




 Research Article

Between Policy Silence and Classroom Reality: Assessing Social and Emotional Learning in Public Secondary Schools in Nyamagana District, Tanzania

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Abstract

It was a general consensus that the function of the Education systems in the twenty-first century was not only to improve the learning achievements of students, but also to nurture their social and emotional growth. However, the current situation in Tanzania regarding students' assessment is based on examinations and content knowledge. While Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) is widely acknowledged as having significant importance for students' learning achievement and citizenship development, there is no knowledge regarding students' SEL assessment in public secondary schools in Tanzania. This study set out to in order to find out the constraints encountered by teachers when evaluating students' SEL in Tanzania, specifically in the Nyamagana district. The study was based on Social Cognitive Theory. In addition, this study was based on qualitative research using a descriptive design. Data collection was carried out using 55 teachers from five public secondary schools in Tanzania, using the interview and focus group discussion techniques. The findings of the study revealed some of the challenges that affect the effectiveness of SEL assessment. Among the key issues identified were the training of the teachers, the lack of standardized tools, the nature of the curriculum, the number of students, and the financial aspect. It was noted that because of these challenges, this situation complicates teachers' efforts to meaningfully evaluate students' SEL. Notwithstanding these constraints, the teachers have used other methods like observation, peer assessment, and role plays to monitor the students' development of SEL. The conclusion of the study shows that despite the importance of the students' SEL, there are certain policy issues that have made it difficult for teachers to assess the students' SEL. The study recommends that the curriculum include students' SEL in secondary schools in Tanzania. This is because the students' SEL remains central to improving the well-being of the students and teachers.

Keywords: Social and Emotional Learning, Competency Development, Educational Assessment, Secondary Education, Tanzania

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1. INTRODUCTION

The conventional curriculum traditions, largely grounded in rote learning, as well as the banking approach of teaching, have had a great influence on students all over the world. In this respect, Wanless and Domitrovich (2017) noted that the conventional school curriculum has offered students fewer chances of innovating, both at school and as a whole. However, the reason why the conventional school curriculum has had a negative influence on students lies in the fact that it does not consider critical aspects, such as emotional, social, and psychological development factors, which are essential in ensuring that the learning, creativity, and ability of students to cope with the challenges of life are well addressed. These opinions are based on the conventional approaches of offering education, as has been the case in most developing

countries, such as Tanzania. In Tanzania, education has traditionally been periodized based on the academic performance of the students. However, with the changing times, as required of the new century, it is essential that the intellectual development of the students, as well as the social and emotional development, be taken care of (Cipriano et al., 2023; Corcoran et al., 2018). The teaching and learning profession is also changing in various ways, and the school community comprising students, teachers, school administrators, and teacher trainers has also understood that the traditional ways in which teaching and learning are conducted are not sufficiently equipping students with the necessary knowledge in this ever-developing world that has always been impacted by the rise of 21st-century soft skills. For instance, this new trend in teaching and learning requires that schools provide support for students to become problem solvers. One way in which schools could address this challenge and ensure that students are equipped with the necessary skills while also making the learning process enjoyable is by considering and implementing Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) in respective schools. According to the literature, SEL is an indispensable way of conducting learning and teaching in schools because it provides students with a comprehensive way of developing necessary skills such as interpersonal skills, emotional understanding, and significant decision-making skills (Dineen et al., 2022). Most importantly, research studies conducted by Naglieri et al. (2011) and UNESCO (2017) indicated that SEL is a significant way of conducting learning and teaching in schools because it not only enhances learning but also promotes personal development. The findings of these studies acknowledge the importance of SEL as a vital education strategy, which has a positive influence on academic achievement, classroom behavior, and life (Cipriano et al., 2023; Durlak et al., 2011). In Tanzania, the assessment of SEL has not yet been fully explored. It has been essential for the study to explore more of the difficulties faced by teachers in relation to the evaluation of SEL within public secondary schools in Nyamagana District, Tanzania. In particular, the present study aimed to explore the ways used by teachers in assessing the social and emotional competencies of learners.

1.1. Research Objectives

- a. To explore the range of difficulties teachers experience when assessing students' SEL in public secondary schools in Tanzania
- b. To document the strategies teachers draw upon to assess students' SEL in public secondary schools in Tanzania.

1.2. Research Questions

- a. What key barriers emerge in assessing students' SEL in public secondary schools in Tanzania?
- b. Which approaches are most frequently applied by teachers to assess students' SEL in public secondary schools in Tanzania?

1.3. Theoretical and Empirical Literature Review

This research is supported by the Social Cognitive Theory, which is one of the leading theories in this area. The theory was first introduced by Bandura in 1974. The main focus of this theory is to understand the dynamic interaction between personal factors, environmental factors, and behavioral factors. The main tenets of this theory can be related to the different facets of SEL. According to this theory, learning is a social phenomenon through which individuals try to understand the world by imitating and observing other individuals' behaviors. Within this framework, elements such as self-efficacy, observational learning, and self-regulation constitute core dimensions of SEL. According to this theory, individuals can develop and learn new skills through observing other individuals. This can be applied to the assessment strategies of SEL because individuals can develop their SEL skills through interacting with other individuals. The important facets of the Social Cognitive Theory can give us a crucial insight into this area.

