

Impact of SEL intervention ‘Lead Well’ on teacher SEL development: Insights from a field study

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Abstract: Teachers’ social-emotional well-being is crucial for their quality of life. Their well-being is closely associated with the classroom practices, relationships and functioning with students. This study examines the impact of an intervention—‘Lead Well’ on the development of teacher SEL competencies. ‘Lead Well’ is a social-emotional learning (SEL) capacity-building program for teachers, developed by Learning Curve Life Skills Foundation, Hyderabad, India. The program aims to support, develop and promote social emotional well-being among teachers. A single group pretest and posttest design is adopted to conduct this study in Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya (KGBV). KGBV schools provide educational facilities for girl students (grades 6–10) belonging to backward classes, minority backgrounds and families below the poverty line in Educationally Backward Blocks. The study was conducted with teachers in the KGBV schools of Vikarabad district. Teachers were provided with the SEL capacity-building program for their own well-being for an academic year. The training was imparted in phases and regular support was provided. An end-line assessment was administered at the end of the academic year. Analysis reported a significant level of improvement in teachers’ SEL competencies (Emotional Intelligence, Engaging the Child, Shaping Attitudes, Mentor Mindset and Learning and Adaptability). The findings provide the empirical evidence on the impact of teacher-focused SEL interventions. It underscores the need for building teachers social-emotional competencies to improve classroom practices.

Keywords: systemic SEL approach; SEL; Lead Well; learning curve foundation; teacher well-being; teacher SEL

1. Introduction

Teachers play a crucial role in nurturing children’s academic learning and social-emotional well-being. SEL for teachers is a critical aspect of education, that focuses on equipping educators with the emotional and interpersonal skills needed to navigate the complexities of their profession. Teacher SEL involves competencies such as emotional regulation, relationship-building, decision-making, and self-awareness, which are essential for maintaining well-being and effectively managing classroom dynamics [1]. The rationale for Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) emerges from a diverse body of empirical research stemming from various theoretical frameworks, often overlapping and lacking clearly defined boundaries [2]. Currently, SEL is widely understood as the process through which individuals develop and apply essential competencies across five interconnected domains: self-awareness, social awareness, self-management, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making, collectively referred to as Social and Emotional Competencies (SEC) [3]. Despite its importance,

teacher SEL has historically received less attention in training and professional development programs.

In the process of engaging with children and in managing classroom dynamics, teachers undergo a lot of stress and experience burnout. Addressing teachers' stress has always remained a significant challenge in education. In numerous research studies conducted with highly experienced teachers, stress was found to have direct effects on depressive symptoms. Burnout was found to mediate the relationship between work stress and depressive symptoms [4]. Similar findings from studies conducted in India indicated that approximately half of the teachers (44%) suffer from burnout and this is significantly correlated with psychological, physical and psychosomatic symptoms [5]. Chronic stress leads to occupational burnout that gets reflected through emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and a low sense of accomplishment in one's own work [6]. This level of stress harms the teacher's physical health and well-being [7]. This stress impacts the classroom climate and interaction with students and school personnel. SEL capacity building of teachers is found to be a particularly useful strategy to improve teachers' emotional health [8]. Research underscores that teachers with strong SEL skills experience lower stress, improved job satisfaction, and enhanced professional efficacy, which positively impacts both their personal well-being and the social-emotional climate of the classroom [9].

Equipping teachers to build their efficacy in using classroom management strategies and work towards their own well-being can translate into building a healthy classroom environment. Not only is SEL significant for students alone but also for teachers and other school personnel. Though the necessity of SEL is high, in the pre-service teacher preparation programs of India, there is no or very little mention of SEL. Even if there is a mention, it is at the knowledge level and does not provide opportunities to practice SEL strategies in classes. Providing teachers with opportunities improves their ability and fidelity in implementing SEL programs and practices. The literature in the field insists on the need for SEL for teachers, as their own social and emotional competencies (SEC) and well-being play a crucial role in their functioning.

