

## INTEGRATING SOCIAL SKILLS AND LEARNING: THE ROLE OF SOCIO-EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE IN STUDENT COLLABORATION

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### Abstract

*This study explores the role of socio-emotional intelligence (SEI) in shaping peer collaboration among secondary school students. Socio-emotional intelligence encompasses key skills such as self-awareness, self-regulation, empathy, and social adaptability, all of which influence how students interact with and support one another in a learning environment. Collaborative learning is essential for academic success, yet its effectiveness depends largely on students' ability to communicate, understand emotions, and resolve conflicts. Using a quantitative research approach, this study surveyed 605 secondary school students in Punjab, Pakistan, analyzing their SEI levels and peer collaboration tendencies. Standardized scales were used to measure both variables, and statistical analysis revealed a positive correlation ( $r = 0.405$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) between SEI and peer collaboration. Regression analysis further indicated that SEI significantly predicts students' ability to work together, accounting for 16.4% of the variance in collaboration levels. The findings suggest that students with higher socio-emotional intelligence are better at resolving conflicts, engaging in teamwork, and maintaining effective peer relationships, which ultimately enhances their academic performance. These results highlight the importance of integrating SEI development into educational programs to foster a more cooperative and emotionally supportive classroom environment. The study recommends that schools incorporate socio-emotional intelligence training into curricula to improve student engagement and collaboration skills.*

**Key words:** *Socio-emotional intelligence, peer collaboration, student interaction, emotional intelligence in education, teamwork, conflict resolution, academic performance*

### Background of the Study

Socio-emotional intelligence (SEI) is an essential cognitive skill that allows individuals to recognize, understand, and regulate their own emotions while also being aware of the emotions of others. It consists of five main elements: self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills (Goleman, 1995). Self-awareness enables individuals to identify their emotions, strengths, and weaknesses, while self-regulation helps them manage impulses and adapt to different situations. Motivation directs their efforts toward achieving goals, and empathy allows them to understand and connect with the emotions and perspectives of others. Lastly, social skills are crucial for effective communication, conflict resolution, and collaboration (Salovey & Mayer, 1990).

In the educational setting, socio-emotional intelligence plays a key role in peer collaboration, where students work together to achieve shared learning goals. Collaborative learning fosters a deeper understanding of academic concepts, increases engagement, and enhances students' interpersonal skills (Barkley, Cross, & Major, 2014). Successful collaboration requires strong emotional intelligence, as students need to communicate clearly, resolve conflicts, and support one another in reaching common objectives (Topping, 2017). Classrooms that prioritize teamwork and cooperation contribute to students' academic and personal development. Those with higher socio-emotional intelligence are better equipped to navigate social interactions, resolve conflicts

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constructively, and actively contribute to group discussions (Joyner, 2021). This study examines the relationship between socio-emotional intelligence and peer collaboration, focusing on how emotional competencies influence student interactions and learning outcomes.

Socio-emotional intelligence significantly impacts students' ability to navigate both social and academic environments. By understanding and regulating their emotions, students can better manage stress, build relationships, and work effectively in teams (Morris et al., 2017). Self-regulation is especially important in group settings, as it allows students to stay calm under pressure, prevent unnecessary conflicts, and remain focused on their academic goals (McClelland et al., 2015). Empathy and social skills are equally crucial in fostering a positive classroom environment. Empathetic students are more likely to encourage and support their peers, creating a culture of mutual respect and teamwork (Bailey, 2022). Effective communication, active listening, and the ability to work collaboratively help students share their ideas clearly, engage in meaningful discussions, and contribute productively to group activities (Argyle, 2019).