1.3.1. SEL in Education

In this regard, it has been widely accepted in the twenty-first century that, in addition to being an instrument for the development of cognitive knowledge and intellectual skills, education is also an indispensable instrument for the development of essential skills in learners' lives. Such skills include emotional, interpersonal, and intrapersonal skills, which are extremely significant in ensuring that learners are able to acquire knowledge that can enable them to be successful in an intricate, interconnected, and dynamic world. The development of essential skills is also prominently evident in the SEL framework. Weissberg et al. (2019) demonstrate that SEL fosters capacities including self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, alongside responsible decision-making and the ability to build meaningful relationships. Moreover, the studies conducted by Osher et al. (2016) have shown that SEL places significant emphasis on the development of learners' emotional intelligence, social skills, and character development. In particular, the studies conducted by Herrera (2020) and Oberle et al. (2022) have shown that SEL has a crucial role to play in ensuring that learners are able to regulate their emotions, build positive relationships, and cope with challenges in their lives. Specifically, Oberle et al. (2022) and Mahoney (2020) found that SEL has the potential to contribute to the development of resilience, social responsibility, and the understanding of the importance of academics as vital. These SEL skills, such as self-awareness, self-management, responsible decision-making, and relationship skills, as emphasized by Crawley et al. (2020), are the foundation for the development of the whole child to a wide extent. Therefore, SEL not only impacts learning, but also civic, health, personal, and professional development. As such, it has been integrated into the basic curriculum in most educational systems across the globe. However, despite the emphasis given to SEL in the learning and teaching processes, the challenge of assessing it remains an issue of debate in the field of learning and teaching. It is important to understand that the challenge in assessing social and emotional learning, as opposed to cognitive learning, is that it is not tangible, as it relies heavily on the behaviors of the learners. These challenges, in general, emanate from the cultural, systemic, conceptual, and organizational challenges that exist in the learning and teaching processes in Tanzania, as well as the inequalities in resources, socio-cultural values, and systemic challenges that exist in the country.

Evaluating SEL is perhaps one of the most challenging aspects of contemporary educational research. As scholars increasingly recognize the importance of SEL in developing children's emotional intelligence, academic motivation, and social competencies, the actual process of evaluating SEL faces challenges. These challenges can be understood as stemming from the process of measuring SEL and the limitations of the larger educational system. One of the most frequently highlighted challenges, as discussed in the literature, is the lack of culturally sensitive and standardized tools of evaluation. Most of the existing SEL frameworks and tools have been developed keeping in mind the Western point of view and their values of individualism, independence, and self-expression. Aber et al. (2022) and Kim et al. (2022) caution that these frameworks may not translate effectively across differing cultural settings. In some African cultures, values such as harmony, respect, and interdependence are more valued than in Western societies. Using such tools in other contexts could therefore result in the misrepresentation of students' competencies. It is revealed that greater emphasis continues to be placed on cognitive achievement at the expense of social-emotional growth. Secondly, teachers' inadequate preparation and ability to assess SEL competencies pose a challenge. Hanover Research (2021) undertook a research study to understand the extent to which teachers are equipped to recognize and evaluate students' social-emotional competencies. From the research findings, it is evident that teachers were not trained adequately to evaluate the students' SEL competencies. In this case, it is important to understand that teachers might use their intuition and judgment to assess the students' competencies because they have not been trained sufficiently. According to Domitrovich (2022), teachers might find it difficult to assess some of the SEL competencies, such as self-awareness, emotional regulation, and empathy, because they cannot see them. Besides, according to Al-Jbouri (2023), teachers might lack the appropriate emotional skills to assess the students' competencies. Therefore, this might affect teachers' confidence in the assessment of the students' competencies. There might not be enough time to assess the students' competencies because of the complexity of the curriculum. There is more focus on cognitive development than on social-emotional development (Hassani & Schwab, 2021).

An additional layer of complexity in assessing SEL arises from the lack of conceptual clarity surrounding its definition. While it is generally agreed that SEL is important, there is no definition of what it means or which aspects of it to prioritize. According to Durlak et al. (2011), although guidelines such as

those offered by CASEL have been found to be helpful on a global level, it is possible that this framework may not fully embrace the variety of emotional and interpersonal skills that are valued across cultures. Thus, the theoretical debate between universal and culturally specific approaches to SEL makes it inherently complex to assess. The complexity is made worse by the lack of universally accepted and validated assessment tools. The most common practices include self-report, teacher ratings, peer reviews, and performance tests. According to Nickerson et al. (2019), each of these practices has its disadvantages. For example, self-reports may be subject to the effects of social desirability and self-perception. Likewise, peer review, although it offers a unique perspective, may be subject to the effects of group membership and popularity. Domitrovich (2022) further added that when assessments are translated across cultures or languages, problems with interpretation and construct validity are common. In conformity with this point of view, UNESCO (2017) noted that global efforts to measure quality results still face challenges in terms of effectively measuring SEL in all stages of development and education.

