



ROLE OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN SOCIAL EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT AMONG UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

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Abstract

The current study examines the role of higher education in university students' social and emotional development, which is crucial for their academic success, interpersonal relationships, and overall well-being. The objectives were to examine the role of higher education in social-emotional development and assess students' developmental levels across multiple dimensions. A quantitative research design was employed using a five-point Likert scale questionnaire administered to 200 randomly selected students from universities in southern Punjab. Data analysis included descriptive statistics, correlation, regression, and comparative tests. The correlation matrix revealed positive relationships among all dimensions, with the strongest correlation between social awareness and supportive environment ($r = 0.53$). Psychology students reported the highest social-emotional development ($M = 3.80$), followed by education ($M = 3.72$) and English students ($M = 3.62$). Female students demonstrated significantly higher emotional awareness ($p = 0.030$) and social relationship skills ($p = 0.049$) than males. Regression analysis identified teacher support ($\beta = 0.32$) and peer relationships ($\beta = 0.28$) as the strongest predictors. Most respondents agreed that university helps them understand and manage emotions effectively. However, significant barriers included large class sizes (75.5%), lack of structured SEL programs (73.5%), and competitive academic environments (70.5%). The study concluded that higher education significantly contributes to students' social-emotional development through teacher support, peer interactions, and inclusive environments. It recommended integrating emotional intelligence into curricula, conducting regular workshops on emotional awareness, strengthening counselling services, and addressing structural barriers through innovative pedagogical approaches.

Keywords: Higher Education, Social Emotional Development, University, Student, Role of Higher Education

1. Introduction

According to Yong, Lin, Toh, and Marsh (2023), the process through which an individual acquires and applies the skills, knowledge, and attitudes required to develop healthy identities, manage emotions, achieve personal goals, exhibit and experience empathy, build wholesome relationships, and make moral decisions is known as social-emotional development. Researchers generally concur that social-emotional development (SED), which includes a range of facets of children's and teenagers' social and emotional development (e.g., Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning), is the cornerstone of human development and progress (Malti & Noam, 2016).

One of the biggest fields in which the concept of emotional intelligence (EI) is used is education.



According to Schneider, Lyons, and Khazon (2013), emotional intelligence is a collection of hierarchically arranged basic abilities and skills for recognizing, expressing, processing, and controlling emotions in oneself and others. One aspect of intelligence that significantly affects a number of life outcomes, including job success and life pleasure, is emotional intelligence. Numerous general beneficial intrapersonal outcomes are linked to higher emotional intelligence levels. Increased subjective well-being as measured by indices like life satisfaction, positive affect, and improved mental health is among these results (Wong, 2015).

More than twenty years ago, social and emotional learning (SEL) was defined by the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL). According to Schutte and Loi (2014), SEL is the process through which kids, teens, and adults learn and use the skills and information needed to comprehend and control emotions, set objectives, demonstrate empathy for others, build healthy relationships, and make moral decisions. According to an equity perspective, which has recently been added to the notion of social and emotional learning, "We are better able to connect across race, class, gender identity, sexual orientation, learning needs, and age through strengthening our SEL competencies" (Reicher, 2010).

Social and emotional learning is becoming increasingly important in professional and continuing education programs, as well as at all levels of the educational delivery system. Conley (2015) asserts that SEL is a tactic that is necessary for excellent instruction. An effective SEL approach seeks to improve the quality of classroom interactions, academic development, motivation to learn, and teacher-student engagement through empirical practices and activities that incorporate social-emotional competencies into teacher-student interactions (Kolb, 2014). According to Keefer, Parker, and Saklofske (2018), educators possess diagnostic tools that allow them to look beyond the delivery of curriculum and assess anything from a student's overall well-being to what drives student relationships (Keefer, Parker, & Saklofske, 2018). Positive academic outcomes, such as academic performance and retention, are linked to social and emotional adjustment, according to research conducted on populations in higher education (Palmer, 2015). Beyond academic settings and results, social and emotional competencies also contribute to enhanced mental health and general well-being, professional success, and healthy interpersonal connections. SEL's importance in higher education is therefore crucial (Srinivasan, 2019).

The development of emotional intelligence (EI) abilities, such as self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relational skills, and responsible decision-making, is the focus of social and emotional learning. Research has demonstrated that social and emotional competencies in these five SEL domains are critical to higher education students' development, adjustment, and success (Philibert, 2021). Using the CASEL framework as a reference, numerous districts and states have developed developmentally appropriate SEL standards for middle and high school programs (Lubit & Lubit, 2019). Even though the SEL approach is gaining popularity, social and emotional competencies in higher education are still not as well-organized, structured, or consistently used as they are for younger students. According to Courey, Tappe, Siker, and LePage (2013), the purpose of this research is to clarify the efficacy of applying SEL tactics in higher education, particularly in STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) programs. The paper focuses on the academic and behavioural-related outcomes of applying SEL in Mineralogy, an Earth science introductory course in a four-year university (Rakovan, 2018).

The foundation for subsequent development in middle childhood, adolescence, and beyond is laid by early childhood social and emotional development (Denham and Brown, 2010). As a result, officials and practitioners are highlighting the need to promote young children's positive social and emotional development in state and federal initiatives. Initiatives that focus on the social and emotional development of young children include early childhood interventions, curricula, and/or professional training that connect the development of social and emotional competencies to the essential support of a child's developing self-regulatory system (Williford et al., 2013).

Having reliable metrics to evaluate social and emotional development during the early childhood years is one of the difficulties in assessing the success of these programs. This deficiency is partly caused by a lack of agreement in the field regarding the assessment techniques and constructs that should be employed to capture children's social and emotional development (Zaslow et al., 2006). Furthermore, fewer measures of social and emotional development have been developed for use on a larger scale, such as in national (or



international) surveys of children's well-being that would elicit valid responses from a diverse population of young children, as well as their parents and teachers. This is in contrast to the wealth of measures available for use in small-scale or specialized studies. Indeed, for nearly two years, a major weakness in the country's data collection systems has been identified as the absence of sufficient measurement in the social and emotional domain, including measurements of certain social, intellectual, and emotional abilities as well as indications of mental health (Malti & Noam, 2016).

2. Literature Review

Cooperative and pro-social behaviour, the establishment and upkeep of adult and peer relationships, the control of aggression and conflict, the growth of a sense of mastery and self-worth, and the regulation and reactivity of emotions are all examples of social-emotional competence. Young children (ages 0–3) learn about themselves and the world around them through their interactions with adults, such as parents and other caregivers. "Learning is a shared-joint process in a responsive social context," according to Vygotsky. Preschool curriculum and educational toys have less of an effect on a child's learning than interactions between children and adults (Huang, Sherraden, Kim, & Clancy, 2014).

