# Social and Emotional Competencies as a Factor in Enhancing Social Skills amongIntermediate Stage Students in Saudi Arabia

#### Dr. Mohamad Ahmad Saleem Khasawneh,

Assistant Professor, Special Education Department, King Khalid University, Saudi Arabia, mkhasawneh@kku.edu.sa. https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1390-3765

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#### **Abstract**

This study elucidates the extent of students' acquisition of social and emotional learning abilities in intermediate schools in Saudi Arabia. The study aimed to identify the variations in the levels of social and emotional learning abilities among intermediate students in Saudi Arabia based on gender and age characteristics. The research employed a descriptive methodology. A random sample of 236 individuals was selected using the simple selection method from the study population. To accomplish the study's aims, the researchers employed the OECD Social and Emotional Skills Study questionnaire. The study's findings revealed that students can control themselves to avoid mistakes while focusing on accuracy in performing the work assigned to them. Students establish good intentions from others and avoid making preconceived judgments. Students have emotional control, especially in situations of anger and facing frustrations and failures that they may experience during their studies and daily life situations. The results indicated statistically significant variations (±0.05) in the average estimations of the research sample regarding the knowledge of social and emotional learning among intermediate stage students in Saudi Arabia. The disparities arise from the gender variable in the overall score, with female students outperforming male pupils.

**Keywords:**emotional competency, social competency, skills, students, intermediate stage, Saudi Arabia.

#### Introduction

A person goes through many stages and changes; therefore, he needs skills and techniques to overcome these stages and emerge from them with positive changes. School is considered an important stage for acquiring various skills that contribute to the development of the individual's personality, and these life skills can be acquired by the individual unintentionally or intentionally and specifically, through social learning programs and social learning (Alnahdi et al., 2024). Social and emotional learning is seen as the initial stage in fostering a healthy and secure educational environment. Enhancing the social and emotional aspectsofacademic institutions is crucial for establishing secure and safe environments that enhance the process of learning. Classrooms characterized by positive relationships between educators and students promote profound learning, and students who feel at ease with their teachers and peers are better equipped to confront challenging topics and persist in their studies (Al-Rimawi & Al Masri, 2022).

Social and emotional learning programs develop many skills that are vital for the student's success in current and future life, such as managing responsibilities, respecting others, the ability to build relationships, working independently, and expressing emotions (Khasawneh, 2020). They also develop skills for working with others and cooperating with them, flexibility and innovation in solving problems, making decisions, and the ability to clearly define goals. Studies

have indicated that students participating in social and emotional learning programs have enhanced these skills at a high level, which has helped them to face social and personal problems more effectively (Grigorenko et al., 2020). Research conducted on more than 270,000 students who took part in a program of emotional and social skills has shown that the level of academic achievement has increased by 11%, school dropout rates have decreased, and it has had a positive impact on other problems such as drug abuse and criminal behavior (Mahoney et al., 2021).

Studies have proven that social and emotional learning programs are important in helping the educational system develop its outcomes in terms of excellence and quality in various cognitive, behavioral, and emotional aspects, and in solving many problems that cause loss of learning time, such as students' lack of desire to attend school and their lack of interaction with teachers and study materials (Ferreira et al., 2020). Social and emotional learning has recently received global attention, as the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) has worked to identify the social and emotional skills that work to achieve success for children in the future, as they have a positive effect on developing the availability of the labor market, as countries have begun to pay attention to developing these skills through school education (Dyson et al., 2021). For example, in the USA, there is great interest in programs to develop social and emotional learning skills, as the US Department of Education is searching for the most important methods and ways to implement programs associated with social and emotional learning, and in Australia, there are schools that implement social and emotional learning programs within school time to enhance students' competence (Krämer et al., 2021).