Students with strong socio-emotional intelligence tend to be better communicators and team players, as they can manage social interactions effectively, resolve disagreements diplomatically, and build trust within their peer groups. This ability enhances their collaboration and improves teamwork, making group tasks more productive and efficient (Bibi, Saqlain, & Mussawar, 2016). Schools that emphasize the development of socio-emotional intelligence create an environment where students thrive academically and socially (Gonzales, 2022). Peer collaboration, which is a student-centered approach, encourages learners to work together in structured groups to complete assignments, solve problems, and deepen their understanding of academic concepts (Barkley et al., 2014). Unlike traditional passive learning methods, collaborative learning promotes active engagement, knowledge-sharing, and problem-solving, all of which are essential skills for academic and professional success (Topping, 2017; Kuusisaari, 2014).

The concept of peer collaboration is based on Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), which suggests that students learn more effectively when working with peers who have a slightly higher level of understanding (Vygotsky, 1978). This theory highlights the importance of social interaction in cognitive development and underscores the benefits of peer-to-peer learning in improving student performance. Through collaboration, students exchange knowledge, challenge each other's viewpoints, and refine their problem-solving skills, leading to deeper learning and better retention of information (Forslund Frykedal & Hammar Chiriack, 2018). Additionally, collaborative learning encourages critical thinking and engagement, as students must analyze different perspectives, articulate their thoughts, and develop solutions together (Ahmad & Dogar, 2023). This approach is particularly effective in secondary education, where students are developing higher-order thinking skills and preparing for more independent learning experiences (Goleman, 2021).

In conclusion, socio-emotional intelligence plays a fundamental role in successful peer collaboration, as it equips students with the emotional and social skills necessary for teamwork. By fostering self-awareness, empathy, and effective communication, educators can create learning environments that enhance academic performance, strengthen social connections, and improve overall student well-being.

#### **Statement of the Problem:**

After examining existing research, the researcher found that while numerous studies have explored socio-emotional intelligence from various perspectives and backgrounds, very few

specifically investigated its impact on peer collaboration among secondary school students. Recognizing this gap, the researcher decided to conduct a study focusing on this particular area. Given the importance of socio-emotional intelligence in shaping students' ability to collaborate effectively, there was an urgent need to explore its influence on peer collaboration within the secondary school setting.

**Hypotheses of the Study:**

The hypothesis of the study was as follows:

**H<sub>01</sub>:** There is no significant effect of socio-emotional intelligence on peer collaboration at the secondary school level.

**H<sub>1</sub>:** Socio-emotional intelligence has a significant effect on peer collaboration at the secondary school level.

**Research Design:**

This study employs a quantitative research approach to examine the effect of socio-emotional intelligence (SEI) on students' peer collaboration at the secondary school level. The study aims to establish a statistical relationship between SEI and peer collaboration while also analyzing differences in SEI based on gender, age, and locality.

**Population and Sample:**

The target population for this study consisted of secondary school students in Punjab, Pakistan, while the accessible population was limited to students from the Sahiwal Division. To ensure a representative sample, a total of 605 students were selected using the convenience sampling technique. Among these, 333 were male students and 272 were female students. The sample included students from both urban and rural backgrounds, ensuring diversity in terms of socioeconomic and educational environments. Additionally, participants were selected from varied age groups, allowing for meaningful comparisons in the study's analysis of socio-emotional intelligence and peer collaboration.

**Data Collection Tools:**

The study utilized standardized scales for data collection to ensure the accuracy and reliability of the findings. The Socio-Emotional Intelligence Scale (SEIS) was employed to measure students' socio-emotional intelligence (SEI), assessing key dimensions such as self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills. Additionally, the Peer Collaboration Scale (PCS) was used to evaluate the extent and effectiveness of peer collaboration in academic settings. Both instruments had been previously validated and widely used in educational research, ensuring their reliability and accuracy in measuring students' socio-emotional intelligence and peer collaboration. Data was gathered through a cross-sectional survey, in which students were given structured questionnaires to complete. The survey was conducted in classroom settings under teacher supervision to ensure maximum participation and accuracy.