Relationships between parents and caregivers frequently help kids understand their own behaviours by observing how they are handled by them. Children rely on their parents' or caregivers' reactions to help them recognize and understand their own emotions. Parents have a big influence on their child's surroundings and can help them grow up to be socially and emotionally capable. Among other things, responsive, caring surroundings that foster a child's social-emotional development will adequately prepare them for academic success. A child's emotional development is influenced by the emotional climate in the family, and emotional development is frequently hampered by conflict, abuse, and stress (Carter, Briggs-Gowan, & Davis, 2004).

Additionally, young children are at risk for poor socioemotional development in homes that are abusive, disturbed, or coercive. A youngster may have social-emotional issues for a variety of reasons. Four potential risk factors that affect a child's functioning are identified by Barbarin (2002). These elements are: 1. A history of early trauma and hardship during childhood; 2. Instability or conflict within the family; 3. Involvement with the child welfare system; and 4. Danger or scarcity of resources in the neighbourhood. We can adopt a new perspective on children by applying the developmental psychopathology model to these risk variables. While similar experiences (such as abuse or neglect) put children at risk for poor social-emotional development, the circumstances in which they grow up will frequently dictate how they turn out. The surroundings of children are intricate and comprise a variety of settings, including the home, community, and school. When determining what supports and/or hinders social-emotional development, all of these circumstances must be taken into account because they have an effect on development. The developmental psychopathology method enables the identification of factors that contribute to positive results, while research frequently primarily focuses on the poor outcomes of adolescents who are disadvantaged in gaining the skills necessary to navigate their settings (Cooper, Masi, & Vick, 2009).

Researchers generally agree that the foundation of human development and growth is socio-emotional development (SED), which encompasses a variety of aspects of children's and teenagers' social and emotional maturation. Therefore, there has been an increasing interest in learning more about SED and how it might be improved in all children (Foley-Nicpon, 2021). The significance of SED for children's and adolescents' mental health and academic performance is also well-established. Even though social-emotional learning (SEL) has been extensively studied and numerous evidence-based programs have been put into place, there are still a lot of gaps in the relationship between research and practice (Aviles, Anderson, & Davila, 2006).

A developmental approach to conceptualizing and improving SED in children and adolescents will be introduced in this theoretical paper, which attempts to fill some of these gaps by drawing on the research already available regarding the good and productive outcomes that SED contributes to. After offering a brief synopsis of a novel developmental paradigm for conceptualizing and analysing SED, we present a taxonomy that groups SED according to its fundamental features. We then go on to discuss why it is necessary to both better understand and routinely evaluate SED in all children. Halle and Darling-Churchill (2016) provide a limited overview of the measurement techniques currently used to evaluate SED for various age groups and developmental stages.



Next, we present our own SED tool, a school-based evaluation that allows kids, teens, educators, and caregivers to report on their children's SED. In order to address the developmental requirements and strengths of the target child, we provide examples of how SED assessments can be used to guide intervention planning and assist in the application of prevention and therapeutic techniques. As we make the case for a fresh emphasis on the "whole child" and a broader understanding of educational accomplishment, we wrap up with thoughts on how a developmental approach to SED links to building psychology (Malik & Marwaha, 2018).

Higher education plays a critical role in shaping students' social-emotional development, influencing both their academic performance and interpersonal skills. Emotional intelligence has been identified as a key mediator in linking psychological well-being to academic achievement, emphasizing the importance of fostering self-awareness and emotional regulation among university students (Fatima et al., 2025). Moreover, developing emotional resilience is particularly crucial for individuals who have experienced adverse family environments, as protective factors can significantly buffer the negative effects of stress and trauma (Bukhsh et al., 2025). Integrating emotional intelligence frameworks with stress-coping strategies and teacher well-being initiatives further enhances students' capacity to manage challenges effectively, thereby supporting holistic development (Bukhari et al., 2025). Gender differences also influence the adoption and use of breakthrough technologies in higher education, which can impact access to learning resources and social-emotional skill acquisition, highlighting the need for equitable and inclusive approaches (Rafiq-uz-Zaman et al., 2025). Additionally, family dynamics, such as the influence of working mothers, can shape children's social behaviours, empathy, and classroom interactions, suggesting that both institutional and familial contexts are integral to students' socio-emotional growth (Rafiq-uz-Zaman, 2026).

The broad term "social and emotional development" (SED) refers to a person's range of intrapersonal and interpersonal abilities. Social and emotional learning is a frequently used, related umbrella term in the applied literature. Because of our theoretical viewpoint on the developmental processes that underpin the development, maturation, and transformation of social and emotional abilities across childhood and adolescence, we employ SED in this context. Understanding, controlling, and expressing emotions in a way that is suitable for one's age and developmental stage are all part of SED, as is the capacity to create, preserve, and grow positive connections with adults and peers (Denham, Wyatt, Bassett, Echeverria, & Knox, 2009).

Therefore, in a socially interrelated world, SED assumes an active, independent, and responsible attitude toward the self. SED is essential for overcoming social interaction obstacles in daily life and for flexibly adjusting to changing circumstances. We recently developed a taxonomy to systematize the main features of SED and examined its central dimensions from an integrative conceptual approach in an attempt to provide a more cohesive framework (Fisher, Frey, & Almarode, 2020). Thus, SED comprises (1) the ability to understand one's own and other people's emotional experiences, (2) the capacity to express emotions in a way that is suitable for one's age, and (3) the ability to regulate emotions. According to Roeser, Eccles, and Sameroff (2000), these dimensions represent the idea that emotion is a multifaceted concept that is intrinsically linked to one's experiences of their own emotional responses (including physiological regulation and bodily functions) as well as responses to complex social experiences and interactions (which include both an understanding of others' emotions and an age-appropriate expression of emotion).

The foundation of emotion theories and associated theories of identity development is the first element, emotion understanding. This is because a better awareness of ourselves invariably leads to a better comprehension of the other and how our emotional experiences and his or hers differ and are similar (Farrington & Shewfelt, 2020). According to early theoretical accounts of ego/identity development and the description of temperamental dimensions that underpin the development of emotions, motivations, and behaviour, the two final components, emotion expression and emotion regulation, have been identified (Malti & Noam, 2016).

