



Social Emotional Learning among Teachers and Students: Insights from Tribal Schools in Karnataka

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ACRONYMS

SEC - Social Emotional Competencies

SEL - Social Emotional Learning

ST - Scheduled Tribe

TWS - Tribal Welfare Schools

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Schools are the platforms that support children in developing social connections, cultivating self-potential and enhancing their social and emotional competencies (SEC). Teachers play a critical role in students' development. Therefore, they should be equipped with the skills and competencies necessary to communicate with students and deal with stressful situations. The present study aims to understand Social Emotional Learning (SEL) among teachers and students. The study further examines teachers' perception, knowledge and implementation of SEL in schools as well as their perspectives on SEL among students. The study involved teachers and principals from nine tribal welfare (Ashrama) schools in Chamarajanagar and Bellary districts.

The findings of the study show a need for SEL among teachers and students. The study showed that teachers believed students needed much more than academic skills to be successful in life and school. Schools should make an alternative arrangement to implement SEL so that classes are not affected. The findings revealed that, because of the varied perspectives on education and social cultural beliefs among the tribal community, teachers in these schools required support in SEL, specifically conflict resolution, negotiation skills and emotional regulation. The study further emphasised the need to enhance the SEC of students. This need analysis is useful evidence for developing SEL programmes for teachers and students. The study highlights the need to focus on teachers' social and emotional competence as a foundation for the holistic development of both teachers and students.

I. INTRODUCTION

Schools play an important role in raising healthy children by fostering not only their cognitive development but also their social and emotional development (Weissberg, Wang, & Walberg, 2004). Schools are the platforms that support children in developing social connections, cultivating self-potential and enhancing their social and emotional competencies (SEC) under the supervision of teachers (Kaur and Sharma, 2021). Teachers play a critical role in students' development. They assist students in their educational journey as mentors, teachers, and guides. Studies have shown that teaching in schools involves a high degree of emotional work and social interaction, requiring resilience and emotional competencies to take on numerous challenges (Kaur and Sharma, 2022). Teachers must therefore be equipped with the skills and competencies necessary to communicate with students and deal with stressful situations.

A growing body of research has shown that SEL is an essential domain for teachers' professional development, personal social emotional growth, promoting a safe and supportive classroom environment and fostering positive social interactions (Collie et al., 2012). Evidence shows that teachers in schools implementing SEL programmes hold a more positive attitude towards teaching and prioritise adaptive teaching practices compared to schools without SEL programmes (Collie, R. J., et al., 2017). The Jennings and Greenberg model establishes that teachers who are higher in SEC and wellbeing (e.g., high psychological wellbeing and satisfaction with work, low stress and burnout) are more likely to build positive relationships, expertly manage the classroom, implement SEL effectively, and promote a safe and supportive classroom climate. When teachers are socially and emotionally competent, they create a supportive learning environment that, in turn, promotes positive student outcomes such as engagement in learning and high-quality interpersonal relationships (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). Therefore, SEL is a key to teachers' occupational well-being and positive student development.

II. BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Education plays a key role in a nation's development and is the most sustainable investment. Our nation has made significant progress in improving access to quality education, increasing enrollment and reducing the number of dropouts. The spread of quality education among marginalised sections was a formidable task after independence. Many policies and strategies were put in place to accomplish this. Both the central and state governments have launched various schemes and programmes to educate the underprivileged, including the tribal population. One such scheme implemented by the government is the Ashrama Schools.

Ashrama schools are centrally sponsored schemes operated by states to impart formal education to marginalised children, with a special focus on primitive tribal groups. The government's policy focused on education as a means to integrate marginalised people into mainstream society. Over the last two decades, the government has expanded elementary school provision to I-VIII in tribal hamlets, significantly increasing enrollment rates. The concept of ashrama residential schools for Scheduled Tribe (ST) children came into vogue to overcome structural barriers such as difficult terrain, inaccessible locations and spatially dispersed habitations and thereby improve educational access for ST communities. One of the main aims of the Ashrama Schools is to impart formal education which will thereby improve the standard of living of the tribal children. To achieve this objective, schools should focus on more than academic skills. Teachers in these schools should be empowered to face challenges (low enrolment, high absenteeism, drop-out, inadequate performance in class assignments and tests, deprived quality of students, adversity, etc.) and provide solutions to the problems experienced at school.

