ENHANCING SOCIO-EMOTIONAL LEARNING IN CLASSROOMS THROUGH DIGITAL PEDAGOGY INTEGRATION: ALIGNING WITH NCFSE 2023

MS. PRIYANKA SINGH

Research Scholar,
Amity Institute of Education,
Amity University, Noida, Uttar Pradesh

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Introduction

Socio-emotional development is crucial for the overall growth and well-being of students, particularly during their formative years in primary education (Pedagogy of Hope for Global Social Justice, n.d.). It includes developing the skills and competencies that allow children to understand and manage their emotions, cultivate empathy, build healthy relationships, and successfully navigate social interactions (Al-Matari, 2023; Elbertson et al., 2010). Integrating socio-emotional development into the educational curriculum is essential for fostering a holistic learning environment that supports both academic achievement and the growth of emotional intelligence and social skills (THE IMPORTANCE OF SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING FOR ALL STUDENTS ACROSS ALL GRADES Core SEL Competencies, 2017a). Child development is shaped by the interaction of three distinct processes: biological, cognitive, and socio-emotional. These processes are closely interconnected, each contributing to a child's physical, cognitive, linguistic, socio-emotional, and moral development (Gimbert et al., 2023). Social and emotional learning (SEL) is a fundamental aspect of education and human development (Al-Matari, 2023). It involves the process through which young people and adults gain and apply the knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary to build healthy identities, regulate emotions, achieve personal and collective goals, demonstrate empathy, establish and maintain supportive relationships, and make responsible and compassionate decisions (*CASEL-SEL-Framework-11.2020*, n.d.).

In the ever-changing field of K-12 education, achieving comprehensive student development has become a crucial objective (Husaj Cand, n.d.). Modern educators and policymakers are increasingly aware of the importance of fostering emotional intelligence and social skills, in addition to traditional academic success (Farah Adiba & Latip, 2021). As society becomes more globalized, students must not only excel academically but also manage complex interpersonal relationships, build resilience, and engage empathetically with diverse viewpoints (Allbright et al., 2019; Wigelsworth et al., 2022). However, traditional educational frameworks

often fail to fully address these socio-emotional aspects, resulting in a noticeable gap in students' overall development (Greenberg, 2023a).

Digital Pedagogy

Digital pedagogy is a field within pedagogical science that explores the nature and principles of digital education. It examines the impact of digitalized educational processes on personal development and focuses on creating practical methods and tools to enhance their effectiveness (Liontas & Karagoz, 2023). Digital Pedagogy effectively supports, enhances, and transforms teaching and learning processes, offering learners enriched, diverse, and flexible learning opportunities (Elias & Zins, 2006a). It provides a foundation for engaging students in meaningful learning experiences, enabling them to actively construct and apply their knowledge in purposeful and impactful ways, as outlined by smart classrooms (Cabanero et al., 2022).

It is not only the use of ICT for learning and teaching but also the creation of new interactive learning experiences through various technologies that address the needs of each learner and facilitate comprehensive brain-based learning (Liontas & Karagoz, 2023). This approach harnesses technology to design engaging, personalized educational experiences that cater to diverse learning styles and preferences, ultimately enhancing overall learning outcomes. Figure 1.1 describes the key elements of Digital Pedagogy. At the center of this framework is "Digital Pedagogy," which is the foundation for modern teaching and learning practices. Surrounding this core are six interconnected elements, each crucial in enhancing the educational experience.
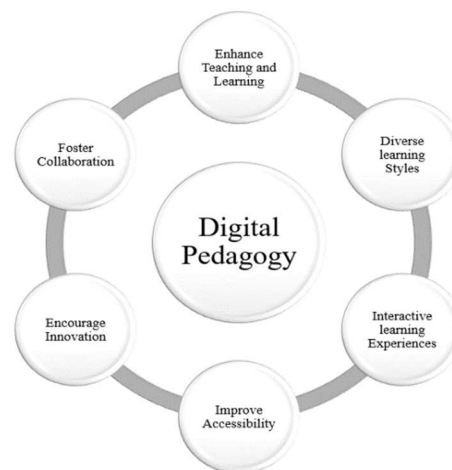