Another factor that can affect the evaluation of SEL is the limitations in the methodologies and logistics used in the evaluation processes. As already mentioned, the evaluation of SEL entails the observation and reflection of the students' behaviors. However, this is a lengthy and complex process that necessitates special training and skills. As Humphrey (2020) pointed out, teachers in environments with limited resources may not have the luxury of time or training to observe and reflect on the students' behaviors or document the students' emotional development accurately. Moreover, the very nature of SEL is such that a student may behave differently depending on the context or situation. As a result, the data gathered may not be reliable enough to draw any conclusions. Moreover, as Duane et al. (2021) pointed out, the attempt to make the evaluation of SEL easier may result in the reduction of the students' emotional development to narrow definitions that are not holistic in nature.

However, another important issue to consider involves the issue of systemic priorities. In many education systems, academic achievement still takes precedence over other important issues. According to Flynn et al. (2024), because results are connected to outcomes in institutions and in careers, teachers and school leaders still do not spend as much time as they should on students' social and emotional learning. In other words, SEL is viewed as another thing to do rather than as part of learning. Limited budget, fewer resources, and lack of support are just some factors that impede the wider implementation of SEL programs. However, in spite of the challenges in measuring SEL, some authors have also proposed ways to enhance the validity and reliability, as well as cultural sensitivity, of SEL measurement. The literature reveals that what is required is a more holistic approach in measuring SEL, with emphasis on culturally responsive measurement tools. According to the study done by Oberle et al. (2022), the most common problem that has been noted when transferring SEL tools from one culture to another is the misalignment that occurs between the assessment tools and the learner's lived experiences. In this regard, the most recommended solution is the participatory approach that is used when creating the assessment tools. The participatory approach is the creation of assessment tools that involve the contributions of teachers, students, parents, as well as the community, in the creation of the assessment tools that are created with the goal of determining the competencies that are valued in the community. According to the study done by Hanover Research (2021), the creation of assessment tools that are culturally responsive is not only effective in creating assessment outcomes that are authentic, but it is also effective in creating acceptance of the assessment tools by the teachers. The creation of assessment tools that are culturally responsive helps the education system in effectively capturing competencies that are valued in the community, such as empathy, cooperation, and social responsibility.

An integral part of successful SEL assessment is building teachers' knowledge and professional competency in this area. Teachers are at the center of assessing students' social-emotional learning development, and unfortunately, they are not always well-informed in this area. Kim et al. (2024), together with Mahoney et al. (2020), propose that professional development workshops for teachers on SEL principles and methods of assessing SEL can greatly enhance teachers' self-confidence in assessing students' social-emotional learning skills. Furthermore, incorporating SEL assessment in pre-service teacher education can ensure that new teachers are well-informed in this area from the onset.

Researchers are increasingly advocating the need for a mixed-method approach as essential for creating a more complete and accurate image of SEL. Kim et al. (2024) and Mahoney et al. (2020) suggest that using both qualitative and quantitative methods, including surveys, observations, interviews, and reflective journals, could give us a more complete image of students' social and emotional learning. This

makes more sense because it promotes the concept of triangulation, or cross-checking findings from multiple perspectives. This more holistic approach could be more effective, especially in relation to students' dynamic behaviors. Another great leap forward in more effectively assessing social and emotional learning is the introduction and integration of technology into the classroom. The role and function of technology in this regard are more efficient, effective, and engaging in collecting and analyzing data. According to Crawley et al. (2020), technology could play a role in monitoring student engagement and providing immediate feedback to students and teachers. In this regard, technology could be used, for example, in relation to observations and self-reflections. Although access to technology is limited worldwide, technology has the potential to enhance the management of data and collaboration between educators and policymakers. It is essential to recognize that digital innovations have the potential to enhance consistency, participation, and access to assessment for SEL.

Another significant strategy that can be employed in the sustenance of SEL assessment is the integration of SEL within the framework of education policies and curriculum designs. Research findings indicate that nations that have integrated SEL within the framework of national education policies are more likely to achieve effective processes of implementation and evaluation (Crawley et al., 2020). It is from this standpoint that this study recognizes the importance of integrating SEL within the framework of curriculum designs and assessment systems as a way of enhancing accountability in the evaluation of emotional and social competencies as much as academic performance. Another strategy that is gaining popularity in the design of improved assessment systems is the strengthening of research partnerships. Partnerships between education institutions and development partners have played a crucial role in the design of more sensitive assessment tools (Osher et al., 2016). The partnerships help in the sharing of knowledge and information and the improvement of methods and capabilities. Moreover, research collaborations between local and international researchers contribute to the enrichment of global knowledge through the interweaving of different understandings of emotional and social development, as noted by Mahoney et al. (2021). Finally, literature underscores the need to ensure equity and inclusiveness in SEL assessment practices. For example, some SEL assessment instruments may be based on the assumption that students in classrooms are equally equipped in literacy skills, digital access, and cultural background. According to Salmela-Aro et al. (2021), equity-focused assessment practices should be able to build tools that are simple, flexible, and responsive to gender differences, which can be adjusted to suit different learning contexts. This practice should recognize the range of experiences of learners and help the majority of them, irrespective of gender, disability, and socioeconomic status, demonstrate what they can do.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1. Research Approach

The research undertook a qualitative research journey in exploring the challenges faced in the evaluation of SEL in various public secondary schools. The researcher undertook this kind of research in order to gain a deeper understanding of the research participants' perceptions and realities. According to Creswell (2014) and Creswell and Poth (2018), this research method seeks to understand how challenges exist in real-life situations. Since the assessment of SEL is subjective in nature, it is appropriate to use this research method because it presents an opportunity to explore the different challenges teachers encounter when evaluating SEL.

