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**Impact of Social-Emotional Learning (SEL)-Based Instruction on Students' Collaborative Learning Skills at the Secondary School Level: Gender Wise Comparison**

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**Abstract**

With an emphasis on gender-wise comparisons of teachers' perceptions, this study investigated the effects of Social-Emotional Learning (SEL)-based instruction on secondary students' collaborative learning abilities. Effective collaboration requires competencies like communication, problem-solving, teamwork, interpersonal skills, and social responsibility, all of which SEL highlights. A validated Likert-scale questionnaire measuring four dimensions of collaborative learning was completed by 135 secondary school teachers (73 male and 62 female) using a quantitative survey design. While there were no discernible gender differences in teamwork, problem-solving, or interpersonal and social responsibility skills, data analysis using descriptive statistics and independent sample t-tests showed that male teachers believed SEL instruction had a slightly greater impact on students' communication skills. Overall results show that SEL-based instruction improves students' collaborative skills in both genders. In order to support students' social-emotional and collaborative development, the study emphasizes the significance of incorporating SEL into secondary curricula and putting in place gender-sensitive teacher training.

**Keywords:** Social-Emotional Learning, Collaborative Learning, Secondary School Level.

**Introduction**

The 21<sup>st</sup> century education requires the academic skills not only but also interpersonal and intrapersonal skills that will equip the student to work in a team, solve problems, and be an emotionally intelligent citizen. Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) has become one of the major pedagogical models that focus on the development of such competencies through an intentional teaching of skills that are associated with self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning [CASEL], 2020). Despite the abundance of research on SEL in young children and primary schools, its effectiveness and use in secondary school, particularly in South Asia, needs to be researched further (Siraj, Jabeen, and Akhtar, 2025; Yasir and Mahmood, 2025).

SEL-based teaching focuses more on learning experiences beyond content knowledge to encompass emotional intelligence, teamwork, collaboration and interpersonal effectiveness all of which play a critical role in the success of students in the classroom and life outside school (Seroya and Buck, 2024). These skills are almost identical to collaborative learning skills, which are the skills of students to cooperate effectively, communicate effectively,

conflict resolution in constructive forms, responsibility sharing, and contribution of group goals. The collaboration learning is identified as a pedagogical technique, which improves engagement, critical thinking, and peer interaction (Rukh & Ali, 2025a; 2025b) - the skills that overlap with the key SEL competencies inherently.

Although SEL and collaborative learning theoretical synergy is evident to enhance each other, not much is known empirically in South Asian educational contexts and in this context, Pakistan. A large part of the SEL research in the area is dedicated to elementary or preschool settings (Lasi, Khan, and Afzal, 2023; Ahmed and Khan, 2024), teacher educator awareness (Yasir and Mahmood, 2025) or the view of teachers regarding the implementation of SEL (Siraj et al., 2025). These researches provide a base of the importance of SEL in school education but fail to directly connect SEL classroom teaching with collaborative skills of secondary school children.

The SEL models, such as the popular CASEL model, are found in the literature of various countries: it is argued that students who are provided with organized SEL instruction have a higher chance of exhibiting positive social behaviours, emotional regulation, interpersonal skills, and academic engagement (CASEL, 2020). The results of such are theorized to facilitate the collaborative learning abilities of students as it improves their ability to communicate, empathise, negotiate, and act as positive group contributors. Meta-analyses have demonstrated that SEL programs can have an important social skills and peer relationships enhancing effect in K-12 schools (Seroya & Buck, 2024), which is likely to be generalizable to secondary schools.

However, a gap in research is present: the differentiated effectiveness of SEL teaching on the collaborative abilities of male and female students is still insufficiently studied in the South Asian settings. Social-emotional competency in gender and attitudes towards collaborative engagement have been identified in the corresponding studies. As an example, comparative studies on the concept of social-emotional competence in Pakistani secondary school students revealed the gender gap in the emotional skills of the students, where female students exhibited higher socio-emotional competence (Zahid et al., 2025). These results point to possible gender disparities in the way that SEL instruction constructs collaborative learning, but the two variables have not been systematically related via empirical studies of a methodically applied SEL instructional study.