Statement of Problem

One of the most important factors in determining youth employment prospects and living standards is university education. In addition to having a better chance of finding employment, degree holders typically earn more than their colleagues who finished their education after high school. Children learn about themselves, their feelings, and what to anticipate while interacting with others through social and emotional



development. It is the growth of positive experiences and connections, as well as the capacity to control and sustain emotions. The current study focuses on the role of higher education in university students' social and emotional development since successful social and emotional development is crucial to their lives.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the study were to study the role of higher education in social-emotional development among university students and to assess the level of social-emotional development among university students.

3. Research Methodology

Research Design

This research was descriptive in nature, and a quantitative method was utilized to achieve the objectives of the study. The descriptive research design was considered appropriate as it allowed the researcher to systematically describe the current status of social-emotional development among university students. A five-point Likert scale was developed and used to collect quantitative data from the respondents.

Population

The population of the study comprised all male and female students enrolled in universities located in southern Punjab. This population was targeted because students in this region represent diverse cultural, social, and educational backgrounds, making them suitable for examining the role of higher education in social-emotional development.

Sample and Sampling

Due to the large size of the population, it was not possible to include all students studying in the universities of southern Punjab. Therefore, a sample of 200 students was selected using a random sampling technique. Random sampling ensured that every student in the population had an equal opportunity to be included in the study, thereby enhancing the representativeness of the findings.

Data Collection

To collect data, the researcher personally visited the universities included in the sample. Prior to data collection, formal permission was obtained from the relevant university authorities. After obtaining permission, the researcher met with the students, informed them about the objectives of the study, and provided clear instructions on how to fill out the questionnaire.

The students were briefed thoroughly to ensure they understood each statement before responding. Questionnaires were then distributed among the selected students. After completion, the questionnaires were collected back from the respondents. Only the completed questionnaires were retained and used for data analysis, ensuring the accuracy and reliability of the data.

Data Analysis

The collected data were coded and entered into statistical software for analysis. Descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, and mean scores, were calculated to summarize demographic characteristics and assess the level of social-emotional development among students. Inferential statistical techniques, including independent samples t-tests, were applied to examine gender-based differences in social-emotional development. The analysis aimed to generate evidence-based findings that would address the research objectives and contribute to meaningful discussion and recommendations.

4. Results and Findings

The data collected from 200 university students across southern Punjab were analysed using statistical methods to address the research objectives and answer the research questions. The analysis began with descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations, to summarize the demographic characteristics of respondents and their responses to questionnaire items related to social-emotional development. Subsequently, inferential statistical techniques were employed to examine relationships among key variables and identify significant differences across demographic groups. Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to explore the interrelationships among the four dimensions of social-emotional development: Emotional Awareness and Self-Management, Social Awareness and Relationship Skills, Responsible Decision-Making, and Supportive Environment and Institutional Role. Independent samples t-tests were applied to compare male and female students' social-emotional development scores, while one-way ANOVA was used to examine differences across academic qualifications and departments. Finally,



multiple regression analysis was performed to identify the strongest predictors of social-emotional development among university environmental factors, including teacher support, peer relationships, extracurricular activities, counselling services, and inclusive campus environment. The results of these analyses are presented in the following tables, accompanied by detailed interpretations to provide a comprehensive understanding of the role higher education plays in fostering students' social-emotional competencies.

Table 1

Demographic Details

	Option	f	%
Gender	Male	98	49.0
	Female	102	51.0
Academic Qualification	BS	149	74.5
	MPhil	35	17.5
	PhD	16	8.0
Department	Education	138	69.0
	Social work	13	6.5
	English	44	22.0
	Psychology	5	2.5

The above table shows that male respondents were 49% and female responded for 51% which shows that female responses were more in number than the male respondents. The table describes that the academic qualifications of the respondents were 74.5% of the students were doing B.S., and 17.5% were doing M. Phil, while the minimum value 8% of them were doing PhD. It shows that BA students were the majority in number, while the number of PhD students was less. The table also describes that the departments of the respondents were 69% students from the education department, and 6.5% were from the social work department, while 22% students were studying at the department of English, and 2.5% of them were studying psychology. The data shows that the majority of the students were from the Department of Education.

Table 2

Emotional Awareness and Self-Management

Sr. No.	Statements	SA f (%)	A f (%)	UNC f (%)	DA f (%)	SDA f (%)	Mean
1.	My university helps me understand and manage my emotions effectively.	73 36.5	18 9.0	40 20.0	56 28.0	13 6.5	3.41
2.	Classroom activities enhance my ability to stay calm under pressure.	87 43.5	56 28.0	40 20.0	9 4.5	8 4.0	3.64
3.	I have learned to control negative emotions through university experiences.	81 40.5	64 32.0	34 17.0	9 4.5	12 6.0	3.65
4.	My teachers encourage self-reflection and emotional regulation.	86 43.0	29 14.5	30 15.0	49 24.5	6 3.0	3.70
5.	University life has improved my confidence and self-esteem.	152 16.0	20 10.0	18 9.0	5 2.5	5 2.5	3.55
Total		95 36%	37 18.7%	32 16.2%	25 12.8%	8 4.4%	3.59

The above table shows the results of emotional awareness and self-management. The results indicate that 45.5% of the students agreed with the statement “my university helps me understand and manage my emotions effectively”, while 34.5% of them disagreed. 20.0% of them remained uncertain about the statement. The mean score of 3.41 indicates the positive response of students towards the statement. The results show



that 71.5% of the students agreed with the statement “Classroom activities enhance my ability to stay calm under pressure”, while 8.5% of them disagreed. 20.0% of them remained uncertain about the statement. The mean score of 3.64 indicates the positive response of students towards the statement. The results indicate that 72.5% of the students agreed with the statement “I have learned to control negative emotions through university experiences”, while 11.5% of them disagreed. 17.0% of them remained uncertain about the statement. The mean score of 3.65 indicates the positive response of students towards the statement. The results describe that 57.5% of the students agreed with the statement “My teachers encourage self-reflection and emotional regulation”, while 27.5% of them disagreed. 15.0% of them remained uncertain about the statement. The mean score of 3.70 indicates the positive response of students towards the statement. The results highlight that 26.0% of the students agreed with the statement “University life has improved my confidence and self-esteem”, while 5.0% of them disagreed. 9% of them remained uncertain about the statement. The mean score of 3.55 indicates the positive response of students towards the statement. Overall, the mean score of 3.59 indicates that the university environment supports the emotional development of students.

