on making screen time more constructive and educational for the children

Initiatives in India promoting SEL skills among students

In India, Education communities recognize the importance of SEL as a holistic approach to education and are critical to a child's success. The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 brought a welcome and much-needed focus on whole child development, both in terms of curriculum and assessment. It focuses on the importance of SEL to "develop good human beings capable of rational thought and action, possessing compassion and empathy." The chapter on Early Childhood Care and Education give SEL comparable importance as other academic competencies. A majority of children are exposed to pre-existing societal issues such as violence, inequality, and poverty, affecting their overall well-being. The COVID 19 crisis made it worse for the students when they were being stuck inside their houses throughout the day, with limited options for physical and emotional outlets. Sudden changes in their lifestyle, routine, fear, and uncertainty of the disease, impacted their physical and mental well-being. Given this predicament, educators are now compelled to re-evaluate traditional forms of pedagogy to teach core skills that are applicable in a real-world setting. Technology has been helping the community to be in touch with the students with various platforms like WhatsApp, Video calling, Zoom, Google Classrooms, Radio, television, to be able to reach every part of the spectrum. Many Indian states have been working closely with various nonprofit organizations dedicated to promoting Social Emotional Learning among the students. And more and more states are now getting on board to provide psychological support to the students coming back to the school after a long time due to the school closure.
Few such initiatives are:-

Manodarpan

The national-level initiative "Manodarpan" was launched during the pandemic by the MHRD to mobilize psychological support to help children and adolescents in a comprehensive and multimodal manner. The aim is to provide psycho-social support and counseling to students for their mental health and well-being. The ministry launched a toll-free national helpline number, a dedicated website, and a handbook on 21st centaur skills. The initiative provided advisory guidelines for students, teachers, and faculty of Schools systems and Universities along with families. The webpage

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[13] https://stanfield.com/5-sel-technology-tools/

provided advisory, practical tips, posters, videos, do's and don'ts for psychological support. It also has a repository of national-level database and directory of counselors at school and university level whose services can be offered voluntarily for telephonic - counseling service on the national helpline.

Indian Social and Emotional Learning Framework (ISELF)

ISELF is a national-level research-based educational resource developed by The Teacher foundation to foster social emotional development of Indian children, using a carefully age-branded approach, from 6 years to 18 years. The objective is to help teachers, counselors, facilitators develop 5 vital social-emotional competencies in children: Self Awareness, Self-Management, Relationship Management, Social Awareness, and Decision making. The framework has been contextualized for Indian schoolchildren, incorporating some of the major international SEL frameworks like CASEL from the USA and Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning from UK and WHO's life skills. The framework is freely accessible online to all schools and teachers in multiple languages. The government also plans to share the resources with the educator community through various digital platforms launched recently like DIKSHA, training modules on the NISHTHA platform.

Labhya Foundation

Labhya Foundation, a non-profit organization that focuses on creating social-emotional (SEL) programs for young students in India. The organization was founded in 2017 and partners with Governments, Multilateral Organisations, and Non-profits to co-create scalable Social and Emotional learning programs across Public education Systems. The organization supports its partner to create an age-appropriate & inclusive curriculum in the form of mindfulness lessons, stories, activities, and expressions. The components of the program are culturally sensitive and socio-economically contextual to the children's realities. Due to an increased vulnerability during the pandemic, thousands of students migrated from cities to villages. With the help of the technology-based platforms, the organization transitioned from classroom in-person sessions to interactive voice and text messages, being sent to students and parents. These were paired with activities like - closing eyes and focusing on the breath, thinking about things you are grateful about.
The organization not only worked with students but also gave equal importance to the emotional well-being of the teachers as well. The foundation offered Zoom sessions on well-being for teachers and their capacity building on working with students on social-emotional concepts. The prompt response of the foundation to integrate technology into their programs made sure students and teachers were connected during the pandemic. The foundation partnered with various state governments in India to provide their resources to more teachers and students. Currently, the organization is working on a learning app called SELT, which is in the pilot stage. The idea is to scale up their work for a wider and better reach.

Happiness Curriculum

Launched by the Delhi State Education team, "Happiness Curriculum" helps students and teachers to practice emotion regulation, relationship building, action orientation. The curriculum calls for schools in India to promote development in cognition, language, literacy, numeracy, and the arts along with addressing the well-being and happiness of students. The objective of the curriculum includes developing self-awareness and mindfulness, including skills of critical thinking and inquiry, enabling students to communicate effectively, and help them apply life skills to deal with stressful and conflicting situations around them. The curriculum has been introduced for classes between nursery to Class 8. The students have a biweekly Happiness period for about 45 minutes. The assessment under this curriculum is quantitative, focussing on the "process rather than the outcome". Amid the pandemic, the state education team promptly leveraged digital platforms like DIKSHA, Zoom, and

Google classrooms to reach out to the students remotely. They encouraged the use of technology by adopting the right approaches to make learning more inclusive for the students.