2.2. Research Design

The research design adopted was qualitative descriptive research, as described by Creswell and Poth (2018). The design was adopted with the objective of providing an in-depth look at teachers' perspectives and practices in relation to the assessment of social and emotional learning in public secondary schools. The qualitative descriptive design is applicable in situations where the researcher needs to present a thorough account of the events that occurred, using language that describes the day-to-day happenings in the field of study. The study adopted the qualitative descriptive design in the hope that it would assist in the acquisition of descriptions and understanding of the contextual reality of the teachers' experience and practices in the assessment of SEL.

2.3. Study Area

The research was conducted in the district of Nyamagana, which is located in Mwanza, Tanzania. This was a deliberate choice because this district offers a wide range of public secondary schools that cater to students from all walks of socio-economic backgrounds. Being an urban district, the social dynamics in both public and community high schools are complex, given the various family circumstances, demands, and pressures that can affect students' social and emotional development. In this context, this district is significant and pertinent as a site to study teachers' evaluations of social and emotional learning and their struggles in assessing it.

2.4. Target Population

This study focused on teachers from public secondary schools in Nyamagana district as the target population. The teachers were identified as the most appropriate target group to participate in the study due to their involvement in the processes of teaching, interaction with students, and continuous assessment of students. This is because, with SEL competencies being observable through day-to-day behavior such as participation, collaboration, and emotional regulation in class, teachers are in the best position to offer valuable information on the assessment of such competencies and the challenges involved in the process.

2.5. Sampling Procedures

The sampling design combined elements of purposive and simple random sampling. The relevance and fairness of the sampling were ensured. A purposive sampling approach guided the selection of five public secondary schools. Participants were drawn from teachers actively engaged in classroom instruction and student evaluation. The teachers were expected to have knowledge and relevant experience about the assessment of SEL. Simple random sampling was used after the schools were selected, and all teachers were given an equal chance to take part. These sampling techniques helped the researchers get participants who were both knowledgeable about the subject and fairly selected.

2.6. Sample Size and Participants' Characteristics

The study had a total of 55 teachers, where eleven teachers were sampled from each of the five public secondary schools that were identified for this study. The number of study participants was found to be adequate for this qualitative study because it helped the researcher to get into the experience of each participant while at the same time achieving data saturation. The study participants were both male and female teachers who represented different age groups and levels of experience in teaching. The teachers had different levels of experience, ranging from newly employed teachers to highly experienced teachers. This helped in getting a wide range of views concerning the practice and challenges experienced in assessing SEL in public secondary schools. Table 1 shows the sample size and characteristics of the participants.

Table 1. Sample Size and Participants' Characteristics

Gender Distribution		Teaching Experience		
Male	Female	Early Career	Mid-Career	Experienced
30	25	1-5 years	6 -15 years	16 +years

2.7. Research Instruments

The data collection process was carried out by conducting semi-structured interview sessions and focus group discussions among the participants. The data collection process took approximately four months to complete. A total of five teachers from each of these two schools were engaged in a semi-structured interview session facilitated by the researchers. In this context, an attempt was made to explore various themes such as teachers' perception of social-emotional learning, teachers' perception of how to explore students' social and emotional competencies, and teachers' challenges, etc. This session was for one hour. In addition to this, six teachers from each of these two schools were engaged in a focus group discussion session facilitated by the researchers. In this process, the discussion lasted for two hours.

2.8. Data Analysis Procedures

The analysis of the data is based on Social Cognitive Theory, which emphasizes the importance of the mutual interaction between personal factors, behavior, and the environment, which is a reflection of the complexity of SEL. In the analysis, thematic analysis is used, which involves an in-depth analysis of the interview and focus group transcripts, where the data are coded and grouped into categories, which are later developed into general themes. In the analysis, there is an iterative process where there is a continuous comparison of the interview and focus group data.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

3.1. Barriers Encountered by Teachers in Evaluating Students' SEL

The study aimed to gain insight into the difficulties teachers encounter in assessing their students' SEL in public secondary schools in Nyamagana, Tanzania. From the interviews and focus group discussions conducted in the study, it is evident that assessing students' SEL is characterized by challenges as discussed below.

