

1 Measuring to enhance social and emotional skills

This chapter situates the OECD's Survey on Social and Emotional Skills within the context of wider efforts to describe, monitor and develop these skills.

Why an international survey on social and emotional skills?

Social and emotional skills are holistic skills: they underpin everything people do. It matters whether someone can actively socially engage and get along with other people. It matters whether someone can effectively recognise and regulate their emotions, focus on a task, and get things done. It matters whether someone can engage with and learn from new experiences and new ideas. And it matters in many dimensions of our lives. A growing body of research (Chernyshenko, Kankaraš and Drasgow, 2018^[1]; OECD, 2015^[2]; Steponavičius, Gress-Wright and Linzarini, 2023^[3]) shows that social and emotional skills are necessary for academic learning, significant predictors of labour market and employment outcomes, strongly related to individual's health and well-being, and key ingredients of peaceful and prosperous democracies. However, the findings from the OECD's 2019 Survey on Social and Emotional Skills indicated that social and emotional skills are unequally distributed across gender and socio-economic background (OECD, 2021^[4]).

Taking stock of these findings, many education systems acknowledge that they have a responsibility to recognise and promote learners' social and emotional skills (OECD, 2023^[5]). Social and emotional competencies are now included in the curricula of most OECD countries and many others (Das et al., 2023^[6]). An OECD report examined recent curriculum changes in several countries, including Australia, British Columbia (Canada), Estonia, Finland, Japan, New Zealand, Norway, Ontario (Canada), Wales (United Kingdom), Argentina, and Hong Kong (China). It found that such changes often focus on cross-curricular competencies tied to multiple disciplines, frequently including social and emotional skills (OECD, 2020^[7]).

Most countries across the OECD have begun to include these skills in their curricula through various methods, such as:

- integrating social and emotional skills as a holistic theme across the curriculum. For example, New Zealand's curriculum describes five "key competencies", among which "managing self" and "relating to others" cover social and emotional skills.
- incorporating specific aspects of social and emotional skills into the existing disciplinary areas. For example, in many countries, global competencies, which typically include empathy and tolerance (two social and emotional skills examined by the Survey), are embedded across many of the learning areas, with humanities, national languages, science and the arts being the largest domains. Collaboration is also widely and relatively uniformly embedded across multiple learning areas, with the exception of mathematics. Some countries opt for developing a particular social and emotional skill as part of a specific subject. For example, at upper secondary level, Portugal encourages collaboration and responsibility in courses on institutions and democratic participation, and Kazakhstan does the same in law courses.
- creating unique courses and areas of study devoted to subjects that include both a content and a social and emotional skills component. For example, in 2019, curriculum for 11th and 12th grades in Chile was updated to respond to emerging national and global developments through the creation of new subjects conducive of social and emotional learning including "Sciences for Citizenship" and "Participating and Argumentation in a Democracy" (Das et al., 2023^[6]).

Even more transformative is the initiative undertaken by the Delhi government (India) to implement the Happiness Curriculum, which promotes students' happiness and well-being by cultivating social and emotional skills through the creation of unique courses. The Happiness Curriculum was launched in 2018 in 1 024 government schools in New Delhi, India, constituting of a daily 45 minute class for over 800 000 students from nursery to grade 8. Evaluation studies found that the social and emotional well-being of students improved over time, thanks to regular happiness classes (see Box 1.1).

Finally, other methods of integrating social and emotional learning, which are not or only indirectly related to curriculum design, include the provision of time in students' schedules for experiences that promote

social and emotional learning, such as extracurricular activities. For example, students can build responsibility through volunteering opportunities, or develop collaboration, creativity, or energy through drama clubs or team sports. Furthermore, investment in training and capacity-building opportunities for teachers and school leaders allows them to incorporate these aspects into teaching practices.

Box 1.1. The Happiness Curriculum in Delhi (India)

Happiness Curriculum is a flagship programme of the Delhi government that expands education's purpose from traditional pedagogy and practice to the development of confident, mindful, responsible, and happy individuals who will work together to build a harmonious society. It is the first step towards broadening the formal public education system to promote students' well-being and happiness with an emphasis on social and emotional skills. The curriculum's premise is that assisting students in developing the skills associated with happiness will improve not only their learning but also their life outcomes.