**Analysis and Interpretation:**

**Table *Gender-Wise Classification of the Respondents***

| Gender       | Frequency  | Percentage   |
|--------------|------------|--------------|
| Male         | 333        | 55           |
| Female       | 272        | 45           |
| <b>Total</b> | <b>605</b> | <b>100.0</b> |

The above table presents the gender distribution of the respondents. Out of a total of 605 secondary school students surveyed, 333 were male, and 272 were female. This means that approximately 55% of the respondents were male, while 45% were female.

**Table**

*Classification of Respondents According to Age*

| Age            | Frequency  | Percentage   |
|----------------|------------|--------------|
| Below 12 Y     | 89         | 14.7         |
| 13-14 Y        | 264        | 43.63        |
| 15-17 Y        | 120        | 19.83        |
| More Than 18 Y | 32         | 5.28         |
| <b>Total</b>   | <b>605</b> | <b>100.0</b> |

Note. Y= Years

The table above groups the respondents by age. Out of the total, 89 students were younger than 12 years old, 264 were between 13 and 14 years old, 120 were between 15 and 17, and 32 were over 18.

*Correlation between Socio-Emotional Intelligence and Peer Collaboration*

| Variables                    | N   | Mean | Std. Deviation | r-value | Sig. (2tailed) |
|------------------------------|-----|------|----------------|---------|----------------|
| Socio-emotional intelligence | 605 | 4.57 | .436           | .405**  | .000           |
| Peer collaboration           | 605 | 4.36 | .621           |         |                |

The table shows that the correlation coefficient (r) between socio-emotional intelligence and peer collaboration is 0.405, indicating a positive relationship between the two variables. This means that as socio-emotional intelligence increases, peer collaboration also tends to improve. The relationship is statistically significant, as evidenced by a P-value of 0.000, which is less than 0.01, confirming that the association is not due to chance.

**Linear Regression Model**

*Effect of Socio-Emotional Intelligence on Peer Collaboration*

| Regression Hypothesis | Beta Weights                                      | R-squared | P-value | Hypothesis Supported |
|-----------------------|---|-----------|---------|----------------------|
| H <sub>01</sub>       | SEI → PC  | .164      | .000    | No                   |
| a.                    | Predictors: Socio-emotional intelligence on (SEI) |           |         |                      |
| b.                    | Dependent Variable: Peer collaboration (PC)       |           |         |                      |

To assess the impact of socio-emotional intelligence on peer collaboration, a linear regression model was applied with socio-emotional intelligence as the independent variable. The results, as presented in the table, showed a significant correlation between the two variables, with a P-value of 0.000, which is less than 0.05, confirming statistical significance. The coefficient of determination (R-square) was 0.164, indicating that socio-emotional intelligence accounts for 16.4% of the variation in peer collaboration. Additionally, the beta coefficient was 0.405, suggesting a positive relationship between the two variables. This means that for every one-unit increase in socio-emotional intelligence, peer collaboration is expected to increase by 0.40 units. Based on these findings, the null hypothesis (H<sub>01</sub>) was rejected.

### Conclusion

The results show that students with higher socio-emotional intelligence tend to collaborate more effectively with their peers. The positive correlation and statistically significant regression results confirm that socio-emotional intelligence enhances students' ability to communicate, cooperate, and engage in peer learning activities.

Thus,  $H_0$  is rejected, and the alternative hypothesis ( $H_1$ : Socio-emotional intelligence has a significant effect on peer collaboration) is accepted.

### Recommendations:

Since the findings demonstrate that SEI significantly predicts peer collaboration, policymakers and educational stakeholders should prioritize the incorporation of socio-emotional intelligence assessments in student evaluations. Schools should regularly monitor and assess students' socio-emotional growth alongside academic performance, ensuring a holistic approach to education. By implementing these recommendations, educational institutions can create a collaborative and emotionally supportive learning environment, ultimately enhancing students' academic success, teamwork abilities, and overall well-being.

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