3.1.1. Contextual Challenges

From the interview sessions conducted at School A, it is evident that both teachers and students know very little about SEL. One teacher explained:

Being teachers, we have to focus on the performance of the students because that is what is demanded of us by the system, society, and even the parents. We know the significance of social and emotional learning for the development of children; however, there is a scarcity of information on how to incorporate it into the classroom. Unless teachers are trained well, SEL is given the least priority and cannot be measured. (Interview, 19th July 2024)

Evidence from Focus Group Discussions (School B) further substantiated this view:

In our school, teachers are mostly concerned with ensuring we complete the syllabus and prepare for the exam. Teachers do not spend much time discussing emotions, teamwork, and interpersonal skills. In case of personal or social challenges, there is no support, and we are left to sort things out ourselves. This makes it really hard for us to develop our social and emotional skills. (Focus Group Discussion, 23rd July 2024)

This statement made by the respondent points to a few basic concerns inherent in the system and culture, which have resulted in the marginalization of SEL in the education system. It points to the inherent culture of performance, which has relegated the role of SEL to the periphery. Such a culture has not only affected the ability of teachers to assess the SEL of students but has also affected the development of social skills among students in public schools. This resonates with the findings of Hosokawa et al. (2023), who noted that most teachers lack the ability to comprehend the concepts of SEL, the importance of the concepts, and the ability to incorporate the concepts into the classroom. Ștefan et al. (2022) noted the cultural and societal values of the Tanzanian culture, which have resulted in the emphasis on performance over the social development of students. The problems facing both teachers and students, as identified in the study, highlight the importance of coming up with measures to improve the assessment of SEL in public secondary schools.

3.1.2. Curriculum Challenges

Teachers from School A pointed out that the national curriculum makes no explicit provision for SEL objectives. One participant explained:

The curriculum that we have to teach is so packed with academic content that there is no time or space left to teach activities and lessons that promote the social and emotional learning of students. Even if we recognize the significance of SEL, there is no guidance on how to integrate this into the regular curriculum; thus, we have no choice but to improvise or forego this important learning because of time constraints and the pressure to meet the curriculum. (Interview, 19th July 2024)

Focus Group Discussions (School B) delivered corresponding perspectives. Students remarked:

However, teachers rarely get the opportunity to talk about emotional and social learning unless they have behavioral issues on their minds. Most of the class is spent memorizing material for tests. When we have to overcome personal and interpersonal challenges, there is no guidance; SEL is considered secondary or elective learning, which makes it difficult for us to learn how to control our emotions and how to develop key social skills. (Focus Group Discussion, 23rd July 2024)

The study has shown that, in today's curriculum, Social and Emotional Learning is absent as part of education. This has, in effect, forced teachers to struggle with time management for assessing and teaching SEL due to the curriculum's sole focus on content and achievement in academics. This, in essence, reveals one of the fundamental flaws in our curriculum: it is content-focused, with no time for the development of the child as a whole. The curriculum is so focused on content and achievement in academics that teachers are forced to juggle this with the increasing demand to inculcate Social and Emotional Learning in students. The content-based curriculum, in essence, is not just failing to incorporate SEL into teaching, but it is also failing to allow teachers to effectively put into practice what has been taught to the child. The study's results are in complete agreement with Hosokawa (2023) in revealing how SEL needs to be incorporated into the curriculum for better teaching and learning. Salmela-Aro et al. (2021) stated that, in curricula where SEL is absent, there is a high chance that the importance of Social and Emotional Learning will be completely ignored in favor of teaching for life beyond academics.

3.1.3. Teaching and Learning Resources

Teachers from School A drew attention to the absence of standardized instruments and resources for SEL assessment:

We do not have formal tools to evaluate students' social and emotional learning. There are no rubrics or checklists to help guide us. So we are forced to use our own understanding. It is very difficult to measure progress and provide feedback. It is very informal in the education system, and for a skill that is so important, that is a shame. (Interview, 22nd July 2024).

Focus Group Discussions (School B) echoed these concerns:

Students understand that teachers handle social and emotional issues differently based on their understanding of the issues. Teachers may be supportive, or they may seem unaware and only encourage students to focus on their books. There is no clear system or tool used in assessing Social and Emotional Learning, and this has made it hard for teachers to utilize Social and Emotional Learning assessment techniques and understand them in an organized manner. (Focus Group Discussion, 23rd July 2024).

The findings show a lack of resources and materials used in the assessment of Social and Emotional Learning. The lack of standardized tools and guidelines, as well as the availability of necessary materials, makes it hard for teachers to measure the social and emotional learning of their students. The lack of necessary resources thus indicates the significance of these resources in the assessment of the Social and Emotional Learning program. The teachers are thus in a dilemma since they are expected to tackle these problems despite the lack of necessary support. The assessment of the Social and Emotional Learning program has thus become more subjective and inconsistent in nature. Durlak et al. (2011) have thus noted that the effective assessment and implementation of the Social and Emotional Learning program are possible only through the availability of necessary resources, tools, and guidelines. The lack of these resources, they note, not only makes the assessment of the program difficult but also makes it harder for the teacher to keep track of the social and emotional development of the students.

3.1.4. Implications of Large Class Enrolment

It is apparent that class size is one of the significant challenges teachers face in relation to assessing social and emotional learning. Teachers feel that large classes are a barrier to providing students with the support that social and emotional learning needs. Teachers believe that the large class size inhibits social and emotional learning as it requires individual support. As one teacher from School A said:

Class sizes are huge, and the number of students per class is over ninety. It is almost impossible to monitor the emotional and social needs of each and every child. With a large number of faces to deal with, it is almost impossible to keep a close eye on the interaction of the children. A large number of children's SEL needs are almost neglected, and the teachers have to concentrate on the curriculum instead of the development of the children. It is extremely difficult to assess the children. (Interview, 21st July 2024).

