



Social and Emotional Learning: A Literature Review from Islamic Perspective

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ABSTRACT

Through the process of social and emotional learning (SEL), both adults and children can learn the abilities needed to comprehend and control their emotions, form wholesome relationships, and make moral decisions. From an Islamic standpoint, social and emotional learning is regarded as a vital part of a comprehensive education since it aids in the development of the moral and ethical compass required to lead a happy and purposeful life. This paper aims to examine SEL from an Islamic perspective through the relevant scientific literature. The advantages of SEL for people as individuals, families, and communities are also covered in the review. Growing attention has been shown in the application of SEL to enhance character education in recent years. Through the SEL process, both adults and children can learn the skills needed to recognize and control their emotions, form wholesome relationships, and make moral decisions. It is a comprehensive method that takes into account the behavioral, affective, and cognitive facets of learning. The study of Islamic principles, practices, and beliefs is included in the wide field of Islamic religious education (IRE). It is a crucial component of many Muslim children's and youths' education. Since IRE instills in pupils the value of honesty, compassion, forgiveness, and other virtues, it can be a potent instrument for fostering character development.

KEYWORDS

Literature review; academic success; social and emotional learning; Islamic education.

Introduction

The process of teaching kids and adults how to recognize and control their emotions, form healthy relationships, and make moral decisions is known as social and emotional learning (SEL). SEL has gained popularity in recent years due to the benefits it has been demonstrated to offer to individuals, families, and communities.

From an Islamic perspective, SEL is considered to be an essential component of a holistic education. The Prophet Muhammad said, "The best of a man's learning is that which benefits him and his family and his community". This paper aims to examine SEL from an Islamic perspective through the relevant scientific literature.

Benefits of Social and Emotional Learning

Improved Grades, Test Scores, and Graduation Rates

A number of studies have found that social and emotional learning programs can lead to improved grades, test scores, and graduation rates. For example, a study by Durlak et al. (2011) found that students who participated in SEL programs outperformed their peers on standardized tests of reading and math by an average of 11 percentile points. Another study by Taylor et al. (2017) found that students who participated in SEL programs were more likely to graduate from high school on time.

Reduced Problem Behaviors

SEL programs can also help to reduce problem behaviors such as absenteeism, suspension, and delinquency. For example, a study by Walker et al. (2004) found that students who participated in SEL programs were less likely to be suspended from school. Another study by Jones et al. (2016) found that students who participated in SEL programs were less likely to engage in delinquent behaviors.

Improved Student Motivation and Engagement in Learning

SEL programs can also improve student motivation and engagement in learning. For example, a study by Roeser et al. (2012) found that students who participated in SEL programs were more likely to be motivated to learn and to be engaged in their schoolwork. Another study by Durlak et al. (2011) found that students who participated in SEL programs were more likely to report that they liked school and that they felt connected to their teachers and classmates.

Positive and Supportive School Climate

SEL programs can also create a more positive and supportive school climate. For example, a study by Taylor et al. (2017) found that students who participated in SEL programs reported that their schools were more positive and supportive environments. Another study by Resnick et al. (1997) found that schools with strong SEL programs had lower rates of violence and bullying.

Mechanisms through Which SEL Programs Promote Academic Achievement

In *Building Academic Success on Social and Emotional Learning: What Does the Research Say?*, Zins et al., (2004), argue that SEL programs help students to develop the following skills and attitudes that are essential for success in school:

- *Self-awareness*: The ability to understand one's own emotions, thoughts, and behaviors.
- *Self-management*: The ability to control one's emotions and impulses and to set and achieve goals.
- *Social awareness*: The ability to understand and appreciate the perspectives and feelings of others.
- *Relationship skills*: The ability to communicate effectively, build positive relationships, and resolve conflict peacefully.
- *Responsible decision-making*: The ability to make thoughtful and ethical decisions.