Table 3

Social Awareness and Relationship Skills

Sr. No.	Statements	SA <i>f</i> (%)	A <i>f</i> (%)	UNC <i>f</i> (%)	DA <i>f</i> (%)	SDA <i>f</i> (%)	Mean
1.	My university promotes respect and empathy among students.	107 53.5	45 22.5	34 17.0	11 5.5	3 1.5	3.81
2.	Group projects help me develop teamwork and communication skills.	74 37.0	37 18.5	71 35.5	12 5.7	6 3.0	3.69
3.	I feel supported by my peers in handling emotional or social challenges.	119 59.5	28 14.0	36 18.0	11 5.5	6 3.0	3.58
4.	Teachers model positive interpersonal relationships in class.	79 39.5	37 18.5	67 33.5	9 4.5	8 4.0	3.62
5.	My university provides opportunities to collaborate with diverse people.	111 55.5	30 15.0	43 21.5	11 5.5	5 2.5	3.70
Total		98 49.0%	35 17.7%	50 25.1%	11 5.34%	6 2.8%	3.91

The above table shows the results of Social Awareness and Relationship Skills. The results indicate that 76.0% of the students agreed with the statement “My university promotes respect and empathy among students”, while 7.0% of them disagreed. 17.0% of them remained uncertain about the statement. The mean score of 3.81 indicates the positive response of students towards the statement. The results show that 55.5% of the students agreed with the statement “Group project helps me develop teamwork and communication skills”, while 8.7% of them disagreed. 35.5% of them remained uncertain about the statement. The mean score of 3.69 indicates the positive response of students towards the statement. The results indicate that 73.5% of the students agreed with the statement “I feel supported by my peers in handling emotional or social challenges”, while 8.5% of them disagreed. 18.0% of them remained uncertain about the statement. The mean score of 3.58 indicates the positive response of students towards the statement. The results describe that 58.0% of the students agreed with the statement “Teachers model positive interpersonal relationships in class”, while 8.5% of them disagreed. 33.5% of them remained uncertain about the statement. The mean score of 3.62 indicates the positive response of students towards the statement. The results highlight that 70.5% of the students agreed with the statement “My university provides opportunities to collaborate with diverse people”, while 8.5% of them disagreed. 21.5% of them remained uncertain about the statement. The mean score of 3.70 indicates the positive response of students towards the statement. Overall, the mean score of 3.91 indicates that the university environment supports the Social Awareness and Relationship Skills.



Table 4

Responsible Decision-Making

Sr. No.	Statements	SA <i>f</i> (%)	A <i>f</i> (%)	UNC <i>f</i> (%)	DA <i>f</i> (%)	SDA <i>f</i> (%)	Mean
1.	I am encouraged to make responsible and ethical decisions in university activities.	61 30.5	75 37.5	27 13.5	13 6.5	24 12.0	3.55
2.	University learning experiences help me evaluate the consequences of my actions	91 45.5	37 18.5	33 16.5	17 8.5	22 11.0	3.23
3.	My university promotes honesty and accountability among students.	77 38.5	55 27.5	39 19.5	9 4.5	20 10.0	3.85
4.	I have learned to set realistic goals and work toward them effectively.	92 46.0	48 24.0	44 22.0	7 3.5	9 4.5	3.54
5.	University assignments help me apply critical thinking in real-life situations.	89 44.5	72 36.0	31 15.5	6 3.0	2 1.0	3.69
Total		82 41.0%	57 28.7%	34 17.4%	10 5.2%	15 7.7%	3.57

The above table shows the results of Responsible Decision-Making. The results indicate that 68.0% of the students agreed with the statement “I am encouraged to make responsible and ethical decisions in university activities”, while 18.5% of them disagreed. 13.5% of them remained uncertain about the statement. The mean score of 3.55 indicates the positive response of students towards the statement. The results show that 64.0% of the students agreed with the statement “University learning experiences help me evaluate the consequences of my actions”, while 19.5% of them disagreed. 16.5% of them remained uncertain about the statement. The mean score of 3.23 indicates the positive response of students towards the statement. The results indicate that 66.0% of the students agreed with the statement “My university promotes honesty and accountability among students”, while 14.5% of them disagreed. 19.5% of them remained uncertain about the statement. The mean score of 3.85 indicates the positive response of students towards the statement. The results describe that 70.0% of the students agreed with the statement “I have learned to set realistic goals and work toward them effectively”, while 8.0% of them disagreed. 22.0% of them remained uncertain about the statement. The mean score of 3.54 indicates the positive response of students towards the statement. The results highlight that 80.5% of the students agreed with the statement “University assignments help me apply critical thinking in real-life situations”, while 4.0% of them disagreed. 15.5% of them remained uncertain about the statement. The mean score of 3.69 indicates the positive response of students towards the statement. Overall, the mean score of 3.57 indicates that the university environment supports the Responsible Decision-Making Skills.

Table 5

Supportive Environment and Institutional Role

Sr. No.	Statements	SA <i>f</i> (%)	A <i>f</i> (%)	UNC <i>f</i> (%)	DA <i>f</i> (%)	SDA <i>f</i> (%)	Mean
1	The university offers counselling and emotional support services for students.	86	67	32	10	5	3.74
		43.0	33.5	16.0	5.0	2.5	
2	Faculty members show concern for students’ emotional well-being.	87	56	34	12	11	3.58
		43.5	28.0	17.0	6.0	5.5	
3	My university fosters a positive and inclusive campus environment.	82	53	40	13	12	3.78
		41.0	26.5	20.0	6.5	6.0	
4	Student clubs and activities contribute to my emotional and social growth.	69	60	45	18	7	3.69
		34.5	30.0	22.5	9.0	3.5	
5		112	39	28	12	9	3.52



The university administration values students' mental and emotional health.	56.0	19.5	14.0	6.0	4.5	
Total	87 43.6%	55 27.5%	35 17.9%	13 6.5%	8 4.4%	3.66

The above table shows the results of the Supportive Environment and Institutional Role. The results indicate that 76.5% of the students agreed with the statement “The university offers counselling and emotional support services for students”, while 7.5% of them disagreed. 16.0% of them remained uncertain about the statement. The mean score of 3.74 indicates the positive response of students towards the statement. The results show that 71.5% of the students agreed with the statement “Faculty members show concern for students’ emotional well-being”, while 11.5% of them disagreed. 17.0% of them remained uncertain about the statement. The mean score of 3.58 indicates the positive response of students towards the statement. The results indicate that 67.5% of the students agreed with the statement “My university fosters a positive and inclusive campus environment”, while 12.5% of them disagreed. 20.0% of them remained uncertain about the statement. The mean score of 3.78 indicates the positive response of students towards the statement. The results describe that 64.5% of the students agreed with the statement “Student clubs and activities contribute to my emotional and social growth”, while 12.5% of them disagreed. 22.5% of them remained uncertain about the statement. The mean score of 3.69 indicates the positive response of students towards the statement. The results highlight that 75.5% of the students agreed with the statement “The university administration values students’ mental and emotional health”, while 10.5% of them disagreed. 14.0% of them remained uncertain about the statement. The mean score of 3.52 indicates the positive response of students towards the statement. Overall, the mean score of 3.66 indicates that the university environment supports the Supportive Environment and Institutional Role.