Figure 1.1: Key Elements of Digital Pedagogy

Socio-Emotional Learning

Socio-emotional learning (SEL) has become a fundamental aspect of modern education, emphasizing the development of students' emotional intelligence, social skills, and overall

well-being alongside traditional academic instruction. SEL encompasses a range of processes through which individuals acquire and apply the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions (Simion, 2023). These competencies are crucial for fostering healthy identities, enhancing interpersonal relationships, and promoting personal and collective success.

In alignment with the National Curriculum Framework for School Education (NCFSE) 2023, SEL is positioned as a key component for fostering holistic education. The NCFSE 2023 emphasizes the need to embed SEL within the curriculum to ensure that students develop the necessary socio-emotional competencies alongside their academic knowledge. This alignment underscores the recognition that academic success alone is insufficient for preparing students to lead fulfilling and productive lives. SEL enriches the educational experience by addressing the emotional and social aspects of learning, thereby promoting the comprehensive development of learners (Elbertson et al., 2010).

As educational systems continue to evolve, the integration of SEL with digital pedagogy offers innovative opportunities to enhance teaching and learning. Digital tools and technologies can support SEL by providing interactive and personalized learning experiences, facilitating real-time feedback, and fostering collaborative environments (Al-Matari, 2023). By leveraging digital pedagogy, educators can effectively implement SEL strategies that are engaging, inclusive, and adaptable to the needs of diverse learners. This synergy between SEL and digital pedagogy not only enhances the effectiveness of socio-emotional initiatives but also aligns with the broader goals of contemporary educational frameworks like NCFSE 2023. Figure 1.2 describes the core components of Socio-Emotional Learning.

Figure 1.2: Core Components of Socio-Emotional Learning

Characteristics of Socio-Emotional Learning:

1. *Development of Emotional Intelligence*: Socio-emotional learning focuses on teaching students how to understand and manage their emotions effectively.

2. *Enhanced Self-Awareness*: Students learn to recognize their own emotions, strengths, and weaknesses, which aids in personal growth.

3. *Improved Self-Management*: Socio-emotional learning equips students with skills to regulate their emotions, manage stress, and set and achieve goals.

4. *Fostering Social Awareness*: Socio-emotional learning encourages empathy by helping students understand and appreciate diverse perspectives.

5. *Building Relationship Skills*: Through Socio-Emotional Learning, students develop the ability to communicate effectively, cooperate with others, and resolve conflicts constructively.

6. *Encouraging Responsible Decision-Making*: Socio-emotional learning promotes ethical and responsible choices, considering the impact on oneself and others.

7. *Positive School Climate*: Socio-emotional Learning contributes to creating a supportive and inclusive environment, reducing bullying and behavioral issues.

8. *Enhanced Academic Success*: By helping students manage stress and stay focused, Socio-Emotional Learning supports better academic outcomes.

9. *Community Involvement*: Socio-emotional learning extends beyond the classroom, involving families and communities to reinforce socio-emotional skills.

10. *Holistic Development*: Socio-emotional learning nurtures well-rounded individuals who are prepared to face life's challenges with resilience and empathy.

Embedding SEL with Digital Pedagogy: A School-Wide Strategy

The education system encompasses various elements that contribute to the development of social and emotional skills (Jacob, 2021). These include dedicated lessons, integration of SEL topics into the subject curriculum, extracurricular activities, specialized learning environments, and teaching methods, as well as the behavior exhibited by adults (Elbertson et al., 2010). Researchers agree that achieving the desired learning outcomes involves a comprehensive approach that combines these diverse elements (Arieny et al., 2023; Elias & Zins, 2006b). Recent research and insights from CASEL indicate that social and emotional learning can be effectively promoted across three distinct levels:

a) *Creating a learning environment and teaching methods that focus on building relationships.*