These skills and attitudes are essential for academic success because they allow students to:

- Manage their emotions in a way that is conducive to learning.
- Set and achieve academic goals.
- Build positive relationships with teachers and classmates.
- Resolve conflicts peacefully.
- Make thoughtful and ethical decisions about their academics.

Zins et al. (2004) recommend that schools implement comprehensive SEL programs that are integrated into the curriculum and that are supported by professional development for teachers and administrators. They also recommend that policymakers support SEL programs through funding and legislation. Finally, they encourage parents to talk to their children about SEL skills and to model SEL behaviors at home.

Developing a Vision for a School Program

In their book, *The Principal as Curriculum Leader; Shaping What is Taught and Tested*, Glatthorn and Jilall (2009) explain how school leaders can go about developing a vision for a school curriculum or program. According to the authors, there are four advantages to schools developing their own program goals:

- It creates a unifying focus for the teachers,
- It gives a clear sense of direction for instructional work,
- It provides an occasion for professional dialogue, and
- It creates a common language.

Glatthorn and Jilall (2009) recommend using the following process for developing a home-grown program:

- Assemble participants and organize them into groups. Participants could include parents, students, and educators.
- Explain the importance of the meeting or vision-making process, and stress its future use

in shaping the SEL program for your school.

- Develop the knowledge base for the group by reviewing elements such as changing society, the characteristics of the community, teaching and learning, among other things.
- Explain to participants that they should individually complete a philosophical statement that the leader provides. Without group discussions, each person should complete the statement by writing ten adjectives.
- Each person should write down a statement or two that defines or describes two of the adjectives they chose.
- The participants share their adjectives with the group while the leader writes down adjectives on the board.
- Leader raises questions about meaning of words and asks participants to share their definitions.
- Each person then has three minutes to advocate for one of the adjectives listed on the board. After the advocacy, each member gets to vote for any of the adjectives listed on the board.
- After voting, the group discusses further the entire list and agree that the adjectives with the largest number of votes are those they support the most.
- Each group presents its results to the larger group, and the facilitator of the session helps find commonalities. (Glatthorn and Jailall, 2009)

When choosing a list of competencies or goals to focus on, it would behoove school leaders to focus on quality instead of quantity. The old axiom that less is more applies to competency generation. Also, the list of competencies should include global constructs, like compassion, or leadership, from which specific behaviors can be extracted. Indeed, global constructs should be translated into specific behaviors (Carlin 2017). Once the behaviors have been identified, worded, and agreed upon, the school is ready to start teaching them. At this juncture, creativity and inventiveness is highly needed. In addition to the instructional strategies to be adopted and professionally developed in teachers, school leaders must create the environment – the culture and climate – in which social and emotional growth could thrive. Indeed, the environment is a prerequisite to social-emotional growth (Wood and Freeman-Loftis, 2017).

Developing a Vision for an Islamic SEL Program

In recent years, the integration of social and emotional learning into traditional Islamic religious education (IRE) has gained immense traction as a viable approach to fostering character development in Muslim youth. SEL encompasses the acquisition of skills required to comprehend, regulate emotions, establish positive connections, and make sound judgments. It delves into the cognitive, affective, and behavioral facets of learning, providing a holistic approach to education.

Khilmiyaha and Suudb (2020) discusses the integration of SEL into Islamic religious education (IRE) as a means to improve character development in Muslim youth. They argue that SEL is an essential component of a holistic education and that it can be effectively integrated into

IRE using a variety of strategies. The article also provides a review of the research on the benefits of SEL for character development. And it is included in key points:

- SEL is a process through which children and adults acquire the skills necessary to understand and manage their emotions, build positive relationships, and make responsible decisions.
- SEL is based on the Islamic principles of *tawbeed*, *taqwa*, *ibsan*, and *adab*.
- There are a number of ways to integrate SEL into IRE, such as using SEL-based teaching strategies, Islamic stories and examples, and creating a supportive and inclusive learning environment.
- SEL programs can have a number of benefits for character development, including increased empathy and compassion, improved self-regulation and self-awareness, enhanced decision-making skills, and greater resilience in the face of challenges.