Therefore, the purpose of the present study is to examine the need for SEL among teachers and students from tribal welfare schools. The teachers' need for SEL is based on two aspects: (a) teachers' social emotional competence; (b) teachers' knowledge and beliefs about SEL. Both of these are important as they not only impact the teachers' personal outcomes, but they also have implications for how teachers implement SEL in the classroom.

III. METHODOLOGY

This study attempts to investigate the need for SEL among teachers in Tribal Welfare Schools (TWS) in Karnataka (Chamarajanagar and Bellary districts). All teachers and principals from nine tribal welfare schools took part in the study. This study consisted of two sections, the first of which was qualitative and used a semi-structured interview schedule to examine the need for SEL among teachers. The second section involved a survey to investigate the teachers' knowledge, perception and implementation of SEL in schools. The study also used a checklist to understand teachers' perspectives on SEL among students. The tools for the study were developed internally by the research team.

Demographic Profile:

Total No. of Schools	Nine
School Type	Tribal Welfare Schools (Ashrama Schools)
Respondents	Teachers and Principals
Teaching Experience	5-19 years
Districts	Chamarajanagar and Bellary

IV. SECTION-I

Karnataka Tribal Welfare Schools (Ashrama Schools) are situated in the remote areas of Chamarajanagar and Bellary districts of Karnataka. Compared to the schools in other areas, it is harder for these schools to achieve expected student enrollment rate because of various socio-economic reasons. Most of the community work as daily wage workers on farmlands and they often travel to nearby districts and states for work. Children are also expected to accompany their parents on these trips because of economic vulnerability and social norms among the tribe groups. This leads to high absenteeism in schools and it is aggravated by the lack of awareness on education among the community. Furthermore, the routes to the schools are also marked by the presence of wild animals, making it dangerous for students to walk alone to the schools. Many of the parents also suffer from alcoholism and unfortunately, bias against girl education still persists in the community.

The responsibilities of teachers in the tribal schools are therefore numerous and varied when compared with government schoolteachers in other parts of the state. Securing enrollment, community visits in forest hamlets, ensuring valid government ID cards for the community, distribution of nutritional supplements and at times accompanying students from their hamlets to school are some of their day-to-day duties. They are also often called upon to settle conflicts between parents and community as well.

4.1 Teachers' Need for SEL

Teachers are the engines that drive SEL programmes and practices in schools and classrooms (Schonert-Reichl, K. A., 2017). The SEC and wellbeing of teachers strongly influence their students. Teachers with high social and emotional competence are self-aware, recognize their emotions, use their emotions positively to motivate students to learn and thus promote a positive environment in the classroom. As a result, there is a need to equip teachers with these skill sets, as they play a critical role in promoting positive student outcomes. Based on the interviews with teachers, the following are some of the skill sets that teachers need to improve on:

4.1.1 Conflict Resolution and Negotiation Skills

According to the teachers, the school is taking initiatives to build a cordial relationship with the community members. "We visit villages almost every day to bond with the parents and children so they can trust us. We also invite community members and officials for school functions such as Independence Day." However, there are many instances where teachers have to deal with conflicts, especially with community members and parents.

"People here are very rough and they even manhandle. Our school has classes only till 5th. Though we try our best to get admission in 6th grade for all our 5th class students in social welfare schools, sometimes we do not succeed and they take out their anger on us and we have to handle it." Meanwhile there are also students who are pulled out of school during harvest season and teachers work with their parents and community to bring the students back to school.

“Recently a girl was enrolled in our school by her mother, but after a few days her father came to us, fought with our security and teachers to send her home. This is a common problem here. Mothers like to enrol their children, but fathers have a problem with it. It gets worse because ours is a residential school.”

With varied perspectives on education among the community, conflicts between teachers and parents are common in these schools. Often, teachers do not also have the resources to solve the concerns of the parents. Trainings with focus on conflict resolution and negotiation skills can help them manage these instances better and help maintain better relationships with community members including parents, tribal group associations and officials.

4.1.2 Emotional Regulation

Teachers were divided in their opinion about how to handle their emotions in classrooms. “We should be aware to not carry any emotions to class. Our job is to teach and that is all.” “I usually share my positive feelings with students, so it spreads among them.”