Digital Tools for Communication	Utilize digital platforms such as communication apps and online discussion boards to foster strong teacher-student and peer relationships. These tools can facilitate regular check-ins, personalized feedback, and collaborative projects that build rapport and trust.
Virtual Classrooms and Social-Emotional Support	Use virtual classrooms and video conferencing tools to create a supportive online environment. Teachers can use these platforms to check in on student's emotional well-being and provide a space for students to express their feelings and concerns.
Digital Learning Communities	Develop online learning communities where students can engage in social-emotional discussions and activities. Tools like class blogs or forums can support peer interactions and relationship-building.

b) *Creating a learning environment and teaching methods that focus on building relationships.*

Digital SEL Resources	Implement evidence-based SEL programs through digital resources such as apps, online courses, and interactive modules. These resources can offer structured SEL activities and lessons based on the latest research.
Data-Driven Insights	Use digital tools to collect and analyze data on SEL program effectiveness. Learning management systems (LMS) and analytics platforms can track student progress and outcomes, providing valuable insights into the impact of SEL interventions.

	Leverage online professional development courses and webinars to train educators on evidence-based SEL practices. Digital platforms can offer flexible, accessible training options for teachers to learn about and implement SEL strategies.
Professional Development	

c) *Integrating SEL principles into the core curriculum.*

Integrative Digital Tools	Incorporate SEL into core subjects using digital tools that facilitate interdisciplinary learning. For example, use interactive simulations and multimedia projects that integrate SEL concepts with academic content.
Curriculum Design Platforms	Utilize digital curriculum design platforms to embed SEL objectives into lesson plans and instructional materials. These platforms can help educators align SEL goals with academic standards and create cohesive learning experiences.
Adaptive Learning Technologies	Employ adaptive learning technologies that personalize educational experiences based on students' social-emotional needs. These technologies can adjust content and feedback to support individual students' SEL development within the core curriculum.

Alignment of Socio-Emotional Learning with the Goals of NCFSE 2023:

The integration of Socio-Emotional Learning (SEL) within the framework of the National Curriculum Framework for School Education (NCFSE) 2023 represents a progressive step towards cultivating a well-rounded educational experience. As the landscape of education evolves, the NCFSE 2023 aims to address not only academic excellence but also the holistic development of students (Ferdig & Pytash, 2021). This approach recognizes that emotional and social competencies are crucial for students' overall growth and future success. SEL, with its

focus on enhancing self-awareness, emotional regulation, and interpersonal skills, aligns seamlessly with the goals of NCFSE 2023. By emphasizing holistic development, critical thinking, inclusion, digital literacy, and essential life skills, both SEL and NCFSE 2023 collectively aim to equip students with the tools they need to thrive in a complex and rapidly changing world (Greenberg, 2023b). This alignment ensures that education is not merely about academic achievement but also about fostering the emotional and social competencies that underpin personal and professional success.

1. *Holistic Development*: Emphasis on the overall development of students, including academic, emotional, and social aspects. SEL directly contributes to holistic development by addressing emotional and social well-being alongside academic growth (Elias & Zins, 2006c). It helps students develop self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making.

2. *Critical Thinking and Problem Solving*: Encouraging students to think critically and solve problems independently. SEL enhances students' ability to manage their emotions and work collaboratively, which are crucial for effective critical thinking and problem-solving. By understanding and regulating their emotions, students can approach problems more rationally and work better in teams.

3. *Inclusion and Equity*: Ensuring that education is inclusive and equitable for all students, regardless of their background. SEL promotes empathy, respect, and understanding, which are vital for creating an inclusive and equitable learning environment. It helps students appreciate diverse perspectives and build a supportive classroom community.

4. *Digital Literacy*: Preparing students for the digital world by integrating technology in education. While SEL itself isn't directly related to digital literacy, the emotional and social skills developed through SEL can help students navigate online interactions more responsibly and with greater awareness.

