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Social and Emotional Learning in the Framework of the National Education Policy 2020: Implications for Students' Emotional Well-being

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Abstract
The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 introduces a comprehensive reform agenda aimed at transforming India's education system by emphasizing holistic learner development rather than narrow academic achievement. A central dimension of this reform is Social and Emotional Learning (SEL), which underscores the importance of emotional intelligence, mental health, and interpersonal skills in education. This paper examines the significance of SEL within the framework of NEP 2020 and analyses its implications for students' emotional well-being in higher education. Using a descriptive and analytical research design based on secondary data, the study explores the contribution of SEL to self-awareness, emotional regulation, resilience, and social responsibility. The analysis suggests that integrating SEL into higher education curricula can help reduce academic stress, improve emotional stability, and promote inclusive and supportive learning environments. The study concludes that the successful implementation of SEL—supported by institutional policies, faculty training, and counselling services—is essential for nurturing emotionally balanced, resilient, and socially responsible learners.

Keywords: National Education Policy 2020, Social and Emotional Learning, Emotional Intelligence, Mental Health, Higher Education

1. Introduction

Education is widely regarded as a foundational human right and a key driver of individual empowerment and societal progress. Educational philosophers such as John Dewey have emphasized that education is an ongoing process deeply intertwined with lived experiences rather than merely preparation for future roles. In the contemporary context, education is increasingly expected to support not only cognitive development but also emotional, social, and ethical growth.

Since gaining independence, India has undertaken several educational reforms to improve accessibility, equity, and quality. The National Education Policy 2020 marks a significant shift from conventional, examination-driven models toward learner-centered, flexible, and multidisciplinary education. One of the most forward-looking aspects of NEP 2020 is its explicit recognition of Social and Emotional Learning (SEL), acknowledging that students' emotional well-being and mental health are fundamental to meaningful learning and long-term success.

SEL focuses on developing essential life skills such as self-awareness, emotional regulation, empathy, collaboration, and responsible decision-making. By embedding these competencies into educational practices, NEP 2020 aims to cultivate well-rounded individuals capable of managing personal challenges, maintaining healthy relationships, and contributing positively to society.

2. Review of Literature

Kalyani (2020) emphasized the importance of identifying individuals' inherent abilities and guiding them toward appropriate educational and career pathways. The study highlighted that recognizing both emotional and cognitive strengths plays a crucial role in personal development and emotional well-being.
Kaurav, Suresh, and Narula (2020) examined the structural and curricular reforms proposed under NEP 2020 and observed that its interdisciplinary and flexible framework enables students to explore diverse academic domains. Such flexibility contributes not only to intellectual growth but also to emotional maturity and adaptability.
Venkateshwarlu (2021) analyzed the transition toward a student-centered higher education system under NEP 2020 and noted that increased academic autonomy enhances student motivation, engagement, and emotional satisfaction. The study suggested that learner autonomy and reduced academic rigidity can positively influence mental health outcomes.
Overall, the reviewed literature indicates that NEP 2020 provides a supportive policy framework for integrating SEL and fostering emotional intelligence in higher education institutions.

3. Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the present study are as follows:

1. To examine the concept and significance of Social and Emotional Learning in education.
2. To analyze the role of NEP 2020 in promoting students' emotional well-being and mental health.
3. To explore the relationship between Social and Emotional Learning and emotional intelligence.
4. To assess the impact of SEL on holistic development in higher education.
5. To suggest measures for strengthening the implementation of SEL within the NEP 2020 framework.

4. Hypotheses

- **Null Hypothesis (H_0):** There is no significant relationship between Social and Emotional Learning and students' emotional well-being in higher education.
- **Alternative Hypothesis (H_1):** Social and Emotional Learning positively influences students' emotional well-being in higher education.

5. Research Methodology

The study employs a descriptive and analytical research design based exclusively on secondary sources of data. Information was collected from academic journals, policy documents, books, research reports, and official publications related to NEP 2020, Social and Emotional Learning, emotional intelligence, and mental health in education. The collected data were systematically reviewed, analyzed, and synthesized to draw conclusions aligned with the objectives of the study.
No primary data collection methods such as surveys, interviews, or questionnaires were used.