Some of them responded that it is a weakness to appear emotional and others said as long as it does not affect children, it is alright. But most of them agreed that training on emotional regulation will help them handle their classes better. “During enrollment, it is very challenging for us to manage students’ emotions. Sometimes in the night, they cry for their parents and it is difficult to handle them.”

Discussion and training on healthy emotional regulation will equip them to manage their emotions better as well as help manage students when they have a meltdown in class.

4.1.3 Self-awareness

The questions on self-awareness were specific to their job responsibilities. Teachers were unable to articulate what ‘they were doing well’ or ‘what they needed help with.’ This points to the lack of clarity regarding the expected performance of their role and individual performances.

4.1.4 Relationship Skills

Teachers reported to having good relationship with their peers, principal and students. They said that since the school has less number of students and teachers, they actively try to plan ahead and work as a team, even cover up for their colleagues whenever there is an emergency. The “support” from their colleagues is something “that helps them to continue” according to the teachers. But teachers expressed concerns with respect to their relationship with the community and higher officials.

V. SECTION-II

Evidence suggests that SEL programmes are more successful when teachers have a positive attitude toward them and are motivated to deliver them with fidelity. Most important of all, teachers should be confident that they possess the skills and knowledge to promote SEL in their students. To achieve this, there is a need to understand teachers' knowledge, perceptions and views on the implementation of SEL in schools. As a result, the second section of the need analysis looks into understanding teachers' knowledge, perceptions and implementation of SEL in schools.

5.1 Teachers Knowledge and Perception of SEL

The majority of the teachers felt that their students needed much more than academic skills to be successful in life. The teachers reported that the periodic trainings they attended focused on enhancing their academic teaching skills only. Most teachers had no prior knowledge of SEL, but when it was explained to them, they were open to such trainings.

"I feel SEL is very important because the academic scores and marks card will not help children much in their growth but if you have a good mind stability and know how to handle your emotions, you can survive anywhere." However, they mentioned that these trainings should be non-judgmental and should be provided with implementation support. The teachers felt there was a need to introduce SEL programmes in schools, not only for students but also for teachers and administrators.

5.1.1 Implementation of SEL Programmes in Schools

The majority (66%) of respondents felt that schools should devote time to SEL programmes. According to them, enhancing students' SEL is the responsibility of teachers and not parents or the community. The teachers and principals found it feasible to implement SEL once a week. Since the concept is new, teachers felt they needed time to prepare the materials. learn and deliver the same. Regarding the mode of implementation, the teachers felt that SEL can be taught like any other skill (reading, writing, or playing an instrument). The teachers were of the opinion that SEL should be given special attention and taught as a separate subject throughout the year.

5.1.2 Challenges in Implementing SEL Programmes in School

The teachers believed that implementing SEL programmes in schools had its own set of challenges. The teachers were of the view that with SEL being a new topic and they needed to devote more time to learning it. Although teachers agreed that SEL is crucial for children and should be improved along with academic skills, they acknowledged that finding the time to do so during regular school hours was difficult as it may affect students' learning. In addition, SEL sessions may need resources and materials, which is a challenge. They also felt that the implementation of SEL in schools may increase the workload and cause personal hardships for them.

5.1.3 Incorporation of SEL in Schools

Most of the teachers felt that schools should emphasise SEL along with academic skills. They were of the view that schools and district administrations should provide trainings on not only SEL but also on developing strategies to assist students in improving their SEL skills. The teachers believed all these would be possible only if schools were supported with the necessary financial resources by the authorities.

5.2 Need for SEL among Students

SEL is a process of acquiring and effectively applying the knowledge, attitudes and skills to understand and manage their emotions, to feel and show empathy for others, to establish and achieve positive goals, to develop and maintain positive relationships and to make responsible decisions.

Extensive research evidence shows that SEL skills promote positive development, reduce problem behaviours and enhance academic performance among students. Moreover, these skills predict important life outcomes among students, such as completing high school on time, obtaining a college degree and securing stable employment (Durlak et al., 2015). The benefits of SEL thus point to a pressing need for schools to focus on students' social and emotional development in addition to academic skills. As mentioned in the methodology, a survey checklist was administered to understand the teachers' perspective on students' social and emotional competencies which are as follows:

5.2.1 Self-awareness

Very few (23.5%) teachers reported that the students had excellent self-awareness skills, i.e. were aware of their strengths and weaknesses, accepted their mistakes without getting angry at their peers and displayed confidence in familiar situations like the classroom etc. A large majority of the teachers (74.1%) felt that their students occasionally displayed self-awareness abilities, while 2.5% of the teachers said that the students never displayed such skills.