The Happiness Curriculum was launched in 2018 as a daily 45-minute class, six days a week, for over 800 000 students from nursery to grade 8 in 1 024 government schools in Delhi, India. The programme also included training sessions for teachers, programme coordinators and facilitators. Delhi's Happiness Curriculum combines a localised and contextualised understanding of happiness and its significance in the Indian context with social and emotional skills as outlined in international frameworks. The framework is based on a 'happiness triad': physical senses (labelled as Momentary Happiness), feelings within relationships (labelled as Deeper Happiness), and learning and awareness (labelled as Sustainable Happiness). This curriculum aims to enable students to move beyond searching for happiness through materialistic means; rather, focusing on learning and awareness of self and others and cultivating skills and human values to experience a sustainable form of happiness. The programme also includes guidance regarding the implementation of three pedagogical practices labelled 'mindfulness', 'stories and activities', and 'expressions'.

- Mindfulness practices support children to be mindful of their own emotions, thoughts, and actions; reduce stress; and become self-attentive. Classroom practices include starting the class with mindful check-in, followed by mindful sensory activities and ending the class with a mindful check-out. Younger children (in grade 1) are taught to pay attention to their senses, such as what they can hear, smell, taste, and feel. As they advance, they engage in activities like mindful walking, drawing, muscle relaxation, and exploring emotions. By grade 8, they are prompted to reflect on their feelings and thoughts, discerning differences between them. The teacher encourages students to share their mindfulness experiences both at home and school, whether practicing alone or with others.
- Stories and activities have been curated to reflect the real-life scenarios of ordinary people and focus on relationships, responsibilities towards others, finding a purpose in life, empathy, and gratitude. After narrating the story in the class, the teacher uses questions to encourage students to reflect on their own thoughts and behaviours. The teachers typically ask whether the students identify with story characters or what their actions would be in similar situations. This approach allows for a deep exploration of concepts like happiness.
- The expressions component focuses on the natural desire of individuals to express thoughts and feelings. Students are encouraged to explore the purpose of their lives and reflect on their actions and behaviour towards others.

A mixed method evaluation found that, overall, the social and emotional well-being of students improved over time with regular happiness classes. The effectiveness of classroom practice was analysed through observations of teachers and students during each of the mindfulness, story and activity, and

expressions components. Overall, teachers' time management and follow-up questions played a crucial role in facilitating reflective discussions and enhancing learning outcomes. Interviews with teachers suggested that most understood the curriculum's objectives and purpose. As well as incorporating the novel pedagogies of the Happiness Curriculum in Happiness classes, teachers also incorporated them into other subjects. Teachers also observed that the curriculum had a positive impact on their students. Teachers found that students had become more honest, respectful, disciplined inside classrooms, caring about school and more responsible about their surroundings. The interviews with students revealed that the Happiness classes have enabled them to become more self-aware, be mindful of their actions, self-reflect and bring about a change in their behaviour. For example, students recounted various occurrences from their everyday experiences, illustrating how the Happiness Curriculum has enabled them to reflect on the causes of their circumstances and find methods to alter their behaviour and outlook.

Sources: (Das et al., 2022^[8]) (Das et al., 2023^[6])

As the inclusion of social and emotional skills in curricula continues to grow, assessing these skills becomes key to meeting student learning objectives. Education systems need to assess how equitably students are supported in developing these skills. The evaluation process can also identify misalignments with classroom realities and unintended policy consequences (OECD, 2013^[9]). At the policy level, promoting social and emotional learning presents major challenges in implementation and in the 'attained curriculum' – the curriculum as experienced by students and teachers, rather than as it is written (OECD, 2023^[10]). In brief, collecting system-wide information on the development of social and emotional skills is important for national monitoring purposes in education. This includes achieving national goals, implementing curriculum, and ensuring equity (OECD, 2013^[9]).

However, unlike other areas of learning, most education systems do not have specifically designed tools or measures to assess the development of social and emotional skills across the attained curriculum. A recent OECD report (OECD, 2023^[5]) provided an overview of how countries across the OECD assess social and emotional skills in upper secondary education. It concluded that strategies for system-wide monitoring are still emerging in many systems. Current strategies typically draw upon a variety of sources to piece together an understanding of students' social and emotional skills, although this picture may remain incomplete. Types of assessments of social and emotional skills at the upper secondary level are classified against two dimensions: (i) whether the assessment is explicit or implicit and (ii) whether it relies on information collected from inside or outside the classroom. *Implicit* assessments within the classroom are often based on students' and teachers' *reflections* about students' social and emotional skills, while *explicit* assessments are based on *actual performance* on specific tasks, as part of subjects like 'digital technologies and communication' or 'morality and civics'. *Implicit* assessments outside the classroom put the focus on students' *participation* and *engagement* in extra- or co-curricular activities, communities outside the school, projects and work experience, while *explicit* assessments outside the classroom are based on students' *achievements* in these activities.