2. Review of literature

2.1. Teacher's social emotional learning

Teaching as a profession is emotionally demanding and a lack of efficient coping strategies leads to emotional exhaustion and burnout [10]. A meta-analysis stressed the need for systemic SEL for teachers and found that teacher SEL interventions positively affect their social-emotional competence and well-being and reduce psychological distress [1]. Teacher SEL is being widely discussed as it has the potential to contribute to improving the schooling system in three ways—firstly, it impacts student social emotional learning and academic outcomes and also contributes to preparing students for their adult life [11,12]; secondly, it helps build effective stress management strategies, resilience, reduces psychological distress and improves quality of teaching [1,13]; thirdly, engaging teachers in SEL contributes to improving school climate while making learning safe and healthy for students [1,11].

In the following sections, literature on teacher SEC, the relation between teacher and student SEC and the relation between work stress and teacher well-being is discussed.

2.2. Teacher social emotional competence

School social-emotional climate plays a major role in the effective functioning of schools. Teacher emotions are critically important for determining the quality of the school and classroom climate. Research reports that children's SEL is directly influenced by teachers' own SEC as well as their pedagogical skills [14]. Teachers' SEC is associated with their psychological well-being. Socially and emotionally competent teachers feel more efficacious, are self-aware, and exhibit high SEC [15,16]. They recognize their own emotions and use their emotions positively to motivate others to learn. They understand their own capacities, emotional strengths and weaknesses particularly well and understand how one's own decisions affect the well-being of others [17].

Studies show that the distress experienced by teachers influences the fidelity in implementing SEL programs in classrooms. The negative emotions of teachers interfere with their motivation to teach. It leads to poor management of the social-emotional demands of students, affecting their academic achievement and behavior [18]. It is important to understand teachers' social-emotional well-being and the way students' SEL is influenced by teachers to understand ways to promote SEL in the classrooms. Since it is understood through studies that teachers' SEC and well-being affect the classroom management strategies, relationships with students, and their ability to implement SEL programs and practices, it is just not enough to promote SEL but to have a systematic plan to enhance teachers' knowledge of SEL.

2.3. Teacher and student SEL

Systemic SEL frameworks share three distinct and interrelated dimensions, i.e., the school climate, the teachers' SEL/adult SEL and the students' SEL. Each dimension influences and is strongly influenced by the other. The objective of these frameworks is to systematically integrate SEL into school practice, policy and curricula [19]. Studies provide evidence that teachers' SEC positively influences the learning [20], teacher-student relationship and also student outcomes [21]. A warm teacher-child relationship encourages deep learning among students and makes them feel comfortable with teachers and peers. It encourages them to take up challenging tasks and persist with difficult learning tasks [22]. Building on teachers' SEC helps in optimizing teachers' classroom performance and their ability to promote SEL among students [17]. Research has also found that teachers have an effect on students' social-emotional skills [23], indicating that teachers have an effect not only on the academic but also the non-academic outcomes. Along with social and emotional skills, teachers' need professional support in building knowledge, dispositions, and skills to create a safe, caring, supportive and responsive school environment and classroom community. The need for professional development programs focused on building SEC among teachers. Also, their intervention provided evidence that teachers

considered engaging in SEL professional development programs to be helpful in implementing SEL among students [24].

2.4. Work stress and teacher well-being

Teaching as a profession is considered one of the most stressful occupations, as indicated by research [25,26]. Teachers experience stress from different sources such as lack of a healthy school environment, increasing job demands, limited autonomy in the workspace, and lack of skills to cope with work-related stress [27]. Increased stress levels among teachers are found to be linked with negative outcomes such as decreased job satisfaction, poor instructional practices, poor student outcomes [28], emotional exhaustion, depersonalization [29], burnout, and reduced student engagement [30–32]. It was also found that teachers' perceptions of students' behavior significantly predict their sense of stress, job satisfaction, and efficacy [33].