Teachers from School B also said:

There are just too many students in one class, and the teacher may not be able to identify whether or not a student is having emotional problems. The problems may be building up and then suddenly explode. The large size of the classes makes it hard for the teacher to offer personal mentoring and counseling to the students. The students are left to their own devices in handling their emotional problems, and this leads to a lack in this area. (Focus Group Discussion, 23rd July 2024).

This statement, however, encapsulates the real tension associated with handling large classes. It, therefore, illustrates the real impediment associated with the sheer volume of the class, which actually gets in the way of the teacher's ability to assess the social and emotional learning of the students. The worry, therefore, encapsulated in the statement, illustrates the real challenge associated with creating a learning environment that promotes the social and emotional development of the students. Kim, in fact, affirms the argument, as the sheer volume of the class makes it difficult for the teacher to provide individualized support, as well as conduct proper assessments of the social and emotional learning of the students. However, the solution lies in the reform of the policies, which addresses the issue of class volume.

3.1.5. Lack of Training and Professional Development

Both schools have a common concern: teachers are not being adequately trained in the area of SEL. They have complained of a lack of adequate training and professional development in assessing their students' SEL abilities. Therefore, they are not in a position to measure their students' emotional and social development. One teacher from School A said:

We have not had any formal training in the assessment of SEL. It is like we are expected to learn this on our own, but how do we know what to look for and how to assess it, What we need is training on how to assess SEL and training on SEL itself. (21st July, 2024).

This excerpt proves that if teachers are not provided with proper training, they cannot assess their students' SEL. They are not provided with the tools to learn how to assess their students' SEL. According to Flynn et al. (2024), teachers need to have training and development to ensure that they can adapt to the changes that are happening in the education system. They need to have the proper tools and knowledge to integrate Social and Emotional Learning into their teaching strategies. Only then can they assess their students' social and emotional learning and promote it in a holistic way of teaching.

3.1.6. Leadership Challenges

Insufficient backing from school leaders was identified as another challenge in assessing social-emotional learning. The finding revealed that leaders are not backing SEL. Their focus is on students' academics. The teachers' views on this issue were in line with what was revealed. As a teacher from School A said:

It appears that all of a school administrator's attention is given to grades and behavior, allowing the social and emotional development of students to be on the back burner. There is no guidance or resources given to support SEL initiatives. Without administrative support, SEL will be a secondary concern, although a very important one for the development of students. (Interview, 20th July 2024).

Teachers from School B echoed this concern:

Rarely will the school administrators focus on the emotions of the children. Meetings and assemblies will be conducted on discipline, tests, and rules. There will be no programs and training in the area of SEL for teachers and administrators. Thus, the significance of SEL would be undermined, and it would be neglected. (Focus Group Discussion, 23rd July 2024).

The research indicates that in the school setting, the leaders are concerned only about the academic outcomes and do not provide the teachers with the proper guidance in the area of SEL. Thus, it is very hard for the teachers to teach and assess Social and Emotional Learning since it is not given the proper attention it deserves in the absence of the proper support and guidance from the leaders in the school setting. Hassani (2024) indicates that Social and Emotional Learning is not given the proper implementation in the absence of the support and priority of the leaders in the school setting. The leadership is vital in developing a culture in schools that makes Social and Emotional Learning a fundamental part of the students' success. Oberle et al. (2022) indicate that teachers do not have proper opportunities to assess Social and Emotional Learning, and this makes it hard for teachers to teach Social and Emotional Learning.

3.1.7. Financial Constraints

In particular, the limited funds set aside for SEL programs present a great financial challenge. It has proved difficult for schools to raise sufficient funds to implement comprehensive SEL programs, including procuring assessment tools, among other essential tools required to incorporate SEL into the curriculum (Durlak et al., 2011). A respondent described the situation as follows: *"We don't have the budget to buy SEL materials or even run teacher workshops. Without financial backing, it's hard to implement these programs well, let alone measure students' progress."* This statement, therefore, shows the financial constraints affecting schools, which, in turn, affect the implementation of SEL programs. In other cases, the funds have also affected the availability of facilities, including space, as well as opportunities such as workshops and conferences aimed at enhancing teachers' knowledge of SEL, as noted by Guskey (2002). Moreover, the funds have affected the availability of space, as well as counseling facilities, which have a role to play in the implementation of SEL programs, as noted by Hattie (2009). In all these instances, the teachers have felt unmotivated or unprepared to tackle the issue of the students' social and emotional learning. Therefore, these show the challenges that affect the implementation of SEL programs that need to be addressed.

3.2. Approaches Employed by Teachers in Assessing SEL in Public Secondary Schools

3.2.1. Observation

Teachers from School A identified observation as a central approach in evaluating SEL. One teacher stated:

A significant part of my time is spent observing students both individually and in groups. It is always nice to get a glimpse into how they get along with each other. For example, I observed a group of students having a discussion in which one of them intervened in order to help settle a dispute between two other students. It was nice to observe this student and how patient and problem-solving they were. Such learning situations are impossible to measure in tests and essay questions. (Interview, 22nd July 2024).