5.2.2 Relationship Skills

Half (50%) of the teachers were of the view that their students established good relationships with their peers and teachers, which includes students who sought teachers' assistance when necessary, expressed their concerns and shared their experiences during their interactions, conversed freely with their opposite gender and established friendly relationships with their peers. The rest (50%) of the teachers believed students needed to improve their interpersonal skills. It was interesting to note that teachers had a very different opinion regarding students' participation in class, clarifying doubts etc. Only 7.4% of teachers said that their students participated in school and classroom-related activities, while 14.8% of teachers felt their students never came forward or participated in any activities in school.

5.2.3 Self-Management Skills

The teachers had very different opinions on the students' ability to manage emotions compared to all other skills. Only 7.4% of teachers believed that their students handled emotions appropriately, while

70.4% felt they needed to improve their emotion management skills. There have been instances where teachers witnessed their students' outbursts of anger both in and out of class. The majority of the teachers (50 percent and above) said they have noticed their students use abusive language, which needs to be avoided. It was worthy of note that more than a quarter of the teachers felt that students never managed their emotions appropriately or used any coping skills. They used aggressive methods to resolve disagreements with peers at school (including hitting, pushing and fighting). The teachers felt a need to practise self-management skills among students.

5.2.4 Cognitive Skills/Motivation to Learn

88.9% of the teachers said that their students followed the instruction in class. Despite being attentive and obeying the instructions, only 40.7% of teachers said that the students always completed the given tasks within the allotted time. Teachers noticed that the majority of students would occasionally approach them for assistance. It was worthy to note that 3.7% of the teachers felt the students were not interested in or never tried to complete the tasks which were difficult.

5.2.5.Social Awareness

The majority (63%) of the teachers believed that students showed strong social awareness abilities. According to the teachers, not only were the student's kind and affectionate to their peers, but they also respected their teachers and the institution in which they were learning. However, 37% of the teachers felt that their students showed a medium level of social awareness.

VI. KEY FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

The key findings of the study are summarised as follows:

- Teachers believed that students needed much more than academic skills to be successful in life. Teachers have very little knowledge of SEL and its importance in schools.
- Majority (66%) of teachers felt that schools should devote time to SEL. Teachers opined that there is need for an alternative arrangement for SEL, so that classes are not affected.
- District and school administrations should train teachers on SEL and teachers requested help with intervention programmes in school.
- Majority of the teachers felt a need to improve the social and emotional competencies of students and themselves.
- Because of the social realities of the tribal school, teachers need support in SEL, specifically conflict resolution, negotiation skills and emotional regulation.
- Teachers have good functional relationship with their peers and principals but effort needs to be invested in building relationship with community members and higher educational officials.

VII. WAY FORWARD

The insights of this need analysis can benefit teachers and students alike if the SEL interventions in these schools focus on the following:

- Inclusion of various approaches and strategies for effective conflict resolution, negotiation and emotional regulation in teacher training curriculum and facilitation.
- Ensuring conceptual clarity on SEL learning in teachers' training.
- Provision of implementation support after the training. Teachers need to be provided clarity on whom to reach out to when they have questions.
- Inclusion of effective strategies for self-management, self-awareness and internal motivation in students' curriculum development.

VIII. CONCLUSION

The present study examined the need for SEL among teachers and students in tribal schools. The findings of the study highlighted that the teachers had very little knowledge of SEL and its importance in schools. But at the same time, teachers believed that students needed much more than just academic skills to be successful in life. The study also emphasised the need to enhance social and emotional competencies, such as social awareness, self-awareness, self-management skills, relationship skills and cognitive skills among students. The social realities of tribal schools stress empowering teachers with emotion regulation, conflict management and negotiation skills. Finally, the study highlights the need to focus on teachers' social and emotional competence as a foundation for the holistic development of both teachers and students.

Nevertheless, the study had its own limitations. The need analysis was limited to the tribal schools (primary) in two districts of Karnataka only. Second, the study focused on examining the teachers' SEL and their perspective on students' SEL. Therefore, future studies would address the above limitations.

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