It is also observed that stress experienced by teachers not only affects students but also has an impact on their functional abilities [34] and their capacities to emotionally attend to children [35]. Stress in classrooms can be contagious; stressful classrooms have stressed students. Teachers who reported higher levels of stress were found to have more students in their classrooms with mental health problems, interpersonal problems (e.g., trouble expressing emotions and resolving conflicts), and internalizing problems (such as anxiety, sadness, and low self-esteem) [36]. This negative impact on students could be caused by increased stress among teachers leading to withdrawn interactions with children [37–39] and less tolerance of challenging behaviors [40]. Stress influences teachers' own beliefs about their teaching efficacy. Also, children who are cared for by stressed teachers tend to have lower levels of SEC [41,42] that negatively impact students' well-being [43,44]. Thus, it becomes necessary to understand the levels of stress experienced by teachers and equip them with SEC to deal with stressful situations.

This highlights the need to engage teachers in programs that help them learn skills to manage their stress while adopting effective coping strategies. There is a need to provide teachers access to resources on mental health to assist them in managing the emotional stress they experience [45]. Also, there is a need to create supportive school environments for teachers, as it contributes to their well-being and reduces their intention to leave the profession [45,46]. Improved teacher well-being is linked to improved classroom, instructional, and emotional support towards children. Hence, teacher well-being is positively related to the quality of teacher-student interactions, leading to improvement in student well-being [47].

The aim of the current study is to examine the impact of the SEL intervention, 'Lead Well', on teachers' SEL development.

3. Methodology

3.1. Context of the study

The Lead Well program was conducted in 18 KGBV schools in the Vikarabad district, Telangana, in the academic year 2019–2020. The program aimed to build

teachers’ social-emotional competencies and assist them in implementing SEL curricula in classrooms among students.

3.2. Research objective

1. To study the effectiveness of SEL Capacity building program in the development of teachers’ SEC.

3.3. Research hypothesis

H₀¹: There is no significant difference between the baseline and end-line scores of teacher SEC levels as a result of the SEL capacity building program.

3.4. Research design

A single group pretest–post-test design, which is categorized under quasi–experimental research design, is used in this study. The same group of participants is measured twice: Baseline (before the intervention) and endline (after the intervention). A paired samples *t*-test is used to compare pretest and post-test scores to assess the effectiveness of the intervention on the SEC of teachers.

3.5. Details on the intervention

Lead Well is a capacity-building program developed by Learning Curve Life Skills Foundation to engage teachers in SEL. Two-day workshops and one day refresher workshop were conducted in one academic year. Teachers were given lesson plans and a plan to facilitate SEL in the classroom. An SEL toolkit was shared with the teachers, and it consisted of a guidebook, handbook, posters, and student rewards. The teacher handbook consisted of detailed lesson plans for grade 6–9 students.

Framework of teacher SEL

This intervention was based on the teacher SEL framework (**Table 1**) developed by Learning Curve and is built around 5 core competencies. This competency model is the basis of the ‘Lead Well’ curriculum and assessment of teacher progress.

Table 1. Lead Well-teacher SEL framework—competency and standards.

Teacher Social-emotional Competency	Standards
Emotional Intelligence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ability to recognize one’s emotions and their effects • Ability to appreciate one’s self-worth and capabilities
Engaging the Child	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ability to listen, be curious and communicate effectively • Ability to manage disruptive emotions and impulses (self and others)
Shaping Attitudes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Active interest in helping others in difficult situations • Ability to collaborate and cooperate with others
Mentor mindset	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ability to build and nurture relationships • Ability to foster long-term learning among children
Learning and Adaptability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ability to handle change • Open to novel ideas and new information

Each competency is elaborated across 4 progression levels, with specific indicators for each competency and level.