5. *Life Skills*: Fostering skills that students need for real-life challenges, including communication, empathy, and resilience. SEL is integral to developing life skills such as effective communication, conflict resolution, and resilience. These skills are essential for students' personal and professional success in the future.

Socio-Emotional Curricular Goals Defined by NCFSE 2023:

The National Curriculum Framework for School Education (NCFSE) 2023 outlines several socio-emotional curricular goals to foster students' holistic development. These goals emphasize the integration of social-emotional learning into the educational process to support

students' well-being and personal growth. Here (Table 1.1) are some key socio-emotional curricular goals defined by NCFSE 2023:

Develops emotional intelligence, which involves understanding and regulating one's own emotions, and positively adapting to social norms.	It begins to identify oneself as an individual connected to both family and community.
	Recognizes different emotions and makes deliberate efforts to regulate them appropriately
	Interacts comfortably with other children and adults
	Shows cooperative behavior with other children
	Understands and responds positively to social norms in the classroom and school
	Shows kindness and helpfulness to others (including animals, and plants) when they are in need
	Understands and responds positively to different thoughts, preferences, and emotional needs of other children
Cultivates a positive attitude towards meaningful work and service, or 'Seva.'	Participates in tasks suitable for their age both at school and at home.
Fosters a positive appreciation for the natural environment surrounding them.	Shows care for and joy in engaging with all life forms

Table 1.1: SEL Curricular Goals Defined by NCFSE 2023

Do Teachers Embrace Socio-Emotional Learning?

Any discussion about teachers and SEL should start by questioning whether they believe that education should actively promote students' social-emotional learning (Cinque et al., 2023; THE SIGNIFICANCE OF DIGITAL PEDAGOGY: TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS AND THE FACTORS INFLUENCING THEIR ABILITIES AS DIGITAL PEDAGOGUES, n.d.). In other words, do teachers agree that SEL should be incorporated into education? Recent research shows that the answer is overwhelmingly affirmative (Ferdig & Pytash, 2021; THE IMPORTANCE OF SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING FOR ALL STUDENTS ACROSS ALL GRADES Core SEL Competencies, 2017b). Teachers are indeed strong proponents of

integrating SEL into the educational framework (Aradhya & Parameswaran, 2023). They recognize the value of SEL in fostering students' emotional well-being, social skills, and overall academic success, and advocate for its inclusion in the curriculum to better support students' holistic development (Wong et al., 2014).

Moreover, teachers see SEL as essential for creating a positive classroom environment and enhancing student engagement (Qadan & Chaleila, 2022). They believe that SEL can help address behavioral issues, improve student-teacher relationships, and contribute to a more supportive and inclusive learning atmosphere (Elias & Zins, 2006d). While there may be challenges such as the need for adequate training and resources, the overall consensus among educators is that SEL is a crucial component of effective education (Schonert-Reichl, 2017). Teachers are committed to promoting SEL and are often eager to receive the support and tools necessary to implement it effectively in their classrooms (Cao et al., 2022). Below mentioned are the good pointers related to the teachers' support for SEL:

- ✓ *Positive Attitudes*: Many teachers are supportive of SEL due to its benefits for students' emotional and social development.

- ✓ *Enhanced Student Outcomes*: SEL helps students with emotion management, relationship building, and decision-making, which positively impacts academic performance and classroom behavior.

- ✓ *Training Needs*: Effective SEL implementation often requires teachers to have proper training and professional development.

- ✓ *Resource Availability*: Success in SEL programs can be limited by the availability of appropriate resources and materials.

- ✓ *Time Management*: Integrating SEL can be challenging due to existing time constraints within the curriculum.

- ✓ *School Culture and Leadership*: Support for SEL can depend significantly on the overall school culture and the commitment of school leadership.

- ✓ *Variation in Support*: The level of support for SEL among teachers can vary based on individual experiences and institutional support structures.