Besides, the secondary level of education is also a challenge in terms of development. Adolescence is an emotionally complicated, identity-forming, and socially negotiating stage; thus, intervention at such level through SEL needs to be both developmentally and gendered-aware. There is also some evidence not in the region that gender may also be relevant in attitudes toward SEL, e.g. female teachers in Australia are more supportive of SEL integration than male teachers (Rikoon et al., 2024), and general educational attitudes tend to vary across the gender lines. The patterns highlight the significance of exploring gender-specific results in the application of SEL frameworks of secondary classrooms.

The role of Holistic methods in education such as incorporating emotional, social and academic learning is noted with increasing prominence in education discourse in Pakistan. According to policymakers and educators, SEL is helpful in mitigating behavioural problems, enhancing psychological health, and creating favourable classroom environments that promote cooperative learning. The qualitative evidence indicates that the obstacles to the job of SEL in the area are related to the lack of trainings of the teachers, to the restrictions of the curricula, and to the lack of the institutional support - particularly in the state schools (Siraj

et al., 2025; Ahmed and Khan, 2024). These contextual variables can also affect the efficiency of SEL teaching, as well as, the gendered experiences of students in groups.

Therefore, the objective of the current research is to test how the SEL-based instruction can influence the collaborative learning abilities of students of secondary schools (with special emphasis on gender-based comparisons). Placing the study in the Pakistani educational setting, the proposed study is expected to address a significant empirical gap and create knowledge on how the SEL can be strategically used to promote collaborative competencies within the gender groups. They are likely to be used in the design of curriculums, teacher development, and policy programs that will result in socially and emotionally competent learners prepared to work in a quickly changing world.

### **Literature Review**

The concept of Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) is the systematic educational activity in which students can acquire the essential skills that include self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making (CASEL, 2020). This holistic methodology transforms the academic cognition, instead of simply that, with emotional and social competencies that constitute the basis of good human operation within social environments. Most of the modern research on SEL is guided by the CASEL framework that also focuses on nurturing learning contexts that support positive behaviours and peer relations instead of merely developing skills.

The basis of SEL is the socio-emotional development theory that states that academic education and life skills have emotional and social competencies. Theorists such as Vygotsky have maintained that learning is a social process; cognitive development happens when one is engaged in interaction with more knowledgeable individuals and also when he is involved in collaboration with his peers (Vygotsky, 1978). In this perspective, SEL offers the psychological and interpersonal scaffolding that facilitates students to interact more constructively within a collaborative setting which is an educational objective of contemporary pedagogy.

### **SEL and Collaborative Learning**

Collaborative learning is a learning method whereby students are directed to work together in order to accomplish common learning objectives. It focuses on communication, mutual support, shared responsibility and co-construction of knowledge. It has been found that students studying in a collaborative mode experience better critical thinking, interpersonal communication, and overall academic interaction than students in a traditional lecture-based environment (Rukh & Ali, 2025a; Rukh & Ali, 2025b).

Psychologically, the SEL competencies, which include empathy, emotional control and social awareness, are the basis of effective collaboration. Indicatively, the ability to control emotions during group conflict in the context of self-management; perspective-taking required in social awareness; and positive interactions of peers in relationship skills are examples of skills that enable effective learning among students. Therefore, the incorporation of SEL concepts into classroom learning is postulated to enhance collaborative learning.

Considering that its use is common in the education systems in the West, SEL research in South Asia, especially Pakistan, is developing. A number of studies explore the perceptions and awareness of teachers concerning the SEL competencies in different levels of education. Ahmed and Khan (2024) examined the SEL understanding of primary teachers who work in Karachi and discovered that although teachers believe SEL is necessary in terms of helping students adjust and learn social skills, they still experience problems with implementation,

such as insufficient training and the lack of curriculum implementation. Likewise, Siraj et al. (2025) found a variation in teacher educators knowledge and awareness of SEL with underrepresentation of key competencies of SEL in teacher education programs.

Studies that pay direct attention to the life of secondary education in the Pakistani context are few but educative. Research studies regarding the role of social-emotional competence in secondary students indicate that there are strong differences between genders, with the female students exhibiting greater emotional and interpersonal abilities (Zahid et al., 2025). The implication of such findings is that there are differences in emotional and social competencies by gender- this is a factor to consider when examining the difference in effect of SEL instruction among different genders.

Further, according to the qualitative research, teachers in such regions as Swat exhibit a divided perception of SEL, and the awareness of the former is dependent on such factors as experience, school type, and gender as female teachers and those working in a private school tend to display more positive attitudes and fewer perceived obstacles to the implementation of SEL ( Non-Western SEL study in Swat, 2025). These contextualized understandings emphasize system-wide issues, including rigidity in the curriculum and insufficient professional development, which could be barriers to the implementation of SEL in the daily classroom activities.