Khilmiyaha and Suudb (2020) recommend that:

- Educators should be trained in SEL and how to integrate it into IRE.
- Schools and mosques should create a supportive and inclusive environment that promotes SEL.
- Parents should be educated about SEL and how they can support their children's SEL development at home.

A recent case study by Al-Wattary (2022) investigated the implementation of an Islamic social and emotional learning program in a public school in Qatar. The program was designed to help students develop the skills necessary to understand and manage their emotions, build positive relationships, and make responsible decisions. The program was based on Islamic principles and values, and it was implemented using a variety of strategies, including classroom instruction, small group activities, and parent workshops.

The study found that the program was effective in improving students' SEL skills. Students who participated in the program had higher scores on measures of empathy, self-awareness, self-regulation, social competence, and responsible decision-making. The program also had a positive impact on students' behavior and academic performance. The study concludes that Islamic SEL programs can be effective in promoting character development in Muslim youth. The study also recommends that further research be conducted on the long-term effects of Islamic SEL programs (Al-Wattary, 2022).

Plato is famous for defining morality as “the willingness to do good and the ability to do good well.” Prophet Mohammad also included, in one of his authentic hadiths (narrated by Bukhari): “What is most likely to send people to paradise? God consciousness and good conduct or mannerisms.” The emphasis on mannerism in Islam is an emphasis on good social habits, and good emotional practices, ones that do not create trouble for one’s self and others (Nurhadi, 2020).

It would also serve educators well to review the difference between learning for recall and

learning for transfer. Learning for recall is knowing and memorizing the knowledge. Learning for transfer means students are able to apply the skills and knowledge they developed during learning to different contexts. Everything we do requires not just knowing knowledge, but using it. In a sense, teaching for transfer is a general goal in education. The goal in SEL is the same, it's to move beyond learning for recall and pursue a model that focuses on learning for transfer, whereby students are practicing the skills on a daily basis.

Learning for transfer is also aligned with an Islamic tradition. Ibn al-Qayyim said: "There are six stages to knowledge: Firstly, asking questions in a good manner. Secondly, remaining quiet and listening attentively. Thirdly, understanding well. Fourthly, Memorizing. Fifthly, teaching the material. And sixthly: and it is the fruit: acting upon the knowledge and keeping to its limits." Acting upon the knowledge is applying the skills one developed during learning. This dichotomy between learning and applying has been described in many ways: *I'lm* and *a'mal*, awareness and ability, and *tarbiyah* and *ta'leem*, declarative knowledge and procedural knowledge (Yousef, n. d.).

Many Islamic schools focus on monthly themes, like respect for example, which is a pro-social competency. But to talk about one trait or another, include a story, or incorporate an activity, only teaches students on the level of awareness, or learning for recall. In order to teach students for transfer, school leaders could borrow from several instructional models that build up procedural knowledge, or, in other words, allows students to transfer the knowledge and apply it to different contexts.

Three models that have been used to gain procedural knowledge are inquiry-based or project-based learning, interactive modeling, and cooperative learning. Project-based learning is, in itself, a whole approach to education. But one of its components, namely how it incorporates 21st century skills, could be leveraged to teach other skills, i.e. social-emotional skills. When students work on projects in teams, it's best practice for teachers to communicate all their expectations, and to include rubrics and checklists for students to keep track of what their being evaluated for (Hallermann and Larmer, 2011). Indeed, rubrics could be created to evaluate students for social-emotional skills.

When teaching the intended social-emotional skills, there are two things that teachers have to think about and invent or arrange for. One, what opportunities will be provided to students to demonstrate and practice the skill, and two, how will you assess that skill. Take for example the ability to disagree politely with others, or as the Prophet Mahomet advised his wife Aisha, to be gentle with others, and avoid aggression. The following format could be used to observe and evaluate gentleness in students.