3.6. Assessment measures

The assessment tool included statements describing the SEC followed by 4 options that would reflect teacher SEL competencies. These options provided were of different levels (Level 1–Level 4 in the progressive order; *Level 1—rarely demonstrates the competency; limited application in teaching practices to Level 4—consistently demonstrates the competency; integrates seamlessly into all teaching practices*). The SO marked the response based on her observations of the teacher's demonstration of SEC. The following competencies were assessed using the scale mentioned above—emotional intelligence, engaging the child, shaping attitudes, mentor mindset and learning & adaptability.

3.7. Data collection procedure

Teachers were assessed on their SEC at both baseline and end-line using a Special Officer reported Observation Schedule (SOOrOS). The data were collected from 8 special officers (Sos) for 31 teachers from 8 KGBV schools. The data obtained from this assessment tool is based on the SOs' observation of the teachers in the school. The baseline assessment and endline assessments were carried out by sharing the assessment tool on the KoBo platform with the SOs. The data thus gathered were then used for further analysis.

The program was implemented in 18 schools; however, the data was collected from 8 schools due to challenges in accessibility to complete the assessment. The SOs of the eight schools provided both baseline and endline scores. Teachers were trained and tasked with implementing SEL sessions in their classrooms, while SOs were trained to observe and evaluate these sessions. A questionnaire (2 questions for each indicator; a total of 10 questions) was uploaded on the KoBo platform, which was then shared with SOs. The field team also guided SOs through each question, addressing any queries to ensure clarity. Thus, it was ensured that all SOs maintained consistency in their assessment process.

3.8. Data preparation and analysis

3.8.1. Data preparation

The missing scores were found on the assessments. If the SO had left an entire assessment blank for the teacher, it was considered unanswered, and the data was regarded as missing, and the participant was dropped from the statistical analysis. In accordance with this, the final number of teachers considered for the study is 31 from 8 KGBV schools.

3.8.2. Analysis of the data

The data collected through the baseline and end-line assessments were statistically analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (henceforth SPSS) Inc., version 12.0 for Windows. In addition to calculating the descriptive statistics, a paired samples *t*-test was conducted to assess the significance in the improvement of SEL competency levels between the baseline and endline scores.

The current study tests the effectiveness of the capacity-building program (Lead Well) on the development of SEC among teachers.

4. Results

Analysis of the data related to teacher SEL competencies:

Table 2. Teachers SEC—baseline and endline mean scores.

Teacher SEL Competencies	Baseline score	End-line score
Emotional Intelligence	1.68	2.55
Engaging Child	1.58	2.23
Shaping attitudes	1.65	2.45
Mentor Mindset	1.61	2.84
Learning & Adaptability	1.61	2.32

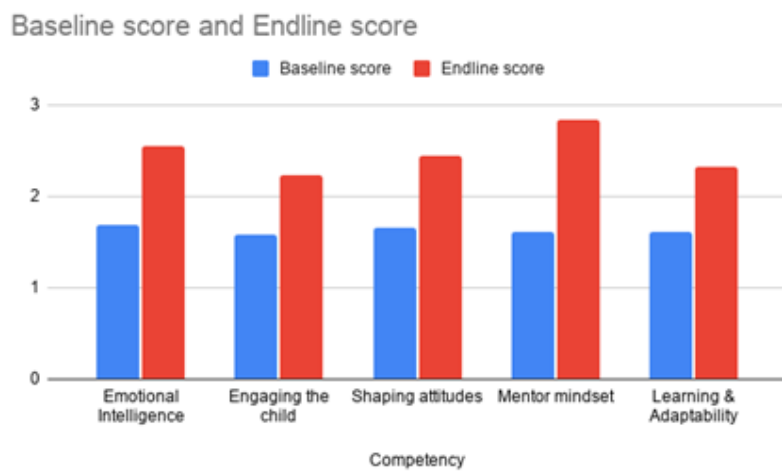


Figure 1. Graphical representation of teacher SEC—baseline and endline mean scores.

There is an improvement in mean scores across all teacher SEC (**Table 2, Figure 1**). If the improvement is significant or insignificant, it is assessed using a paired sample *t*-test. The increase in mean scores across all competencies indicates the potential of the capacity-building program ‘Lead Well’ for teachers’ well-being, support, and development.