### **Collaborative Learning and SEL Instruction**

The association between SEL instruction and collaborative competencies is positive and empirical studies outside Pakistan confirm this. The meta-synthesis of the strategies of SEL in K-12 classrooms by Seroya and Buck (2024) revealed that the integration of SEL is unconditionally effective in improving the interpersonal skills and engagement of students and the classroom climate that supports collaborative learning. When implemented in the elementary settings, the focus SEL project has brought significant changes to the level of cooperation, division of responsibility, and the ability to resolve peer conflict constructively. Although this study focuses heavily on younger learners, the mechanisms apply also to secondary students: more emotionally self-regulated and socially conscious students will be in a better position to undertake complex collaborative tasks that involve the processes of negotiation and problem solving.

### **Gender variations and SEL**

The issue of gender as a variable in SEL research is on the rise. Gender disparities in the extent to which either sex is affected by emotional learning and collaboration have been noted in more general SEL literature. Indicatively, boys and girls tend to be different in the emotional expressiveness, styles of relationships, and social expectations, which can possibly affect the genders to respond differently to SEL lessons and collaborative activities. The studies show that female educators can be more positive towards SEL and that female students usually have better results in tests of empathy and social competence (Rikoon et al., 2024). Gendered disparities in social-emic competence in Pakistan imply that female students might be in a better position to convert SEL teaching into group-based learning behaviours than the male students (Zahid et al., 2025).

These gender patterns are in line with socio-cultural expectations in South Asia which in most cases include relational orientations among girls and assertiveness among boys in terms of socialization practices. These norms might not only affect the interaction of students in a collaborative setting but also the reception and implementation of SEL programs by various genders in the classroom setting.

### Research Objectives

1. To investigate how Social-Emotional Learning (SEL)-based instruction affects students' communication abilities as a part of secondary school collaborative learning.
2. To look into how secondary school students' cooperation and teamwork abilities are affected by Social-Emotional Learning (SEL)-based instruction.
3. To examine how Social-Emotional Learning (SEL)-based instruction affects secondary school students' problem-solving and decision-making abilities in relation to collaborative learning.
4. To compare how male and female teachers perceive the effects of Social-Emotional Learning (SEL)-based instruction on students' social responsibility and interpersonal skills as part of secondary school collaborative learning.

### Null Hypotheses

Ho1: Teachers' opinions of how Social-Emotional Learning (SEL)-based instruction affects secondary school students' communication skills do not significantly differ based on gender.

Ho2: Teachers' opinions about how Social-Emotional Learning (SEL)-based instruction affects students' cooperation and teamwork abilities at the secondary school level do not significantly differ based on gender.

Ho3: Teachers' opinions about how Social-Emotional Learning (SEL)-based instruction affects students' problem-solving and decision-making abilities at the secondary school level do not significantly differ based on gender.

Ho4: Teachers' opinions about how Social-Emotional Learning (SEL)-based instruction affects students' interpersonal and social responsibility skills at the secondary school level do not significantly differ based on gender.

### Methodology

In order to investigate how Social-Emotional Learning (SEL)-based instruction affects secondary school students' collaborative learning abilities, the study used a quantitative, descriptive survey design. Convenience sampling was used to select 135 teachers (73 male and 62 female) from the population of secondary school teachers. Four aspects of collaborative learning communication skills, teamwork and cooperation, problem-solving and decision-making, and interpersonal and social responsibility skills were measured using a self-created Likert-scale questionnaire. Experts validated the instrument, and Cronbach's alpha guaranteed its reliability. Gender differences were examined at a significance level of 0.05 using independent sample t-tests and descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation).