Table 1.*A proposed example of social-emotional skills teaching in Islamic schools*

Social-Emotional Skill	Opportunities for students to demonstrate skill	How to assess skill
Gentleness with others.	Periodic meetings or instances to give each other feedback without negative words and comments	Use rubric to assess for kind words and absence of impoliteness.

When thinking about the opportunities, a teacher must think about the skill. Hallermann and Larmer, (2011) provide a list of opportunities to teach critical thinking. One example to allow students to demonstrate critical thinking is that students get “to explain the quality of various solutions to a problem before deciding on one”. Teachers evaluate that ability or skill by simple observing it and recording the times it was observed. Once Islamic schools translate their competencies into behaviors, then they’ll be more able to embed skills into project-based learning experiences, invent opportunities, and evaluate students for attainment.

Another instructional strategy is interactive modeling. In *The Art and Science of Teaching: A Comprehensive Framework for Effective Instruction*, R. J. Marzano (2007) explains that the best way to introduce procedural knowledge is to provide students with a “clear model of the procedure, and a chance or two for students to try it themselves (p. 80). Interactive modeling is a responsive classroom, straightforward, seven-step process used to teach children skills, strategies, or procedures that you want them to do in a specific way. The following is a summary of the steps:

- Briefly state what you will model, and why.
- Model the behavior exactly as you expect students to do it. (Don’t narrate unless you need to “show” an internal thinking process.)
- Ask students what they noticed. Prompt them to notice essential details.
- Invite one or more students to model the same way you did.
- Again, ask students what they noticed.
- Have all students’ practice.
- Provide feedback. (Marzano, 2007)

In an Islamic school setting, interactive modeling can be used to teach *salah* (prayer) or *wudu’* (ablution for prayer]. It could also be used to show students what saying *salaams* sounds like, what inviting others looks like, what it looks like to help the poor, to respect your parents, to be gentle with others, or to be forgiving in one situation, and assertive in another. If a school decides on what it wants to teach, then it could use interactive modeling to teach it. A last, but certainly not final instructional approach is cooperative learning. If a school leader understands the significance and efficiency of cooperative learning towards teaching social skills, then he or she will leverage it to teach their desired social-emotional competencies.

Conclusion

Societies all over the world are grappling with a variety of problems and issues. Many are trying to find solutions to their problems; many are scrambling to address the needs of their people. It's important to acknowledge that societal problems, even environmental and political ones, are products of human behavior. Indeed, there's a connection between human crises and the way people behave, produce, and interact. But when considering this connection between problems and human behaviors/interactions, educators might as well consider how schools could reverse or at least help slow down the worsening of things.

Islamic schools could develop programs that teach more constructive behaviors, inhibit destructive or problem-producing interactions, and contribute to a more conscientious population. The question is which ones? Not just which behaviors does society need, but which behaviors do Muslim communities need? Which behaviors merit the focus of Islamic schools? And what kind of social/emotional program could Muslim children benefit from? School leaders ought to play a pivotal role in answering these questions, and focusing on improving three areas of school work: identifying skills or competencies, cultivating a positive school climate/culture, and training teachers on certain instructional strategies.

It's important to remember that schools are the organizations most obliged to correct world issues, to populate the world with people who are more willing to do good than harm, more willing to build than to destroy, and more willing to love than to hate. Social and emotional learning is a vehicle towards more positive mindsets, attitudes, and pro-social skills. When considering the definition of *Khalifa*, someone that takes care of the earth, we might as well consider that a *Khalifa* is a well-rounded person, who's socially and emotionally adept. Islamic school leaders ought to play a role in moving their schools beyond academics Islamic Studies, and to pursue a more purposeful program towards social and emotional growth. Indeed, that's one way of moving from good to great.

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