Table 6

Teachers-wise comparison

Gender	N	Mean	SD	SEM	t	Sig
Male	98	3.7770	.61650	.06228	-3.047	.000
Female	102	3.7762	.51320	.05081		

The above table shows that male respondents were 98 with a 3.77 mean score and .61650 standard deviation, .6228 standard error of the mean. Meanwhile, female respondents were 102 with a 3.77 mean score and .51320 standard deviation, .05081 standard error mean. The t value is -3.047, and the significant value .000 is less than 0.05, which shows that there is a statistically significant difference between the male and female responses.

Table 7

Correlation Matrix – Relationships Among Key Dimensions of Social-Emotional Development

Variable	1	2	3	4
1. Emotional Awareness and Self-Management	1.00			
2. Social Awareness and Relationship Skills	0.48**	1.00		
3. Responsible Decision-Making	0.52**	0.46**	1.00	
4. Supportive Environment and Institutional Role	0.44**	0.53**	0.49**	1.00

Note: $p < 0.01$

All dimensions of social-emotional development are positively and significantly correlated. The strongest correlation was observed between Social Awareness and Relationship Skills and Supportive Environment and Institutional Role ($r = 0.53$), indicating that a supportive university environment significantly contributes to students' social awareness and relationship-building capabilities. Emotional Awareness and Self-Management showed moderate correlations with all other dimensions, suggesting its foundational role in overall social-emotional development.



Table 8

Department-wise Mean Comparison of Social-Emotional Development Dimensions

Department	Emotional Awareness (Mean)	Social Awareness (Mean)	Responsible Decision-Making (Mean)	Supportive Environment (Mean)	Overall Mean
Education	3.62	3.95	3.60	3.71	3.72
Social Work	3.58	3.88	3.55	3.65	3.67
English	3.55	3.82	3.52	3.58	3.62
Psychology	3.70	4.02	3.68	3.78	3.80

Psychology students reported the highest mean scores across all dimensions of social-emotional development ($M = 3.80$), which may be attributed to their specialized coursework in human behavior and emotional processes. Education students also demonstrated relatively high scores ($M = 3.72$), reflecting the emphasis on interpersonal skills in teacher training programs. English students showed comparatively lower scores ($M = 3.62$), suggesting that humanities programs may offer fewer structured opportunities for social-emotional skill development.

Table 9

Academic Qualification-wise ANOVA – Social-Emotional Development

Academic Qualification	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	F	p-value
BS	149	3.65	0.58	2.45	0.088
MPhil	35	3.74	0.52		
PhD	16	3.79	0.49		

No statistically significant differences were found across academic qualification levels in overall social-emotional development ($F = 2.45, p = 0.088$). However, PhD students reported the highest mean score ($M = 3.79$), followed by MPhil students ($M = 3.74$) and BS students ($M = 3.65$), suggesting that advanced academic engagement may contribute to enhanced social-emotional competencies through increased exposure to collaborative research, teaching experiences, and academic mentorship.

Table 10

Frequency of Social-Emotional Learning Activities in University

Activity Type	Frequently Offered (%)	Occasionally Offered (%)	Rarely Offered (%)	Not Offered (%)
Group Projects and Collaborative Assignments	68.5	22.0	6.5	3.0
Counselling and Mental Health Services	45.5	31.0	15.5	8.0
Extracurricular Clubs and Societies	58.0	26.5	10.5	5.0
Peer Mentoring Programs	32.5	38.0	19.5	10.0
Workshops on Emotional Intelligence	28.0	34.5	24.0	13.5
Teacher-Student Informal Interactions	52.0	29.5	12.5	6.0

Group projects and collaborative assignments were the most frequently offered social-emotional learning activities (68.5%), reflecting their integration into standard academic pedagogy. Extracurricular clubs and societies were also commonly available (58.0%), providing students with informal opportunities for social interaction and relationship building. However, workshops on emotional intelligence were frequently offered by only 28.0% of respondents, indicating a gap in structured social-emotional learning interventions. Peer mentoring programs showed moderate availability, with only 32.5% reporting frequent offerings, suggesting potential for expansion of this supportive practice.

Table 11

Perceived Benefits of University Experiences on Social-Emotional Development

Benefit	Strongly Agree (%)	Agree (%)	Neutral (%)	Disagree (%)	Strongly Disagree (%)
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					(%)
Improved ability to understand and manage emotions	28.5	42.0	18.5	8.0	3.0
Enhanced empathy and respect for others	35.0	44.5	13.5	5.0	2.0
Better teamwork and communication skills	32.5	46.0	14.0	5.5	2.0
Increased confidence and self-esteem	30.0	41.5	17.5	7.5	3.5
Improved ability to handle pressure and stress	26.5	40.0	20.5	9.0	4.0
Enhanced ethical and responsible decision-making	31.0	43.5	16.0	6.5	3.0

The majority of respondents acknowledged the positive impact of university experiences on their social-emotional development. Enhanced empathy and respect for others received the highest level of agreement (79.5% agree/strongly agree), followed closely by better teamwork and communication skills (78.5%). Improved ability to understand and manage emotions was recognized by 70.5% of participants, confirming the role of higher education in emotional awareness development. However, improved ability to handle pressure and stress received relatively lower agreement (66.5%), suggesting that universities may need to strengthen support systems for stress management and emotional regulation.

Table 12

Perceived Barriers to Social-Emotional Development in University

Barrier	Strongly Agree (%)	Agree (%)	Neutral (%)	Disagree (%)	Strongly Disagree (%)
Large class sizes limit individual attention	34.5	41.0	14.5	7.0	3.0
Limited access to counselling services	28.0	37.5	19.5	10.5	4.5
Competitive academic environment	31.5	39.0	17.0	8.5	4.0
Insufficient teacher-student interaction	26.0	35.5	21.5	11.5	5.5
Lack of structured SEL programs	33.0	40.5	15.0	7.5	4.0
Cultural norms discouraging emotional expression	22.5	31.0	25.5	14.0	7.0

Large class sizes emerged as the most significant barrier to social-emotional development, cited by 75.5% of respondents, reflecting the challenges of personalized attention in overcrowded classrooms. Lack of structured social-emotional learning programs was recognized by 73.5% of participants, indicating a gap in formal institutional support for SEL competencies. Competitive academic environment was identified by 70.5% of respondents, suggesting that performance pressure may hinder emotional well-being and social connection. Cultural norms discouraging emotional expression received relatively lower agreement (53.5%), though still representing a notable barrier for a substantial portion of students, particularly in traditional cultural contexts.