Social and emotional learning competences encompass self and interpersonal awareness, which involves skills related to emotional recognition, emotional regulation, positive self-concept, and perspective-taking. Secondly, good attitudes and values encompass personal responsibility, respect for others, and social responsibility abilities (Øzerk et al., 2021). Third, responsible decision-making, includes skills in identifying the problem, setting adaptive goals, analyzing social norms, and solving the problem. Fourth is social interaction, which includes skills of active listening, expressive communication, cooperation, rejection, negotiation, and asking for help. Social and emotional learning competencies also include the following areas: conscientiousness skills of self-discipline and perseverance, emotional stability: skills of dealing with negative emotional experiences and stressors, and the ability to regulate one's emotions, extraversion skills of activity, positivity, and assertiveness; Agreeableness: skills of cooperation, empathy with others, and altruism; Openness: skills of dealing with life changes (Wigelsworth et al., 2020).

## 1.1.Problem statement

In light of the extraordinary emergency conditions created by the Coronavirus pandemic across all sectors, particularly education, and the subsequent pursuit of innovative solutions within educational institutions, numerous international reports have indicated a decline in social and emotional learning skills during the coronavirus pandemic. This underscores the necessity of conducting this study to bolster this dimension and to assess the availability of social and emotional learning competencies within school communities. The scarcity of similar studies within the limits of researchers' knowledge, especially in the Sultanate of Oman, is one of the reasons for this study, which gives it a degree of importance. In parallel, the results of many studies have indicated the role of social and emotional learning competencies or the five areas of personality in enhancing the positive environment inside the school and improving relationships, supporting positive behavior and its role in achieving academic and academic growth for students, as well as the contribution of emotional self-regulation in reducing social interaction

anxiety in children, and its role in achieving a positive connection between the level of responsibility and the sense of family security, as well as its role in achieving a positive relationship between the factors of extroversion, neuroticism, conscientiousness, acceptability, achievement motivation and its role in making psychological stress reduced, increasing optimism and mental health among university students.

Given the significant role social and emotional competencies have in light of the Covid-19 pandemic and its various repercussions on educational systems, including the absence of adoption of social and emotional skills by the Ministry of Education in Saudi Arabia among students. Therefore, this study came to shed light on the degree of students' possession of social and emotional learning competencies among school students and to work on enhancing their availability and employment in educational practices.

## 1.2.Research questions

- 1- What is the level of students' possession of social and emotional learning competencies in the intermediate stage in Saudi Arabia from their point of view?
- 2- Are there statistically significant variations at the  $\alpha \le 0.05$  level in the extent of students' social and emotional learning abilities in the intermediate stage in Saudi Arabia based on the variables of gender and age?

## 1.3. Significance of the study

This study explores the degree of students' acquisition of social and emotional learning competencies in intermediate schools in Saudi Arabia. Consequently, its findings may elucidate the extent and proportion of students' acquisition of social and emotional learning abilities within the educational community. The study's findings may assist officials in the Ministry of Education in implementing the five competencies of social and emotional learning, or the five principal domains of personality, among Saudi school students, particularly in light of the educational deficits in this area as indicated by the UNESCO report(2020).

## 1.4.Limitations of the study

- Objective limitations: the study was limited to the topic of the level of students' possession of social and emotional learning competencies in second-cycle schools, which are (task performance emotional regulation dealing with others cooperation openness).
- Human limits: It was limited to ninth-grade students in intermediate-stage schools.
- Spatial limits: The study was limited to students in Abha, Aseer region in Saudi Arabia.
- Time limits: The study was conducted in the first semester of the academic year 2022/2023.

#### 2. Literature Review

## 2.1. Social and Emotional Competencies

An individual has several transformations and phases throughout life, necessitating abilities and strategies to navigate these periods and emerge with a healthy outcome. Education is a crucial phase in which an individual receives diverse life skills that shape their personality and equip them for the complexities of social existence (Trigueros et al., 2020). These skills can be acquired in several ways, some of which are unintentional, and some of which are intentional and studied to obtain specific skills, such as social and emotional learning programs (Casino-García et al., 2021). One of the topics that has received increasing attention from stakeholders in education, especially in recent years, is the interactive personal competencies that help students

succeed inside and outside school. These competences are called "social and emotional" skills, and their development is sometimes characterized by the term social and emotional learning(Yang et al., 2020).