Why have education systems not developed a unified or systematic approach to monitor and assess social and emotional skills? The complex nature of these skills presents a challenge. They are demonstrated and developed across a wide variety of contexts, of which school is only one, and manifest in different ways for different individuals. This variability makes system-wide assessment challenging. Additionally, the value and expression of these skills varies across cultures and education systems. This variation makes international comparisons difficult from both a conceptual and methodological standpoint, yet such comparisons provide valuable insights. Comparing a large group of education systems helps to shed light on universal educational processes by answering the following questions: which social and emotional skills consistently matter for which outcomes, regardless of the cultural context? Which teaching practices are consistently related to stronger social and emotional skills? Site- and country-specific deviations in the

universal principles are also useful to pinpoint and interpret. Why is curiosity more strongly related to academic achievement in some education systems than in others? What does it tell us about social and emotional learning in those systems and the value placed on this competency? Are there some education systems more efficient at closing gaps in students' social and emotional skills or at promoting certain skills, than others? What do they do differently?

The OECD, through the work done by the Centre for Educational Research and Innovation (CERI), has been a forerunner with its research, conceptual and assessment framework for defining and measuring social and emotional skills in a cross-country setting (Chernyshenko, Kankaraš and Drasgow, 2018^[1]; OECD, 2015^[2]). This pioneering work paved the way to the design and implementation of the OECD's Survey on Social and Emotional Skills (SSES). SSES is the most comprehensive international large-scale assessment to date that provides education systems with information on their students' social and emotional skills (OECD, 2021^[4]). A great strength of SSES lies in its conceptual and methodological underpinning – its inception mobilised experts from around the world. SSES also provides insights in to how students' social and emotional skills relate to key life outcomes and helps identify factors in students' home, school and peer environments that promote or hinder the development of social and emotional skills. The aim of SSES is not to create another layer of top-down accountability but to help educational practitioners and policymakers shift towards looking outward to the next school, city or country.

The first round of SSES was conducted in 2019 in 10 cities from around the world, with findings published from 2021 onwards (OECD, 2023^[10]; OECD, 2021^[4]). This first round showed the feasibility of measuring social and emotional skills across countries and demonstrated its value in addressing research questions and policy issues relating to social and emotional learning. How did the participating cities use SSES findings? Many local governments applied them to policy and practice, often in collaboration with partner foundations or universities. For instance, in Bogotá, the Colombian Institute for Educational Evaluation (ICFES) organised sessions that used the survey data to raise awareness among policy makers, teachers, parents and caregivers of the relationship between social and emotional skills and cognitive development. The Secretariat of Education of Bogotá used SSES findings to inform their plans for developing safe and supportive school environments. ICFES also liaised with several thousand educational practitioners to analyse SSES findings and discuss with them how to update their teaching practice. In addition, Bogotá has been identified as a leading example for social and emotional learning programmes, and Bogotá's practices are being promoted in the rest of the country. Other SSES participants helped schools implement change. In Portugal, the city of Sintra and the Gulbenkian Foundation used the SSES data to inform schools about students' levels of social and emotional skills. Schools grouped in clusters received a diagnosis report and were tasked with identifying key areas for improvement as the basis for developing an action plan. Importantly, the municipality recognised the importance of this work and the need for adequate support – a specialised team was hired to support the schools in implementing their action plans in the following two years. In parallel to Sintra's participation in SSES 2019, the Portuguese Gulbenkian Academies for Knowledge supported the nationwide implementation of interventions to promote social and emotional learning in people aged 0 to 25 years. Forty of these interventions were evaluated, using SSES 2019 instruments for pre-and post-test assessment of all participants' social and emotional skills. A team tasked to evaluate these interventions found evidence of significant positive impact of the Academies' work on various skills. Specifically, consistent impacts from the perspective of children and teachers, particularly for the skills of curiosity and assertiveness, were found (Barata et al., 2024^[11]). Another encouraging example comes from Helsinki (Finland) where the municipality collaborated with the University of Helsinki to further analyse the survey data and use the results to produce research and experience-based tools and support for schools, teachers and students in the city. Barometers and dashboards were devised and shared among teachers and school leaders to facilitate monitoring of students' advancements in social and emotional skills and learning. These initiatives were implemented with the aim of narrowing the disparities arising from social segregation within the city.