A teacher from School B also highlighted the benefits of observation:

As a teacher, I have always noticed the way the students interact and engage with each other during group activities. Noticing the way the students relate and engage with each other has helped me understand the way they are connected socially. When I observe how a student helps resolve a problem between two or more students in a calm manner, it is definitely indicative of how well they are progressing in social and emotional learning. (Focus Group Discussion, 23rd July 2024).

The above statement emphasizes just how significant observation is in helping to identify the finer aspects of students' social and emotional learning, as this is not always possible through other forms of evaluation. The statement further emphasizes how observing students in real-life situations can help in understanding how effectively they can apply SEL skills in real-life situations, as opposed to just in a classroom environment. This is in agreement with Jones et al. (2013), who observed that through observation, valuable insights can be gained on how to approach social behaviors in a given situation, and this can be done with the help of assessment tools such as observation. The interviews with teachers showed that 72% of them used structured observation to monitor the progress of the students on SEL, while 28% used unstructured methods of observation.

3.2.2. Reflective Practices through Journals and Self-Assessments

Reflective practices were commonly used to promote self-awareness. A teacher from School B explained:

As a teacher, my goal is for the students to maintain a journal that reflects on their experiences in school, how they feel, and the challenges they are facing. This will enable them to understand how they are able to handle situations, how they interact with fellow students, and how they manage their emotions. Through this, they will be able to identify the challenges they are facing, such as how to effectively communicate themselves or how to manage their anger in the most effective way possible. (Focus Group Discussion, 23rd July 2024).

An interview with a teacher from School A added:

It is in this area that reflective journals can be beneficial to students, in that they will be able to have a safe space to recognize their emotions and monitor how they interact with other people. Over time, it becomes clear that they have developed in terms of awareness, empathy, and emotions. Through reviewing their reflective journals, it becomes possible for me to assess how they are progressing and thus suggest ways to enable them to excel in this area. This is important because it cannot be done in any other way. (Interview, 22nd July 2024)

This is significant in relation to appreciating the importance of reflective journaling to students as a therapeutic tool. It can help them to cope effectively with stress and other emotional challenges. The finding is similar to that obtained in Reichl and Lawlor's 2010 study, which found that self-reflection is a key component in building self-awareness, which is a significant part of SEL. Reflective journaling can provide teachers with significant qualitative data on students' emotional development.

3.2.3. Surveys

Teachers further utilize structured surveys and questionnaires to capture both quantitative and qualitative dimensions of SEL. One teacher from School A explained:

I have used surveys that include a combination of multiple-choice and open-ended questions in measuring how students perceive their own social and emotional learning abilities. Surveys are effective in helping us know the areas in which the students are strong and the areas in which they need help, mainly in the management of emotions, the development of positive relationships, and the display of empathy towards others. One student, for instance, learned that being part of group activities helped him build confidence and improve his understanding of people's perspectives. Surveys are very important in helping us get critical information. (Interview, 21st July 2024)

Teachers from School B noted:

The surveys give students an opportunity to share their relationships with their classmates and how they cope with different challenges. The most significant part for me in the surveys is the open-ended questions. I believe that these questions provide students with a chance to share what is happening in their lives that influences their feelings and relationships. It is more personal to include students' voices in the assessment of SEL. (Focus Group Discussion, 23rd July 2024).

This teacher's statement also illustrates how surveys are unique in that they are flexible in collecting both quantitative and qualitative data about SEL. They could also be used as a way for students to voice their minds and for teachers to identify where each student excels or struggles. This is in support of Durlak et al. (2011), who also found that surveys could be used to get accurate results for SEL. The focus groups found that students preferred surveys that used open-ended questions because they allowed them to voice themselves fully.

3.2.4. Peer Assessment

Peer assessment was highlighted as an effective method for encouraging accountability and reflection. A teacher from School B described:

I help the students carry out peer assessment activities where they learn from each other based on how they work as a group, how they communicate, and how they show empathy towards each other. In this way, the students can learn from each other, including areas of improvement in themselves, like recognizing the futility of cutting each other off when working as a group. When students learn to give and receive feedback in ways that are respectful, trust, respect, and understanding can be developed in very concrete ways. (Focus Group Discussion, 23rd July 2024).

A teacher from School A reinforced this:

This is so because peer assessment is significant in that it helps students become more reflective about themselves and what other students are able to contribute. In addition to this, students are able to learn to receive and give feedback without being defensive in a way that will help them become better communicators. This approach encourages students to become involved in the process of SEL development and evaluation in a way that fosters a collaborative learning environment. (Interview, 21st July 2024)

These findings, therefore, underscore the role of peer assessment in creating a conducive environment in which students interact with each other. These findings are in line with the assertions of Zins and Elias (2006) that peer assessment plays a critical role in the development of a collaborative learning environment, which is essential in the development of Social and Emotional Learning skills.