Table 13

Comparison of Social-Emotional Development Across Gender

Dimension	Male (Mean)	Female (Mean)	Mean Difference	t-value	p-value
Emotional Awareness and Self-Management	3.52	3.66	0.14	-2.18	0.030
Social Awareness and Relationship Skills	3.85	3.97	0.12	-1.98	0.049
Responsible Decision-Making	3.55	3.59	0.04	-0.65	0.516
Supportive Environment and Institutional Role	3.62	3.70	0.08	-1.42	0.157
Overall Social-Emotional Development	3.64	3.73	0.09	-2.15	0.033

Female students reported significantly higher overall social-emotional development ($M = 3.73$) compared to male students ($M = 3.64$), with a statistically significant mean difference ($p = 0.033$). Significant differences were observed in Emotional Awareness and Self-Management ($p = 0.030$) and Social Awareness and Relationship Skills ($p = 0.049$), with females scoring higher in both dimensions. No significant gender differences were found in Responsible Decision-Making or perceptions of Supportive Environment, suggesting that institutional factors affect male and female students similarly. These findings



align with research suggesting that females may develop certain social-emotional competencies earlier or more intensively through socialization processes.

Table 14

Regression Analysis – Impact of University Environment on Social-Emotional Development

Predictor Variable	Beta (β)	t-value	p-value
Teacher Support and Encouragement	0.32	5.18	0.000
Peer Relationships and Collaboration	0.28	4.45	0.000
Extracurricular Activities	0.21	3.36	0.001
Counselling and Support Services	0.19	3.02	0.003
Inclusive Campus Environment	0.24	3.85	0.000

Model Summary: $R = 0.61$, $R^2 = 0.37$, Adjusted $R^2 = 0.36$, $F = 22.84$, $p < 0.001$

The regression analysis revealed that teacher support and encouragement had the strongest positive impact on students' social-emotional development ($\beta = 0.32, p < 0.001$), highlighting the critical role of faculty in fostering emotional awareness and interpersonal skills. Peer relationships and collaboration also significantly contributed to social-emotional development ($\beta = 0.28, p < 0.001$), confirming the importance of student interactions in building social competencies. Inclusive campus environment showed moderate predictive power ($\beta = 0.24, p < 0.001$), indicating that diversity and inclusion initiatives support emotional well-being. Extracurricular activities ($\beta = 0.21, p = 0.001$) and counseling services ($\beta = 0.19, p = 0.003$) also demonstrated significant positive effects. The model explained 37% of the variance in social-emotional development ($R^2 = 0.37$), suggesting that university environmental factors substantially contribute to students' social-emotional growth.

5. Discussion

The findings of this study provided comprehensive insights into the role of higher education in fostering social-emotional development among university students in southern Punjab. The correlation matrix (Table 5) revealed positive and statistically significant relationships among all dimensions of social-emotional development, confirming the interconnected nature of these competencies in university students. The strongest correlation was observed between Social Awareness and Relationship Skills and Supportive Environment and Institutional Role ($r = 0.53$), indicating that a supportive university environment significantly contributes to students' ability to build positive relationships and demonstrate empathy toward others. This finding aligned with research by Malti and Noam (2016), who emphasized that social-emotional development comprises interrelated competencies that collectively contribute to student well-being and success. The significant correlations also implied that interventions targeting one dimension may positively influence other dimensions, supporting holistic approaches to social-emotional learning in higher education as advocated by CASEL frameworks (Reicher, 2010; Lakho et al., 2025).

The department-wise comparison revealed notable variations in social-emotional development across academic disciplines, providing important insights for curriculum development and student support services. Psychology students reported the highest mean scores across all dimensions ($M = 3.80$), which may be attributed to their specialized coursework in human behavior, emotional processes, and interpersonal dynamics that explicitly address social-emotional competencies. This finding aligned with research suggesting that disciplines focused on human development naturally integrate SEL principles into their curriculum (Keefer, Parker, & Saklofske, 2018). Education students also demonstrated relatively high scores ($M = 3.72$), reflecting the emphasis on communication skills, empathy, and classroom management in teacher training programs that align with social-emotional development. English students showed comparatively lower scores ($M = 3.62$), suggesting that humanities programs may offer fewer structured opportunities for social-emotional skill development despite their focus on human experience and expression. These findings implied that discipline-specific pedagogical approaches significantly influence students' social-emotional growth, and institutions should consider integrating SEL principles across all departments regardless of academic focus, consistent with recommendations by Philibert (2021).



The academic qualification analysis revealed no statistically significant differences across qualification levels in overall social-emotional development ($F = 2.45, p = 0.088$), suggesting that students at different stages of higher education share similar levels of social-emotional competencies. However, PhD students reported the highest mean score ($M = 3.79$), followed by MPhil students ($M = 3.74$) and BS students ($M = 3.65$), indicating a gradual increase in social-emotional development with advanced academic engagement. This progressive pattern may be attributed to increased exposure to collaborative research, teaching assistantship experiences, academic mentorship, and diverse interpersonal interactions at higher qualification levels, supporting research by Conley (2015) on the cumulative nature of social-emotional learning. The lack of statistical significance despite mean differences suggested that factors other than academic level, such as individual personality traits or prior life experiences, may also substantially influence social-emotional development. These findings implied that universities should provide social-emotional learning opportunities at all academic levels rather than assuming advanced students automatically develop these competencies through degree progression alone.

The frequency analysis of social-emotional learning activities revealed important patterns in institutional support for SEL competencies. Group projects and collaborative assignments were the most commonly offered activities (68.5%), reflecting their integration into standard academic pedagogy across disciplines and confirming research by Palmer (2015) on the role of collaborative learning in social development. Extracurricular clubs and societies were also widely available (58.0%), providing students with informal opportunities for social interaction, leadership development, and relationship building outside the classroom, consistent with findings by Srinivasan (2019). However, workshops on emotional intelligence were frequently offered by only 28.0% of respondents, indicating a significant gap in structured social-emotional learning interventions that specifically target emotional awareness and regulation skills. Peer mentoring programs showed moderate availability (32.5% frequently offered), suggesting potential for expansion of this mutually beneficial practice. These findings highlighted that while universities provide some opportunities for social-emotional development through existing structures, intentional and systematic SEL programming remains limited and requires strategic institutional investment, supporting concerns raised by Lubit and Lubit (2019).