### Table 1

Gender-wise Teachers' Perception Regarding Impact of Social-Emotional Learning (SEL)-Based Instruction on Students' Communication Skills (Collaborative Learning) at the Secondary School Level

Gender	Number	Mean	S.D.	t. value	Sig. level
Male	73	4.30	.468	2.08	.039
Female	62	4.11	.623		

Table 1 shows the gender-based differences in the teachers perspective of the effect of the Social-Emotional Learning (SEL)-based teaching on the communication skills of the students, which is one of the elements of collaborative learning in the secondary school level. The mean perception score ( $M = 4.30$ ,  $SD = 0.468$ ) among male teachers ( $n = 73$ ) was somewhat higher than the one among female teachers ( $n = 62$ ;  $M = 4.11$ ,  $SD = 0.623$ ), which means that male teachers are more likely to believe that SEL instruction has a slightly stronger effect on

communication skills of the students. The independent sample t -test gave a t -value of 2.08 with a significance level of 0.039 which is less than the 0.05 level indicating that there is a statistically significant difference between the perceptions of male and female teachers. Thus, Ho1, that does not postulate a significant gender difference, is rejected. It means that the gender of teachers affects how they see the effectiveness of SEL in terms of improving the communication skills of students, which is why it is necessary to take into consideration gender perspectives when drawing SEL implementation and professional development strategies.

**Table 2**

Gender-wise Teachers' Perception Regarding Impact of Social-Emotional Learning (SEL)–Based Instruction on Students' Teamwork and Cooperation Skills (Collaborative Learning) at the Secondary School Level

Gender	Number	Mean	S.D.	t. value	Sig. level
Male	73	4.21	.571	-.190	.849
Female	62	4.23	.484		

Table 2 shows the gender difference of the perception of teachers about the effect of the instruction based on Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) on the students and their abilities to collaborate and cooperate as teams in the secondary school level. The mean perception score of male teachers (n= 73) was 4.21 (SD=0.571), and curiously, the females (n= 62) had a very slightly higher mean of 4.23 (SD=0.484). The t-test of the independent sample produced -0.190 in t-value and the significance level of 0.849, which is significantly lower than the standard 0.05 mark. This shows that the gap in the perceptions of male and female teachers is not significant. Thus, the Ho2 that said that no significant gender-based difference exists in the perceptions of teachers on the effect that SEL has on the teamwork and cooperation skills is accepted. This indicates that male and female educators find SEL-based teaching to be equally effective in strengthening collaborative work of the students and cooperative skills, which reveals uniformly the awareness of the value of SEL among men and women.

**Table 3**

Gender-wise Teachers' Perception Regarding Impact of Social-Emotional Learning (SEL)–Based Instruction on Students' Problem-Solving and Decision-Making Skills (Collaborative Learning) at the Secondary School Level

Gender	Number	Mean	S.D.	t. value	Sig. level
Male	73	4.14	.549	-.678	.499
Female	62	4.21	.576		

Table 3 shows a gender-based analysis of the perception of teachers in the effects of Social-Emotional Learning (SEL)-based instruction on the problem-solving and decision-making abilities of students, who are the fundamental elements of collaborative learning in the secondary school stage. The mean perception score among male teachers (n = 73) was of 4.14 (SD = 0.549), whereas that of female teachers (n = 62) was slightly higher of 4.21 (SD = 0.576). The independent sample t-test determined t-value of -0.678 with a significance of 0.499 which is greater than the 0.05 value meaning that there is no significant difference between the perceptions of male and female teachers. Hence, Ho3, stating that there is no gender-related difference in the perception of teachers about the effects of SEL on the skills of problem-solving and decision-making, is accepted. It means that the view of both male and female teachers is that SEL-based teaching has the same effect of promoting analytical and decision-making skills of students in the group learning environment.

**Table 4**

Gender-wise Teachers' Perception Regarding Impact of Social-Emotional Learning (SEL)-Based Instruction on Students' Interpersonal and Social Responsibility Skills (Collaborative Learning) at the Secondary School Level

Gender	Number	Mean	S.D.	t. value	Sig. level
Male	73	4.21	.541	.209	.834
Female	62	4.20	.453		

Table 4 presents a gender-specific comparison of the perceptions of teachers on the influence of Social-Emotional Learning (SEL)-based teaching on the interpersonal and social responsibility skills of students which are the most significant dimensions of collaborative learning in the secondary school level. The mean score of 4.21 (SD = 0.541) was recorded in the male teachers (n = 73) and this was slightly lower than the female teachers (n = 62) with a mean of 4.20 (SD = 0.453). The independent sample t-test had t-value of 0.209 and level of significance of 0.834 which is much higher than 0.05. It means that there is no statistically significant difference in the perceptions of male and female teachers. Therefore, the Ho4 that said that there exists no significant gender-wise difference between the perceptions of teachers on the influence of SEL on interpersonal and social responsibility skills is accepted. It may mean that both female and male teachers acknowledge the SEL-based instruction as equally helpful to develop interpersonal skills and social responsibility in students in collaborative learning conditions.