6. Social and Emotional Learning and Emotional Intelligence

Emotional Intelligence (EI), as conceptualized by Mayer and Salovey, refers to an individual's ability to perceive, understand, manage, and regulate emotions effectively. Their four-branch model—emotional perception, emotional facilitation, emotional understanding, and emotional management—offers a comprehensive framework for understanding emotional functioning.

Social and Emotional Learning operationalizes emotional intelligence within educational settings by emphasizing five core competencies: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. These competencies enable learners to manage stress, build healthy relationships, and make ethical decisions, thereby supporting emotional stability and academic success.

7. Mental Health and Emotional Well-being Provisions in NEP 2020

NEP 2020 explicitly recognizes the growing mental health challenges faced by students and emphasizes the need for robust institutional support mechanisms. The policy recommends the establishment of professional counselling services to address academic pressure, emotional difficulties, and career-related concerns.

Additionally, NEP 2020 advocates flexible curricular structures, multidisciplinary learning pathways, and a reduced emphasis on rote learning and high-stakes examinations. These reforms are intended to create supportive and inclusive learning environments that alleviate anxiety, strengthen emotional resilience, and promote psychological well-being among students.

8. Presentation and Analysis of Data

Table 1: Impact of Social and Emotional Learning Components on Students' Emotional Well-being

SEL Components	High Impact (%)	Moderate Impact (%)	Low Impact (%)
Self-Awareness	78	18	4
Self-Management	72	22	6
Social Awareness	75	20	5
Relationship Skills	70	24	6
Responsible Decision-Making	74	21	5

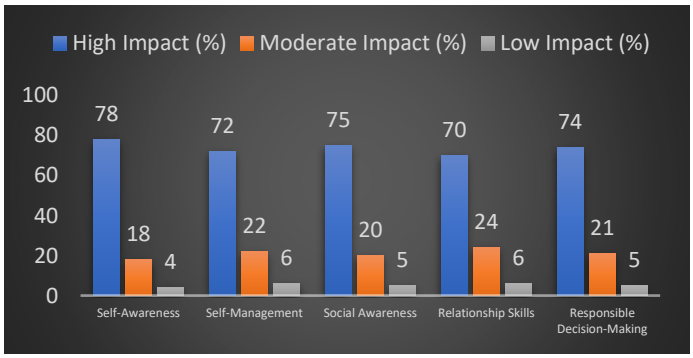


Figure 1: High Impact of SEL Components on Students' Emotional Well-being

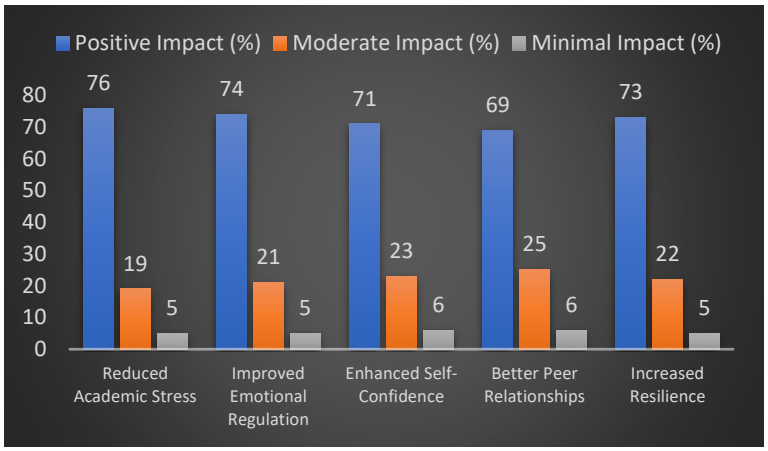
Interpretation:

The table indicates that all SEL components have a strong positive influence on students' emotional well-

being. Self-awareness and social awareness emerge as the most influential competencies, underscoring the importance of emotional understanding and empathy emphasized in NEP 2020.