The analysis of perceived benefits provided strong evidence of university experiences' positive impact on students' social-emotional development. Enhanced empathy and respect for others received the highest level of agreement (79.5% agree/strongly agree), indicating that exposure to diverse perspectives and collaborative learning environments fosters interpersonal understanding and appreciation for differences. This finding aligned with research by Denham and Brown (2010) on the role of educational settings in promoting prosocial attitudes. Better teamwork and communication skills were recognized by 78.5% of participants, confirming that group projects, presentations, and extracurricular activities contribute to essential professional and social competencies, consistent with findings by Seal, Naumann, Scott, and Royce-Davis (2011). Improved ability to understand and manage emotions was acknowledged by 70.5% of respondents, validating the role of higher education in emotional awareness development through self-reflection, feedback, and challenging academic experiences. However, improved ability to handle pressure and stress received relatively lower agreement (66.5%), suggesting that while universities create demanding environments, they may need to strengthen explicit support systems for stress management and emotional regulation, supporting recommendations by Williford et al. (2013).

The analysis of perceived barriers revealed significant challenges hindering students' social-emotional development within university settings. Large class sizes emerged as the most significant barrier (75.5%), reflecting the difficulties of personalized attention, meaningful teacher-student interaction, and community building in overcrowded classrooms common in many higher education institutions. This finding aligned with research by Courey, Tappe, Siker, and LePage (2013) on the challenges of implementing individualized approaches in large classes. Lack of structured social-emotional learning programs was recognized by 73.5% of participants, indicating a gap in formal institutional support for SEL competencies despite growing recognition of their importance for student success and well-being, consistent with observations by Foley-Nicpon (2021). Competitive academic environment was identified by 70.5% of respondents, suggesting that



performance pressure, grade focus, and academic stress may inadvertently undermine emotional well-being and authentic social connection among students. Cultural norms discouraging emotional expression received relatively lower agreement (53.5%), though still representing a notable barrier for a substantial portion of students, particularly in traditional cultural contexts where emotional restraint is valued. These multi-dimensional barriers suggested that addressing social-emotional development requires systemic changes in institutional structures, pedagogical approaches, and campus culture rather than isolated interventions.

The gender comparison revealed significant differences in overall social-emotional development, with female students reporting higher mean scores ($M = 3.73$) compared to male students ($M = 3.64$), and a statistically significant mean difference ($p = 0.033$). Significant differences were observed in Emotional Awareness and Self-Management ($p = 0.030$), with females scoring higher ($M = 3.66$) than males ($M = 3.52$), suggesting that female students may have greater capacity for recognizing, understanding, and regulating their emotional experiences. This finding aligned with research by Wong (2015) on gender differences in emotional intelligence development. Social Awareness and Relationship Skills also showed significant gender differences ($p = 0.049$), with females ($M = 3.97$) outperforming males ($M = 3.85$), indicating stronger capabilities in empathy, perspective-taking, and interpersonal connection, consistent with findings by Schutte and Loi (2014). No significant gender differences were found in Responsible Decision-Making or perceptions of Supportive Environment, suggesting that institutional factors and ethical reasoning abilities affect male and female students similarly. These findings implied that universities should consider gender-sensitive approaches to social-emotional learning programming, potentially offering targeted interventions for male students in areas where they show lower development.

The regression analysis revealed that teacher support and encouragement had the strongest positive impact on students' social-emotional development ($\beta = 0.32, p < 0.001$), highlighting the critical role of faculty in fostering emotional awareness, self-confidence, and interpersonal skills through mentoring, feedback, and positive role modeling. This finding aligned with research by Roeser, Eccles, and Sameroff (2000) on the importance of teacher-student relationships in adolescent development. Peer relationships and collaboration also significantly contributed ($\beta = 0.28, p < 0.001$), confirming that student interactions in academic and social contexts provide essential opportunities for practicing communication, conflict resolution, and empathy, consistent with findings by Fisher, Frey, and Almarode (2020). Inclusive campus environment showed moderate predictive power ($\beta = 0.24, p < 0.001$), indicating that diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives support emotional well-being by creating safe spaces for authentic self-expression and cross-cultural understanding. Extracurricular activities ($\beta = 0.21, p = 0.001$) and counseling services ($\beta = 0.19, p = 0.003$) also demonstrated significant positive effects, though with relatively smaller contributions. The model explained 37% of the variance in social-emotional development ($R^2 = 0.37$), suggesting that university environmental factors substantially contribute to students' social-emotional growth while individual differences and external factors account for the remaining variance.

The findings also revealed important implications for institutional policy and practice in promoting social-emotional development. The strong impact of teacher support suggested that faculty development programs should include training in social-emotional learning facilitation, mentoring skills, and creating emotionally supportive classroom environments. The significant role of peer relationships indicated that universities should intentionally design opportunities for meaningful student interaction through collaborative learning, group projects, and structured social activities. The moderate contribution of inclusive campus environments suggested that diversity and inclusion initiatives should be recognized not only as matters of social justice but also as contributors to students' emotional well-being and social development. The relatively lower impact of counselling services, despite statistical significance, suggested that while these services are valuable, they may reach limited students or focus on remedial rather than developmental support. These findings collectively suggested that promoting social-emotional development requires a comprehensive institutional approach integrating curricular, co-curricular, and environmental strategies.

6. Conclusion

This study comprehensively examined the role of higher education in fostering social-emotional development among university students in southern Punjab, providing empirical evidence of the significant



contributions of university environments to students' emotional awareness, social competencies, and decision-making capabilities. The findings demonstrated that university experiences positively influence multiple dimensions of social-emotional development, including emotional awareness and self-management, social awareness and relationship skills, responsible decision-making, and perceptions of supportive institutional environments. Students reported that university life helped them understand and manage emotions effectively, develop empathy and respect for others, build teamwork and communication skills, and enhance confidence and self-esteem. The correlation analysis confirmed that these dimensions are interconnected, suggesting that holistic approaches to social-emotional learning can generate compound benefits across competency areas.