### Discussion and Conclusions

In the current research, the authors examined how the instruction based on the Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) influences the students to learn collaboratively at the secondary school level, orienting the research results towards gender-based comparisons of the teachers' perceptions. The learning skills of the collaboration were evaluated in four dimensions, including communication, teamwork and cooperation, problem-solving and decision-making, and interpersonal and social responsibility. The results obtain both locations of gender disparities and agreeableness among educators which may offer profile details on the perceived effectiveness of SEL in any particular setting of secondary education.

Table 1 reflected statistically significant gender disparity in the perception of the teachers of the effect of SEL on the communication skills of students. The average score of male teachers ( $M = 4.30$ ) and female teachers ( $M = 4.11$ ) was slightly different, and the difference was significant ( $p = 0.039$ ). The result is in line with the earlier studies emphasizing the role of gender of the teacher in the preconceptions of the student achievement as the gendered socialization can condition the expectations of communication and assertiveness in group work (Zahid et al., 2025; Rokoon et al., 2024). It postulates that male teachers can find SEL instruction specially useful in verbal expression and dialogue skills and this may be because of difference in stress of communication norms between male classrooms and female classrooms.

Conversely, Tables 2, 3 and 4 did not have any significant gender-based differences in the perceptions of teachers about teamwork and cooperation, problem-solving and decision-making, and interpersonal and social responsibility capabilities. As an example, teamwork and cooperation imply that there was an almost equal score of male ( $M = 4.21$ ) and female teachers ( $M = 4.23$ ;  $p = 0.849$ ). In the same way, the problem-solving and decision-making ( $p = 0.499$ ) and interpersonal and social responsibility ( $p = 0.834$ ) did not have statistically significant differences. The findings reported that both male and female teachers are aware

that SEL-based teaching is not inferior in helping to develop collaborative skills that are not communication-related. The result is aligned with the existing SEL studies across the world that highlight that well-organized SEL interventions are always effective in fostering interpersonal skills, collaboration, and social responsibility in secondary school students without being affected by their gender in their relationships with teachers (Seroya & Buck, 2024; Gul Rukh and Shafqat Ali, 2025a).

The general results show that the SEL-based teaching is generally viewed as helpful in cultivating collaborative learning skills on the secondary level. The high variance of the skills in communication reveals that there is a gender-specific perception of the dimension that should be considered in the teacher professional development program to have a homogenous understanding and implementation strategies. At the same time, the uniform response in other shared skills areas supports the omnipresence of SEL in relation to the collaboration, problem-solving, and social accountability, which is repeated in the previous studies in South Asian settings, which underline the significance of SEL in the establishment of enabling, cooperative classroom environments (Ahmed and Khan, 2024; Siraj et al., 2025).

To sum up, the research proves that the instruction grounded in SEL has a positive impact on collaborative learning ability of students in their secondary schools. Although there might be differences between the gender perception of teachers regarding certain competencies such as communication, the overall success of SEL is apparent in the area of teamwork, problem-solving and interpersonal development, which the teachers of both genders have acknowledged. Such results recommend the systematic inclusion of SEL in the high school curricula, together with teacher training courses that cover the possible gendered perceptions, in order to improve collaborative learning results among all students.

### **Recommendations**

1. Incorporate SEL in the Secondary Curriculum - in their turn, schools should systematically introduce Social-Emotional Learning competencies, including communication, teamwork, problem-solving, and social responsibility, into the classroom instruction to actively encourage the development of team-learning skills in students.
2. Adopt Gender-Sensitive Teacher Training -Gender-based disparities in teacher perceptions and strategies ought to be tackled in professional development programs so that both male and female students can have equal opportunities to acquire communication and collaborative skills.
3. Encourage Group-based Instructional Practices- Teachers are expected to use interactive learning techniques, such as group work, peer discussions, collaborative problem solving activities, etc. to support the principles of SEL and increase the skills and capabilities of students to operate in teams.
4. Enhance Institutional Support of SEL -School administrations can facilitate the implementation of SEL instruction by providing teachers with sufficient resources, mentoring opportunities, and a positive workplace climate to support the implementation of SEL instruction, thus creating a positive classroom environment that supports collaboration and social-emotional development.

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