Objective 1: To study the effectiveness of SEL Capacity building program in the development of teachers’ SEL competencies.

H_0^1 : There is no significant difference between the baseline and end-line scores of teachers social-emotional competency levels as a result of the Lead Well Capacity Building Program.

A paired sample *t*-test was conducted to assess the difference between teachers’ baseline and endline SEC (Refer to **Table 3**). There is a significant increase in mean scores of emotional intelligence in comparison of baseline ($M = 1.68, SD = 0.653$) to end-line scores ($M = 2.55, SD = 1.09, t(30) = 3.63, p = 0.00$). There is a significant increase in mean scores of engaging children in comparison to baseline ($M = 1.58, SD = 0.765$) to end-line mean scores ($M = 2.23, SD = 1.117, t(30) = 2.7, p = 0.01$). There is a significant increase in mean scores of shaping attitudes in comparison of baseline ($M = 1.65, SD = 0.709$) to end-line mean scores ($M = 2.45, SD = 1.287, t(30) = 3.44,$

$p = 0.00$). There is a significant increase of mentor mindset in comparison of baseline scores ($M = 1.61, SD = 0.615$) to the end-line mean scores ($M = 2.84, SD = 1.117$), $t(30) = 5.54, p = 0.00$. The levels of learning and adaptability also show an improvement between the baseline ($M = 1.61, SD = 0.715$) and the end-line scores ($M = 2.32, SD = 1.22, t(30) = 2.61, p = 0.01$). These results indicate that there is an overall improvement in all competencies pointing towards the potential of the SEL programs, such as ‘Lead Well’ among teachers. Hence, the null hypothesis is rejected at the 0.05 level and the alternate hypothesis is accepted.

Table 3. Paired sample t -test—baseline and end-line scores of teachers SEC.

SEL Competency	Mean	S. D	t -value	df	sig
Emotional Intelligence	0.871	1.33	3.63	30	0.001*
Engaging child	0.645	1.33	2.7	30	0.011*
Shaping attitudes	0.806	1.30	3.44	30	0.002*
Mentor mindset	1.226	1.23	5.54	30	0.000*
Learning and Adaptability	0.710	1.51	2.61	30	0.014*

Notes: * Significant at 0.05 level.

5. Discussion

The study reports findings of the effects of the SEL capacity-building program on the development of SEL competencies of teachers. Teachers participated in the capacity-building program for a period of one academic year. Teachers were assessed prior to the intervention (baseline) and after the intervention (endline). The intervention has brought about a significant improvement in the levels of teacher SEL competencies. While there have been a few studies on the effectiveness of the SEL programs for teacher well-being, these kinds of studies have been limited in the context of the Indian education system. The present study contributes to a growing body of work on the impact of capacity-building programs for the development of SEL competencies in teachers from baseline to endline assessments.

Results from the current study are in line with the results from the previous studies. Many SEL-related interventions for teachers have been implemented and have proved to be efficient in improving the SEL levels of teachers. The CARE training received by teachers showed improvement in “adaptive emotion regulation, mindfulness, and greater reduction in psychological distress” [48]. Research has also highlighted the link between successful “social relationships in schools (both between teachers and students and among students) are connected to positive social and academic outcomes” [49]. Synthesis of various SEL programs reveals that teachers who receive training in SEL are more confident in modifying their teaching practices and contribute positively to student engagement [50]. Consistent with findings, a review of several interventions aimed to improve teachers’ SEC showed promising results, and it was found that teachers’ own beliefs on their teaching efficacy influence the fidelity with which they implement the SEL programs in the classroom [51]. When fidelity was less, SEL programs were found to be less successful. The findings from the current study also resonate with the prior research that a well-designed and well-

implemented SEL program can help all students and teachers acquire and apply the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to deal effectively with daily tasks and challenges and achieve success in school, work, and life [52,53]. Numerous meta-analyses have shown that SEL programs taught by class teachers can promote the development of social-emotional competencies [53–55].

