

Social and Emotional Skills in Early Grades

There is mounting evidence worldwide about the benefits of integrating social and emotional learning (SEL) into children's learning. However, there is currently little information about its integration into Tanzanian early grade public school classes, as many national programs (e.g., Literacy and Numeracy Education Support-LANES) focus on academic subjects. This research, conducted with USAID Tanzania's Education Office funding, adds to the body of evidence on the benefits of integrating SEL components into early childhood learning.

Governments, including Tanzania's, are aware that children need secure and safe schools for optimal development. Still, 81% of Tanzania Mainland school children say they have experienced some sort of violence in their school setting (Hakielimu, 2020).

Through in-depth interviews and questionnaires with parents, early grade teachers, school committees, quality assurers, and pupils, researchers worked to produce evidence on the three research questions (RQs) listed below.

Summary of Policy-Relevant Findings

RQ1: Will teaching Social and Emotional Learning Competencies (SELs) such as self-management, self-awareness, and relationships lead to greater school safety?

- Teachers believe that training in autonomy, supportive communication, and participation in school-community activities helps them contribute to school safety.
- Early grade pupils' safety is impacted by master bullies (in Swahili, *wababe wa darasa*), known for dominating their whole class, since they create an intimidating atmosphere.

RQ2: What pedagogical practices, resources, and materials support the positive development of pupil SELs?

- SEL assessment is currently a top-down and teacher-centered activity, and it overlooks opportunities to use pupils' self-rating in the process.
- SELs were inadequately integrated into classroom assessments (e.g., the formal year-end assessment and the informal, ongoing assessment by individual teachers).

Key Takeaways

Teachers' knowledge and skills play a significant role in how they integrate SELs in their teaching practices

Appropriate pre-service and in-service teacher education programs would enhance teachers' ability to grow pupil SELs

Improving school safety is an important part of helping children develop SELs

Supportive programs enable teachers and parents to identify and address aggression in and out of the school context

Capacity strengthening would help teachers and parents to better use educational media and technology to promote children's SELs
Schools need help on how to include **SELs into their regular assessments**, which would make **both teacher-rating and pupils' self-rating** more objective

- Teachers have a limited understanding of both SEL and pedagogical practices that support SEL. Notably, they miss chances to use classroom organization to enhance respectful, caring, and responsive relationships.

RQ3: How does the community participate in promoting the development of SELCs for all early grade learners?

- Current in-service programs inadequately prepare teachers to grow their pupils' SELCs.
- Parents use educational media and technology at home for entertainment and academic purposes and could learn to use them to enhance their children's SELCs.
- Community members can hinder pupils' SEL growth, such as when parents force schoolgirls to fail national examinations, drop out, and marry early in order to earn a bride price.
- The SEL elements most frequently promoted at home are social awareness (i.e., moral values, obedience, empathy) and relationships (i.e., teaching children to live cooperatively).
- Teachers are generally unaware of how in-service programs could help them better collaborate with communities in promoting SELCs.



Policy Recommendations

After analysis, the researchers recommend the following:

- Professional development programs should help teachers better integrate SEL into their teaching and enhance their abilities to collaborate with their communities in promoting pupils' SELCs. Teachers often have a low capacity to translate SEL knowledge from in-service programs into classroom practices. Better teacher training from the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology would help teachers learn how to integrate SEL into their classrooms, and collaboratively promote SEL with their community.
- School management should help teachers assess SELCs and integrate them into classroom management, which would fix SELC growth as a goal for teachers. The *Ministry of Education, Science and Technology* (Tanzania Mainland) and the *Ministry of Education and Vocational Training* (Zanzibar) should adopt contextualized measures to help teachers assess pupil SELCs progress.
- Educators should help parents learn how positive cultural practices can aid in developing children's SELCs. Parents and community members said very little about how cultural practices can shape children's SELCs.
- Teacher education should strengthen early grade teachers' capacity to create and use both procured and locally available learning resources to promote both academics and SELCs.
- The *Ministry of Education, Science and Technology* should incentivize Tanzania media and technology providers to integrate SEL into their programs, to support teachers' classroom teaching initiatives.
- Future training should help teachers use educational media and technology to help students learn academics and SELC, as findings revealed that teachers rarely use technology for either purpose.

Project Contact: Principal Investigator Dr. Pambas Tandika, University of Dodoma, tpambas@gmail.com