3.2.5. Performance-Based Assessment Through Role Playing and Scenario Activities

Teachers said they use role-playing and scenarios to give students practical, real-life opportunities to develop SEL skills. One teacher from School A explained:

Role-playing scenarios enable students to experience challenging social scenarios, such as conflict resolution or stress management, in a group project. This will enable them to develop skills in emotion management, empathy, and conflict resolution, which cannot be achieved through tests and quizzes. I can see how they interact, negotiate, and take charge in these scenarios, which provides a better picture of their skills in social-emotional learning. (Interview, 21st July 2024)

This is because this concept is founded on the application of SEL skills in life, which enables students to enhance their emotional intelligence through the activities. This is in line with Durlak et al.'s (2011) research, which focuses on the significance of performance-based assessments in helping students have a complete understanding of the application of SEL skills. The students noted that the activities are interesting and enable a conducive environment in which they improve their skills.

4. FINAL THOUGHTS

Yet, despite the fact that its value is well recognized and supported by ample evidence of its benefits, social and emotional learning remains underemphasized in the educational systems in the Global South nations, including Tanzania. Social and emotional learning is not a new concept in educational theory. It goes back to ancient times. It was recommended by Greek scholars that learning should extend beyond mathematics and science to include physical education, art, morals, and character development. He believed that the purpose of education was to produce good character in citizens. According to these scholars, good character in citizens could be achieved through a strong educational and upbringing system (Cipriano et al., 2023). This points to the importance of personality development in children, including their emotional and social sides, in addition to their cognitive sides, as emphasized in contemporary social and emotional learning theory. Today, contemporary theory recognizes the importance of social and emotional learning in building strong educational systems. Dineen et al. (2022) assert that without social-emotional learning, schools suffer, and the overall performance of the students declines. For instance, in Tanzania, it seems social-emotional learning isn't really being emphasized, and things could definitely be worse. Without social-emotional learning, children may have issues with their feelings, arguments, and getting along with each other. As we enter the new century, it is really important to remember that all students are different. Every student has their own unique talents, interests, and what makes them tick. Some students really enjoy their school work and social activities, while others may not be so enthusiastic and have difficulty becoming involved. Dineen et al. (2022) assert that if we are preparing our students for the personal and professional

challenges of the future, we must provide the tools of teamwork, problem-solving, and social interactions. Not only is social-emotional learning good, but it is the key to academic as well as social development.

Yet, while significant progress has been made in the expansion of access to education, gaps are apparent in fully executing SEL in secondary schools across the country. According to Hosokawa (2023), in order for students to be empowered in their learning and become active agents in building their own knowledge, respecting and valuing diversity, and having significant social interactions, learning and teaching should be centered on SEL. As such, SEL should be at the heart and foundation of our educational system and not just another add-on. The current curriculum, while placing significant emphasis on academic outcomes, is wanting in serving the needs of contemporary students. As indicated in this study's findings, there is an urgent need for the curriculum to be reviewed and placed more emphasis on Social and Emotional Learning. The current emphasis on content delivery and outcomes does not provide teachers with opportunities for students to develop and demonstrate their social and emotional learning, which are critical for students' personal and professional development. The curriculum of today should align with the requirements of socio-economic progress, and this involves developing capabilities in self-direction, teamwork, tenacity, creativity, and problem-solving. It involves a shift from a test-oriented, traditional approach to a learner-centric model of learning and teaching, with a strong focus on emotional learning and developing practical capabilities.

5. IMPLICATIONS OF THIS STUDY

The implications of this research have far-reaching significance to all those involved in secondary education in Tanzania. First and foremost, to teachers, this research shows that professional development is key. Teachers need to have the skills to assess their students' social and emotional learning. Teachers can use techniques such as behavioral observation, journaling, peer feedback, and SEL monitoring even in resource-constrained environments. To school administrators and those in management positions, this research shows that it is important to have a school culture and system that encourages teachers to collaborate and share their assessment techniques and have reflective sessions about their students' learning beyond academics. To policymakers and those in key positions of influence in Tanzania, this research shows that it is important to have guidelines on SEL and its inclusion in national assessment guidelines and the development of appropriate assessment tools for use in public schools in Tanzania.

6. DELIMITATIONS

The research targeted public secondary schools located in the Nyamagana district. The choice of the location sought to ensure a deep understanding of the experiences of the teachers. Only teachers were targeted since they are the ones involved in the process of teaching as well as assessing the social-emotional learning. Students, school administration, and parents were not included in the research. The research was conducted qualitatively, and a few participants were targeted. This was to give a meaningful insight. These delimitations were set to ensure the research remains feasible as well as foster a good understanding. However, the delimitations of the research present a limitation since the teachers had to give their experiences based on their own perceptions. Despite the limitations, the research remains relevant since it points out the challenges associated with the assessment of social-emotional learning.

7. DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Further studies could be conducted on more approaches to the subject, as well as testing the concepts in other contexts. A longitudinal study would enable us to see the progression of the assessment approaches of SEL over time, as well as the influence of these approaches on the students. It would also give us a more complete idea of the effectiveness of the assessment approaches. Involving multiple stakeholders, including the students, principals, and parents, would give us a more complete idea of the effectiveness of the assessment approaches of SEL.

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