Many state governments are now working with various organizations that believe in the importance of SEL and its role in the development of a healthy adolescent into a healthy adult. Most of these organizations understand that to develop socio-emotional learning competencies in the child, the social context of the child is important and therefore engagement with the community and the parents becomes a critical aspect of the interventions.

Challenges with the SEL adoption

Implementing SEL into the school curriculum can be potentially faced with various challenges considering the complexity of the whole process. Socio-Emotional Learning is still a new concept for many educators as well as students in the country. The incompatibility between the current curriculum and teacher's pedagogical capacity, limited focus on understanding the student's need, and perceived difficulties in integrating SEL into educational activities are some of the hurdles that the educational community has to overcome together. According to the report by UNESCO and MGIEP, some of the major challenges in SEL adoption could be:-

1) Educational policies are not being designed to include the explicit teaching of social and emotional learning. Our policies need to ensure to take into account social, economic, and cultural context while designing education policies that include SEL.

2) SEL programs and practices may vary across cultures, assessment tools for monitoring and evaluating student's social and emotional competencies need to be designed to be flexible and adaptive so that they can be seen as relevant across cultures.

3) Inadequate time for teachers' professional learning and not recognizing the importance of teacher's social and emotional competence to successfully promoting social and emotional learning in schools.

4) Current education systems are designed to encourage competition whereas research and evidence show that collaboration is key to building peaceful and sustainable societies.

5) A key challenge recognized in the use of technology is access to reliable technology is inconsistent across schools and student's homes, presenting challenges to the equitable deployment of technology-supported SEL. Moreover, the fact that successful implementation of technology-supported SEL efforts requires significant time investment on the part of already educators remains a significant barrier to adoption.

In the Indian context, the lack of understanding of SEL and lack of necessary levers contextualizes SEL to the diverse environments is possibly the biggest challenge in adopting SEL practices. Shortage of reliable and relevant instruments for assessing SEL, making it difficult to generate conclusive evidence on the ground. The current work on SEL needs to be scaled up with the contribution of various big players together and channelize the latest technological advancement in the same domain.

SEL as a way forward

Social-Emotional Learning is a core competency in the coming future as mankind has created and invented a gadget, device, or app for almost most technical and knowledge-based needs. Advancing SEL will require a sustained effort from a multifaceted group of stakeholders—including policymakers, educators, parents, researchers, businesses, technology developers, and investors. They must overcome the challenges that slow the development of SEL and related educational technologies Policymakers, in particular, must stand at the forefront of setting the agenda for policy change, prioritizing efforts that foster SEL and related assessments and measurements in education, as well as providing funding and other resources for the research and adoption of SEL and related educational technologies. The development of standards processes should be a top priority. Parents and educators also play a vital role, collaborating to capitalize on what works to foster SEL at home and school. If stakeholders work together, particularly at the all-important stage of setting the policy agenda, they can change perceptions and behaviors about SEL. Some of the recommendations by the UNESCO report are:-

1) Education policies should adhere to the principles of the learning sciences and their social and emotional facets for social and emotional skills to be imparted effectively. Thus, becomes necessary that social and emotional competencies be systematically and sustainably integrated and mainstreamed into the education system.

2) Teachers' training and professional development should include an introduction to the basics of brain development, the social brain, and the social and emotional factors, promoting the cognitive, social, and emotional development of children and adolescents.

3) In addition to the creation and implementation of SEL assessments, there needs to be a mechanism put in place to allow key stakeholders to be involved in making meaning of those data and using them for making positive changes that promote social and emotional competence and well-being of all students.

4) School and teachers training budgets should be revised to allow for SEL interventions to be integrated into classrooms and this should be done from Grade 1 onwards. Continuous investment in this should be an integral part of all education budgets. Investments should be made in professional development opportunities for educators to support them to design and implement high-quality instruction that fully integrates SEL with digital tools and academic content.

5) Enable systemic and sustained implementation of SEL programs by developing consistent policy settings, curriculum standards, and effective implementation support, including expert guidance for schools

Together, such collective actions towards integrating SEL into our education system will witness a new era of digital learning. It will be able to address all the core values which make us most human.

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