It is also reinstated that school staff needs regular opportunities to develop their SEC and build trusting relationships [56]. Hence, a safe, nurturing, and caring environment is necessary for effective implementation of SEL. Effective implementation depends on the adults at school. Teachers need to have strong SEL skills and cultural competence [57,58]. They need to be committed to SEL and model behaviors such as managing stress and frustration, showing empathy, cooperating, and handling conflicts. Teachers with strong SEL skills are better able to manage their own job demands and foster a healthy learning environment [31]. This requires enhancing the social-emotional competencies of teachers as a part of the foundation of the SEL system [51,59]. Regular opportunities have to be provided for staff to develop these skills through professional development [60] to support teacher social and emotional development [58]. In the current study, the component—Teacher SEL is imparted through the SEL capacity-building program and the implementation of the SEL curriculum to students as well. The significant improvement in the teachers' SEC suggests the efficacy of the capacity-building program—Lead Well—and its benefits for teachers.

The findings of this study highlight the potential of the program—Lead Well' — to serve as a model for capacity building that improves teacher well-being and promotes a conducive learning environment. This study is useful for researchers as it provides empirical evidence on the impact of teacher-focused SEL interventions. For educators, it underscores the importance of building SEL competencies to improve classroom practices, foster better relationships with students, and enhance teaching effectiveness. Policymakers can use the insights to design and implement targeted SEL capacity-building programs for teachers, particularly in underserved regions, to promote holistic educational reforms that address both teacher and student well-being.

Study limitations and future directions

- The study is conducted with teachers working in schools in a residential setup, which provides them with ample opportunities to interact with children and implement SEL, whereas similar opportunities would not be possible in other schools. Hence, the generalization of results to all types of schools is difficult.
- A convenience sampling technique was used to identify SOs from the population of 18 schools. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, not all schools could provide complete data. Hence, this could impact the generalizability of the study to a larger population. However, the study provides insights into the need for teacher SEL capacity-building programs for the betterment of their SEC.
- The study period overlapped with the Covid pandemic, and the external factors were not controlled by the researcher. Hence, randomized experimental design-based studies can be conducted to attribute the development of SEL competencies exclusively to the intervention.

- The data was collected twice, once at baseline and endline, owing to the availability of the participants. Continuous assessments were not conducted; however, qualitative assessments and delayed post-tests can provide more insights.

Follow-up studies would be necessary to understand the impact of capacity-building programs on the development of SEL competencies among students and teachers. To understand the processes involved in the development of SEC in both children and adults, longitudinal studies need to be planned.

6. Conclusion and implications for practice

The present study represents a significant step in reporting results and providing evidence of the continued impact of SEL intervention with teachers for a year. Findings from the present study suggest an SEL intervention for teachers with support has a significant impact on the SEL competency levels of teachers. This suggests the effectiveness of the SEL capacity-building program—Lead Well—in developing SEL competencies of teachers. Though the research on the critical role of teachers in enhancing SEL at school is increasing, the training for teachers in this area is not on par with the need iterated by the research [61,62]. Considering results from studies that report most teachers perceive themselves as moderately or poorly prepared for understanding and regulating emotions at work, specific implications for practice include teacher preparation programs incorporating theory, research, and practical application of SEL into teachers' pre-service education [63]. Given that, SEL needs to be a part of pre-service education; it is just not enough that they are provided only with knowledge of SEL, but it is also necessary to provide them with tools and strategies to build their own SEC. Continued support for teachers through workshops and training programs in the in-service phase also helps keep teachers updated with new strategies and research to implement SEL. This also paves the way to integrate SEL into K-12 education and create a generation of students who are SEL enabled. This intervention provided initial evidence that the SEL capacity-building programs for teachers offer the potential to efficiently and effectively help promote well-being, which further enables them to implement SEL interventions with fidelity and efficiency in classrooms for better development of children.

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Conflict of interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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