Social competence has received significant attention from researchers in the past two decades due to its importance in workplaces and educational environments. It is considered one of the important factors in determining the daily interactions of the individual with those around him in the various areas of life (Santos et al., 2023). Today's society needs a socially competent individual who performs his work in an organized manner, carries out his duties, and fulfills his obligations without the need for supervision or guidance from one person to another. In addition, social competence leads to social success, and sound adaptation, and indicates compatibility. It is also considered a criterion for the psychological health of individuals (Wigelsworth et al., 2020).

The National Research Council 2017 report classified the competencies that play a significant role in enhancing the experiences in schools, the workplace, and life more broadly into three main areas (Pakarinen et al., 2020). Cognitive talents encompass proficiency in academic areas including science, language arts, history, mathematics foreign languages, and geography, as well as critical thinking skills, innovation, and debate. Secondly, personal skills encompass attitudes and behaviors such as conscientiousness, initiative, resilience, emotional management, and persistence, which can affect students' performance in academic and other environments. Third, interactive competencies encompass the skills required for interpersonal engagement, including communication, cooperation, dispute resolution, and leadership(Eriksen & Bru, 2023).

Self-awareness and self-management skills are considered "personal" skills by the National Research Council (NRC). Social awareness and relationship skills are considered "interactional" skills in collaborative academic and social-emotional learning. Finally, making responsible decisions includes both personal and interactional skills (Santos et al., 2023). Social and emotional skills are defined as "individual characteristics that arise from biological predispositions and environmental factors, are manifested in consistent patterns of thoughts, feelings, and behaviors, continue to develop through formal and informal learning experiences, and influence important social and economic outcomes throughout an individual's life." Researchers defined these competencies as "a diverse set of competencies (personal traits or noncognitive skills) that research has shown to be important for students' success in school and life." (Ferreira et al., 2020)

Extensive studies indicate that SEL has advantageous outcomes for students, adults, and educational communities. SEL possesses a robust amalgamation of evidence and support (Dyson et al., 2021). The subsequent findings derive from various disciplines and sources, encompassing analyses of studies that demonstrate the positive effects of SEL on social and emotional competencies, self-perception, attitudes towards school and societal issues, social behaviors, behavioral challenges, emotional distress, and academic achievement. Social and emotional competencies play an important role in improving behavioral outcomes (Krämer et al., 2021). Research indicates that comprehensive social and emotional learning treatments improve youth's social and emotional competencies while alleviating symptoms of sadness and anxiety in the short run. Studies demonstrate that social and emotional learning (SEL) consistently produces enduring benefits across all demographic categories, both within and outside the United States. This supports the idea that the social and emotional skills cultivated in SEL can promote the positive development of students from diverse family backgrounds and geographical areas(Øzerk et al., 2021).

Initiatives to enhance students' social and emotional capabilities at educational institutions can manifest in several ways. A paper from the Collaborative for Academic and Emotional Learning outlines four primary strategies for enhancing social and emotional learning(Wigelsworth et al., 2020):

- Direct, fully personalized instruction in social and emotional learning that aims to develop specific competencies.
- Fundamental pedagogical strategies that foster classroom settings characterized by mutual expectations, constructive relationships, and other elements that enhance social and emotional learning (e.g., employing collaborative group work).
- Incorporating social and emotional learning with academic programs, such as involving pupils in intricate mathematical problem-solving tasks to foster tenacity alongside mathematical comprehension.
- Efforts to create school conditions and climates that promote social and emotional learning, including new discipline approaches and a shared vision.

#### 2.2.Previous studies

Alzahrani et al. (2019) explored the ways in which children's social-emotional competency impacts their development. It is essential for adults to engage with children in order to foster social-emotional competence in youngsters. It is the duty of educators to foster students' growth in several domains, such as emotional regulation, academic achievement, social competence, and behavioral regulation. Young pupils benefit academically and behaviorally from strong relationships between instructors and themselves. We summarize the findings of several research that demonstrate how the social and emotional aspects of any child impact the academic performance and their capacity to exhibit positive conduct. They also give a number of tools that may be used by educators to foster positive connections with their students. Academic and behavioral achievement in children are enhanced by these techniques. Students' reading, writing, critical thinking, and vocabulary abilities are enhanced when they demonstrate competency in the various skills, which is defined in connection to their academic achievements. Controlling one's emotions has long-term benefits for academic performance. Furthermore, they offer methods that educators might employ to cultivate constructive conduct.