CASEL (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning)

CASEL (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning) is a leading organization dedicated to advancing the development of social and emotional learning (SEL) in education (*CASEL-SEL-Framework-11.2020*, n.d.). Its mission is to promote the integration of SEL into preschool through high school education, supporting students in acquiring key emotional and social skills that contribute to their success in school and life (Elias & Zins,

2006e). CASEL also advocates for a **systemic approach** to SEL, which involves incorporating it into schools at various levels—from classrooms to entire districts, promoting a whole-school approach to SEL implementation (Anvarovna Umarova, n.d.). Figure 1.3 represents the interactive CASEL wheel that fosters the development of skills and environments that promote students' learning and growth.

Figure 1.3 Interactive CASEL wheel

CASEL identifies five core competencies of SEL:

1. **Self-awareness**: Understanding one's emotions, strengths, and limitations.
2. **Self-Management**: Regulating emotions, setting goals, and managing stress.
3. **Social Awareness**: Empathizing with others and understanding social norms.
4. **Relationship Skills**: Building healthy relationships, communication, and teamwork.
5. **Responsible Decision-Making**: Making ethical, constructive choices in personal and social contexts.

CASEL's goals focus on advancing Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) to equip all students with essential emotional and social skills for success. The key objectives include:

1. *Promote SEL Implementation in Schools:*
   o Advocate for the integration of SEL in schools from preschool through high school, emphasizing the importance of creating a supportive learning environment.

2. *Develop SEL Competencies:*
   o Foster the development of the five core SEL competencies: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making.

3. *Advance Research and Practice:*

    o Support and disseminate research to deepen the understanding of how SEL impacts student outcomes, both academically and socially.

    o Translate research findings into practical applications for educators and policymakers.

4. *Systemic Approach to SEL:*

    o Promote a systemic approach to SEL that integrates it not only at the classroom level but also at the school, district, and community levels to create a consistent and supportive environment.

5. *Equity and Inclusion:*

    o Ensure that SEL practices contribute to equity and inclusivity in education by addressing the needs of all students, regardless of background, and fostering an inclusive, respectful learning environment.

6. *Policy and Advocacy*:

    o Influence education policies at local, state, and national levels to prioritize and fund SEL initiatives, ensuring that all students have access to SEL programs.

7. *Collaborate with Families and Communities*:

    o Engage families and communities in the SEL process to ensure that learning extends beyond the classroom and supports students in all aspects of their lives.

CONCLUSION

The integration of digital pedagogy into classroom practices offers a promising pathway for enhancing Socio-Emotional Learning (SEL) in alignment with the National Curriculum Framework for School Education (NCFSE) 2023. By leveraging digital tools and resources, educators can create more engaging, personalized, and inclusive learning environments that foster the development of crucial socio-emotional skills among students (Elbertson et al., 2010). The NCFSE 2023 emphasizes the importance of holistic education, which includes the cultivation of emotional intelligence, empathy, resilience, and collaboration—skills that are essential for students to thrive in an increasingly complex and interconnected world (Greenberg, 2023b). Digital pedagogy, when thoughtfully integrated, can support the goals of SEL by providing diverse, interactive, and student-centered learning experiences. For instance, online platforms can facilitate collaborative projects, virtual simulations can help students navigate emotional scenarios, and digital storytelling tools can enhance self-expression and empathy. Moreover, the use of data analytics can help teachers monitor and support students' socio-emotional development more effectively.

However, the successful integration of digital pedagogy into SEL requires careful planning, ongoing professional development for educators, and equitable access to technology for all students. It also necessitates a mindful approach to balancing screen time with other forms of learning and ensuring that digital tools are used to complement, rather than replace, face-to-face interactions (THE IMPORTANCE OF SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING FOR ALL STUDENTS ACROSS ALL GRADES Core SEL Competencies, 2017b). In conclusion, aligning SEL with digital pedagogy as outlined in the NCFSE 2023 has the potential to transform classrooms into spaces where students not only acquire academic knowledge but also develop the emotional and social competencies necessary for lifelong success. The key to this transformation lies in the strategic and thoughtful application of digital tools that enhance, rather than detract from, the human connections at the heart of education.

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