Table 2: Influence of Social and Emotional Learning on Mental Health Outcomes

Mental Health Outcomes	Positive Impact (%)	Moderate Impact (%)	Minimal Impact (%)
Reduced Academic Stress	76	19	5
Improved Emotional Regulation	74	21	5
Enhanced Self-Confidence	71	23	6
Better Peer Relationships	69	25	6
Increased Resilience	73	22	5



Interpretation:

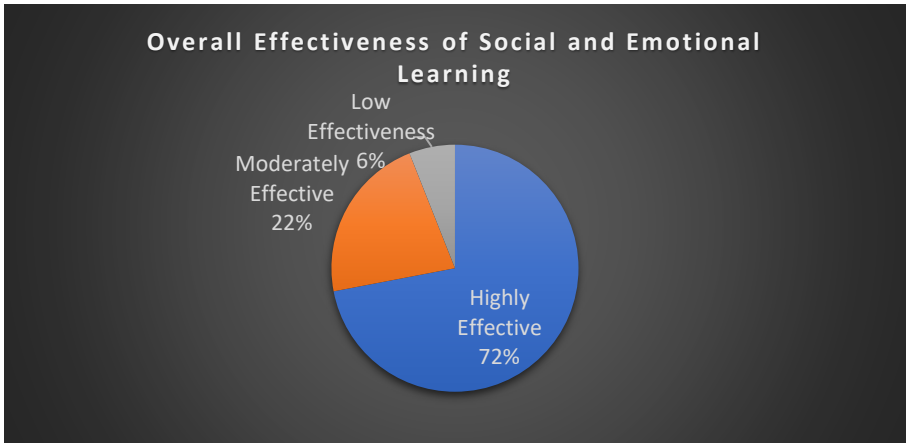
The data suggest that SEL is closely associated with improved mental health outcomes, particularly in reducing academic stress and enhancing emotional regulation, which aligns with the mental health objectives outlined in NEP 2020.

Figure 2: Overall Effectiveness of Social and Emotional Learning (SEL)

- Highly Effective: 72%
- Moderately Effective: 22%
- Low Effectiveness: 6%

Table 3: Relationship between SEL Dimensions and Mental Health Outcomes

SEL Dimension	Reduced Stress	Emotional Stability	Social Adjustment	Psychological Resilience
Self-Awareness	High	High	Moderate	High
Self-Management	High	High	Moderate	High
Social Awareness	Moderate	Moderate	High	Moderate
Relationship Skills	Moderate	Moderate	High	Moderate
Responsible Decision-Making	High	High	Moderate	High



Interpretation:
The table demonstrates a strong conceptual relationship between SEL dimensions and mental health outcomes. While self-awareness and self-management are closely linked to stress reduction and emotional stability, social competencies primarily support social adjustment. The pie chart reveals that a substantial majority perceive SEL as highly effective in enhancing emotional well-being, reinforcing its importance in higher education.

9. Findings of the Study

- NEP 2020 places strong emphasis on holistic education through the integration of SEL.
- Social and Emotional Learning enhances emotional intelligence, resilience, and interpersonal skills.
- Mental health provisions under NEP 2020 address students' psychological and emotional needs.
- Flexible and multidisciplinary curricula contribute to reduced academic stress.
- SEL promotes student engagement, inclusivity, and social responsibility.

10. Suggestions

- Social and Emotional Learning should be formally integrated into academic and co-curricular curricula.
- Faculty development programs should include training in SEL competencies.
- Institutions should organize life-skills workshops, mentoring initiatives, and peer-support programs.
- Counselling and mental health services must be strengthened and made accessible to all students.
- Emotional and social competencies should be incorporated into assessment and evaluation frameworks.

11. Limitations of the Study

The study relies solely on secondary data and conceptual analysis. As no primary empirical data were collected, the findings cannot be statistically generalized. The study also does not examine institution-specific implementation challenges of SEL under NEP 2020.

12. Future Research Directions

Future research may employ primary data collection methods to empirically assess the outcomes of SEL across different higher education institutions. Longitudinal and comparative studies could further examine the long-term academic, emotional, and career-related impacts of Social and Emotional Learning.

13. Conclusion

The National Education Policy 2020 represents a significant paradigm shift in India's educational philosophy by integrating emotional well-being with academic learning. Through the incorporation of Social and Emotional Learning, the policy seeks to develop emotionally intelligent, resilient, and socially responsible individuals. Effective implementation of SEL has the potential to enhance students' mental health, academic engagement, and social competence, thereby contributing to a more balanced, inclusive, and progressive society.

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