Vucenovic et al. (2023) evaluated emotional skills and coping strategies as factors of depression among teenagers. The research was performed with a sample of 142 high school students. A significant proportion of individuals indicated elevated levels of depression, with 21.1% classified as extremely depressed. Girls, on average, indicated elevated levels of depression compared to males. Gender disparities were seen in avoidance, with females exhibiting higher scores in both categories. Nonetheless, no gender disparities were seen in problem-solving or emotional competence. Significant predictors of depression according to hierarchical regression analysis included the following abilities: emotional regulation, avoidance, emotion expression and identification, and perception and understanding. The most important predictor of depression, according to this regression model, was emotional regulation (p < 0.01). It explained 53% of the variation in depression. The relationship between emotional competence and depression was not mediated by coping strategies, according to this study.

Magro et al. (2023) investigated the correlation between teacher-student relationships and social competence from early childhood to high school. The weighted average correlation between the quality of teacher-student relationships and social competency with peers, based on approximately 30,000 students from 87 research, was .31. Neither age nor the duration between assessments correlated with impact magnitude, indicating that teacher-student connections remain linked to children's social skills beyond early childhood. The total score was the most

effective predictor of social competence, whereas reliance had a weaker correlation with social competence. The results of this study indicate that the quality of teacher-student relationships is a significant correlate of both current and future social competence from early infancy through adolescence.

Alt et al. (2023) investigated undergraduate students' perceptions of the implementation of competency learning and assessment feedback methods by their faculty, as well as the impact of these methods on their development of soft skills. Data were collected from 303 undergraduate students enrolled in education, health management, and social work programs. The empirical model indicated a favorable correlation between competency-based learning and personal, social, and methods skills. The research demonstrated a strong positive correlation between formative assessment feedback and competency-based learning, however very little results were observed between this component and soft skills. According to the results, students can strengthen their soft skill development through the use of constructivist learning activities embedded in relevant occupational contexts, complemented by timely, constructive feedback derived from particular evaluation criteria.

Bai et al. (2024) sought to assess the social-emotional learning (SEL) competence levels of secondary school students in Hong Kong and to investigate the complex interrelations among the four SEL competence clusters: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and social management, in connection to English learning outcomes. The findings revealed a moderate degree of social-emotional learning competency among 315 third-grade secondary school students, indicating a disparity between their elevated awareness abilities and their moderate skills. Structural equation modeling analysis validated two mediation pathways, underscoring the key mediating function of self-organisation skills in amplifying the impact of self-awareness and social awareness abilities on English learning outcomes. Significant repercussions are examined.

## 3. Methodology

The study employed a descriptive methodology, a systematic form of scientific analysis and interpretation, to elucidate a phenomenon or specific issue. It quantitatively represented the subject by gathering standardized data and information, analyzing it, and subjecting it to meticulous examination.

## 3.1. Sampling

The participants in this study were 236 students, who were taken from the study population. Table 1 shows the distribution of the sample according to the study variables.

Table 1. Data on the sample of the study

Variable	Category	Number	Percentage
Gender	Male	130	55%
	Female	106	45%
Age	13-14 years	148	62.7%
	15-16 years	88	37.2%
Total		236	100%

## 3.2. **Instrument of the study**

To obtain the objectives of the study, the OECD Social and Emotional Skills Study questionnaire was utilized. The questionnaire consisted of (30) paragraphs after arbitration, distributed over five main areas, and each area includes a number of paragraphs, according to the five-point Likert scale.