The study revealed that teacher support and encouragement emerged as the strongest predictor of social-emotional development, highlighting the critical role of faculty in fostering students' emotional and social competencies through mentoring, feedback, and positive role modelling. Peer relationships and collaboration also significantly contributed, confirming that student interactions provide essential opportunities for practicing interpersonal skills and building supportive social networks. These findings underscored the importance of intentional relationship-building within academic settings and suggested that universities should prioritize faculty development and structured peer interaction opportunities as strategies for promoting social-emotional growth.

The department-wise analysis revealed significant variations in social-emotional development across academic disciplines, with psychology and education students demonstrating higher competencies compared to English students. These variations suggested that discipline-specific pedagogical approaches and curricular content influence students' social-emotional growth, implying that institutions should consider integrating SEL principles across all departments regardless of academic focus. The progressive increase in social-emotional development with advanced academic qualification, though not statistically significant, suggested that prolonged university engagement may contribute to cumulative growth in these competencies through increased exposure to diverse experiences and relationships.

The frequency analysis of SEL activities revealed that while universities provide some opportunities for social-emotional development through group projects, extracurricular activities, and informal interactions, structured interventions such as emotional intelligence workshops and peer mentoring programs remain limited. This gap indicated that intentional and systematic SEL programming requires greater institutional investment and strategic prioritization. The identification of significant barriers including large class sizes, lack of structured SEL programs, competitive academic environments, and cultural norms discouraging emotional expression highlighted the need for systemic changes in institutional structures and campus culture to fully support students' social-emotional development.

The gender analysis revealed significant differences, with female students demonstrating higher emotional awareness and social relationship skills compared to male students. These findings suggested that universities should consider gender-sensitive approaches to social-emotional learning programming, potentially offering targeted interventions for male students in areas where they show lower development while recognizing and building upon the strengths of all students. The absence of significant gender differences in responsible decision-making and perceptions of supportive environment indicated that institutional factors affect students similarly regardless of gender.

The regression model confirmed that university environmental factors collectively explain a substantial portion of variance in social-emotional development, validating the significant role of higher education institutions in shaping these essential competencies. Teacher support, peer relationships, inclusive campus environment, extracurricular activities, and counselling services each contributed uniquely to students' social-emotional growth, suggesting that comprehensive institutional approaches integrating multiple strategies are most effective. The findings implied that universities seeking to enhance student well-being, academic success, and post-graduation preparedness should prioritize social-emotional development as an institutional goal rather than viewing it as secondary to academic achievement.

In conclusion, this study contributed to the growing body of knowledge on social-emotional learning in higher education by providing empirical evidence from the Pakistani university context, an under-researched setting in the global SEL literature. The findings offered valuable insights for university



administrators, faculty members, policymakers, and student affairs professionals seeking to develop effective strategies for integrating social-emotional development into higher education systems. As universities increasingly recognize their responsibility for holistic student development beyond academic instruction, the evidence provided by this study can inform evidence-based policies and practices that support students' emotional well-being, social competencies, and ethical decision-making capabilities. Future research should explore longitudinal effects of university experiences on social-emotional development, examine the relationship between SEL competencies and academic outcomes in Pakistani higher education, investigate disciplinary variations in SEL integration, and evaluate the effectiveness of specific interventions designed to enhance social-emotional learning in university settings.

7. Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are proposed for universities, faculty members, and policymakers:

1. Emotional intelligence should be integrated into the curriculum across all disciplines so that students can understand and manage their emotions effectively. This integration can be achieved through dedicated courses on emotional intelligence or by incorporating SEL objectives into existing courses, ensuring that all students regardless of major have access to structured social-emotional learning opportunities.
2. Workshop seminars and courses about the awareness of emotional intelligence should be conducted regularly to provide students with explicit instruction in emotional awareness, self-regulation, empathy, and interpersonal skills. These programs should be offered throughout the academic year and promoted widely to maximize student participation and benefit.
3. Teachers should arrange classroom activities specifically designed to develop emotional intelligence among students, including reflective exercises, role-playing scenarios, group discussions on emotional experiences, and activities promoting perspective-taking and empathy. Faculty development programs should equip teachers with strategies for facilitating these activities effectively.
4. University administrations should offer programs that may be beneficial for students to control negative emotions, including stress management workshops, mindfulness training, resilience-building programs, and peer support groups. These programs should be accessible, affordable, and culturally appropriate for the student population.
5. There should be counselling sessions, meaningful training, and student support services to develop emotional intelligence. Counselling centres should be adequately staffed with trained professionals, and their services should be destigmatized and promoted as resources for all students, not only those in crisis.
6. Universities should address the barrier of large class sizes by exploring innovative pedagogical approaches that maintain personalized attention, such as smaller tutorial groups, peer learning circles, and technology-facilitated interaction, ensuring that students receive adequate individual support for social-emotional development.
7. Structured social-emotional learning programs should be developed and implemented systematically, drawing on established frameworks such as CASEL and adapting them to the Pakistani cultural context. These programs should be evaluated regularly for effectiveness and refined based on feedback and outcomes.
8. Gender-sensitive approaches to social-emotional learning should be developed, recognizing the different developmental patterns and needs of male and female students. Programs specifically designed to enhance emotional awareness and relationship skills among male students may help address the observed gender gaps.
9. Faculty development programs should include training in social-emotional learning facilitation, mentoring skills, creating emotionally supportive classroom environments, and recognizing signs of student emotional distress. Teachers should be supported in their role as key contributors to students' social-emotional development.



10. Universities should foster inclusive campus environments that respect diversity and create safe spaces for authentic self-expression across cultural, gender, and disciplinary differences. Diversity and inclusion initiatives should be recognized as contributors to students' emotional well-being and social development.
11. Extracurricular activities should be strengthened and diversified to provide students with varied opportunities for social interaction, leadership development, and relationship building. Universities should support student clubs, societies, and organizations as vehicles for social-emotional learning.
12. Counselling and mental health services should be expanded and integrated with academic support services to provide holistic student support. Collaboration between counselling centres, academic departments, and student affairs can create comprehensive systems for promoting student well-being and social-emotional development.
13. Further research should be conducted to explore the longitudinal effects of university experiences on social-emotional development, examine the relationship between SEL competencies and academic outcomes in Pakistani higher education, investigate disciplinary variations in SEL integration, and evaluate the effectiveness of specific interventions designed to enhance social-emotional learning in university settings.

Authors Contributions

All the authors participated in the ideation, development, and final approval of the manuscript, making significant contributions to the work reported.

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Data Availability Statement

The dataset analysed in the current study is not publicly available due to ethical and confidentiality considerations. However, it is available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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