The validity of the instrument was obtained by presenting it to a group of 10 experienced and specialized arbitrators in the fields of translation, educational administration, sociology, and psychology at the Ministry of Education. All validated questionnaires were submitted, and the arbitrators concurred on their validity and appropriateness for assessing the intended domains, following necessary modifications based on the arbitrators' feedback and instructions, which included deletions, additions, rephrasing, or rearrangements, resulting in the removal of two paragraphs, thereby reducing the total to 28 paragraphs in the questionnaire. The researchers employed Cronbach's alpha coefficient to derive the reliability coefficient. Table 2 presents the findings.

Table 2. Stability coefficients according to the questionnaire fields

Number	Area	Number of paragraphs	Cronbach's alpha coefficient
1	Task performance	4	0.625
2	Emotional organization	6	0.675
3	Dealing with others	6	0.673
4	Cooperation	6	0.611
5	Mental openness	6	0.657
Total		28	0.85

Table 2 demonstrates that all questionnaire domains exhibit an acceptable stability value, with the overall stability of the instrument attaining a score of 0.851. This suggests that the first study tool possesses an adequate value, rendering it suitable for implementation to the real study sample.

# 3.3. Data analysis

To answer the study questions, the mean scores, standard deviations, percentages, ranks, degrees, and the test of differences between means (T-test) were used.

#### 4. Results and discussion

## 4.1.The first question

To address this inquiry, the arithmetic means, standard deviations, percentages, and rankings were computed to assess the extent of students' social and emotional learning abilities across several fields of study. Table 3 presents the results.

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Table 3. The mean sco	res and standard	deviations	for study	y areas

Number	Area	Mean score	Standard deviation	Percentage	Rank	Level
1	Task performance	4.09	0.76	82%	1	High
2	Emotional organization	3.74	0.92	75%	4	High
3	Dealing with others	3.67	0.94	73%	5	High
4	Cooperation	3.91	0.77	78%	3	High
5	Mental openness	4.08	0.83	82%	2	High
Total		4	0.74	80%	-	High

Table 3 indicates that the level of students' acquisition of social and emotional learning abilities at intermediate schools in Saudi Arabia was elevated, with an arithmetic mean of the total score being (4), corresponding to a percentage of (80%). The arithmetic averages of competency possession varied from 3.67 to 4.09, corresponding to percentages between 73% and 82%, indicating a high level of possession. The field of accomplishing tasks obtained first place with an arithmetic mean of (4.09) and a percentage of (82%), with a high degree of possession. The field of open-mindedness came in second place, with an arithmetic mean of (4.08) and a percentage of (82%), with a high level of possession. The field of cooperation came in third place, with a high degree of possession, with an arithmetic mean of (3.91) and a percentage of (78%). Conversely, the domain of emotional control ranked fourth, exhibiting an arithmetic mean of 3.74 and a percentage of 75%, indicating a high level of proficiency. The fifth position was occupied by the domain of interpersonal interactions, which recorded an arithmetic mean of 3.67 and a percentage of 73%.

This outcome is ascribed to the pupils have the ability to control themselves to avoid mistakes while focusing on accuracy in performing the work assigned to them. Students exhibit trust and presuppose the goodwill of others, refraining from forming predetermined judgments. Students have emotional control, especially in situations of anger and facing frustrations and failures that they may experience during their studies and daily life situations. Students have the ability to resist stress, represented by low anxiety, and the ability to solve problems calmly, which is a positive thing, especially in cases of anxiety and high psychological pressure. Students' possession of high energy helps them to accomplish what is required of them, as it helps them to pay attention and focus and helps with open-mindedness. Students are able to an average degree to express opinions, needs, and feelings with confidence, to exercise social influence and take responsibility from the class or team by taking the initiative to lead others

## 4.2. The second question

To answer this question, the arithmetic means, standard deviations, and T-Test were calculated for the gender and age variables, as follows:

Gender variable

Table 4 shows the mean scores, standard deviations, and T-test for the gender variable for all study fields and the total score.

Table 4. T-test results for the degree of students' possession of social and emotional learning

competencies according to the gender variable

Number	Area	Gender	Number	M.S	S. D	T value
1	Task performance	Male	130	4.09	0.79	0.090
		Female	106	4.08	0.74	
2	Emotional	Male	130	3.87	0.91	3.74
	organization	Female	106	3.65	0.91	
3	Dealing with others	Male	130	3.74	0.89	1.87
		Female	106	3.36	0.97	
4	Cooperation	Male	130	3.92	0.81	0.340
		Female	106	3.90	0.73	
5	Mental openness	Male	130	3.95	0.87	-4.127
		Female	106	4.17	0.78	
Total		Male	130	4.06	0.81	-3.081
		Female	106	4.21	0.68	

The table above reveals significant differences ( $\pm 0.05$ ) between the average estimates of the study sample on how much students in the intermediate stage in Saudi Arabia know about social and emotional learning. These differences are due to the gender variable in the total score, with female students doing better than male students. There are also statistically significant differences at the significance level ( $\alpha \le 0.05$ ) in the efficiency of emotional regulation in favor of male students. This outcome is ascribed to the observation that male students utilize regulation more effectively or with reduced effort compared to female pupils. Statistically significant differences exist at the significance level (α≤0.05), indicating greater efficiency of openmindedness among female pupils. This result is attributed to the greater desire of female students to read and review various books and magazines, while there are no apparent differences. There are also clear differences in the efficiency of completing tasks and the efficiency of cooperation, attributed to the gender variable. This result is attributed to the similarity of the curricula and the tasks required to be completed.

#### Age variable

Table 5 shows the mean scores, standard deviations, and T-test for the age variable for all study fields and the total score:

Table 5. T-test results for students' level of possession of social and emotional learning competencies according to the age variable

Number	Area	Age	Number	M.S	S. D	T value
1	Task performance	13-14 years	148	4.11	0.72	1.008
		15-16 years	88	4.05	0.84	
2	Emotional	13-14 years	148	3.74	0.89	0.055
	organization	15-16 years	88	3.73	0.96	
3	Dealing with others	13-14 years	148	3.66	0.94	-0.835
		15-16 years	88	3.71	0.94	
4	Cooperation	13-14 years	148	3.89	0.74	-0.968
		15-16 years	88	3.94	0.81	
5	Mental openness	13-14 years	148	4.09	0.80	2.51
		15-16 years	88	4.06	0.86	
Total		13-14 years	148	4.19	0.70	2.25
		15-16 years	88	4.07	0.79	

As shown in Table 5, there are no clear significant differences at the significance level ( $\pm 0.05$ ) between the average estimates of the study sample in terms of how well students in Saudi Arabia's intermediate stage possess social and emotional learning competencies. There are also no statistically significant differences at the significance level ( $\pm 0.05$ ) in any of the competencies that are given by age. This result is attributed to the similarity of the age stage and the closeness of cognitive development among students.

#### 5. Conclusion

This study came to focus on the degree of students' possession of social and emotional learning competencies among school students and to work on enhancing their availability and employment in educational practices. This study sheds light on the level of students' possession of social and emotional learning competencies in intermediate schools in Saudi Arabia. The results of the study revealed that students can control themselves to avoid mistakes while focusing on accuracy in performing the work assigned to them. Students establish trust and assume that others have good intentions, and avoid making preconceived judgments. Students have emotional control, especially in situations of anger and facing frustrations and failures that they may experience during their studies and daily life situations. The findings showed no statistically significant differences at the significance level (±0.05) between the average estimates of the study sample in terms of how well students in Saudi Arabia's intermediate stage possess social and emotional learning competencies. The findings also revealed that there are statistically significant differences (±0.05) between the average estimates of the study sample on how much students in the intermediate stage in Saudi Arabia know about social and emotional learning. These differences are due to the gender variable in the total score, with female students doing better than male students.

## 6. Recommendations

The study recommends Activating the second cycle of basic education teachers in social and emotional skills in learning and integrating social and emotional learning skills into the curricula. It is important to focus on including social and emotional learning skills in classroom activities. The Ministry of Education should adopt holding courses, workshops, and lectures on social and emotional learning programs aimed at raising awareness in all educational, community, and media institutions. Researchers should conduct comparative analyses to study the most effective social and emotional intervention programs and determine their impact on academic skills, communication skills, and language.

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