What's new in SSES?

Following the successful inaugural round of SSES in 2019, the second round in 2023 saw expanded geographical coverage. Six countries participated nationwide along with another 10 subnational entities from diverse areas. This report compiles findings from the 23 sites and countries involved in either or both SSES rounds (for more details on participating sites, please see Table 2 in the Reader's Guide). Notably, two cities – Bogotá (Colombia) and Helsinki (Finland) – rejoined the SSES in 2023, presenting a unique opportunity to compare their current data with that from 2019 and to understand the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on students' social and emotional skills and well-being.

In 2023, Ukraine joined the SSES amid ongoing conflict. Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine has profoundly affected the nation, inflicting damage on infrastructure and profoundly impacting its youth. Growing up in an active war zone, Ukrainian children face violence, displacement, disrupted schooling, and socio-political upheaval. The SSES findings are crucial in understanding how students are coping and maintaining their social and emotional resilience amidst these challenges, offering insights into the unique impacts of war on children's socio-emotional development.

Recent global events underscore the importance of social and emotional skills. The prolonged isolation due to COVID-19, Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine and ongoing conflicts in other areas of the world highlight the need for skills like stress resistance, empathy, trust and tolerance. This report aims to enrich the international evidence base regarding these essential social and emotional skills, providing a comparative perspective on their development and significance in diverse global contexts.

The survey instruments and procedures used in 2023 are like those used in 2019, with some minor adjustments and improvements, allowing for meaningful comparisons across participating sites and over time. The key features of SSES survey design remain the same:

- International target population: 15-year-old students, their teachers and school leaders (in 2023, surveying 10-year-old students and surveying parents were made optional.)
- Target sample size: 3 000 students, 500 teachers and 75 school leaders per site
- Survey instruments: self-reported assessment for students and self-reported questionnaires for each target population, each requiring between 30 and 60 minutes to complete
- Mode of data collection: online by default with possibility to complete the survey on paper
- Survey window: data collection started in March 2023 in Spain and finished in January 2024 in Delhi (India).

New themes have been incorporated into the contextual questionnaires to focus more on several aspects: students' career prospects and employability (as detailed in Chapter 4), the influence of gender stereotypes on gender-related gaps in social and emotional skills, teaching and schooling practices that support social and emotional learning, and the potential effects of online or hybrid schooling on the development of social and emotional skills (as discussed in the forthcoming report due in late 2024).

Application of this report's findings to policy and practice

The findings from SSES 2023 (combined with those of 2019) are presented in two international reports: the present one focuses on social and emotional skills as predictors of key life outcomes; the forthcoming report (due for publication towards the end of 2024) will focus on societal, school and teacher-related factors that can foster or hinder the development of social and emotional skills.

This report provides further empirical evidence for the importance of a wide range of social and emotional skills for key life outcomes (see Chapters 3 and 4 in particular). Applying these findings to policy and practice requires considering parallel developments in the field of social and emotional learning (SEL).

Recent research supports the idea that social and emotional skills are not only malleable but that they can be developed through deliberate school interventions. Compared to OECD's first report on SSES findings (OECD, 2021^[4]), an important departure is shifting the focus from malleability to teachability.

Malleability denotes susceptibility to change due to environmental influences, whether deliberate and unintentional. These can be experiences, relationships, or general contexts at home, in school and in society more broadly (Cantor et al., 2019^[12]). For example, the ability to form healthy attachments has been shown to be highly malleable (Immordino-Yang, Darling-Hammond and Krone, 2019^[13]). Attachment patterns form after birth, primarily through our relationships with our caregivers and later, peers and others (Cantor et al., 2019^[12]). Schools and activities outside the home do create opportunities to learn relationship skills and adjust attachment patterns. Yet the ability to form healthy attachments itself is likely a broader, less teachable and more malleable capacity that arises from our key personal relationships. Caregivers are its primary mediators (Cantor et al., 2019^[12]).

Although the term might be debated, "teachability" denotes susceptibility to deliberate intervention in education settings. These can be school-based, after-school or out-of-school interventions that take place outside students' homes. They are led by instructors who are, generally, not the students' caregivers. Teachability matters more to the education community as it describes skill changes arising specifically from intentional efforts of educators and instructors. For example, evidence suggests that emotional control or, the ability to manage one's own emotions such as anger, is teachable. Numerous programmes were found to improve emotional control from preschool to secondary school (CASEL, 2023^[14]; Grant et al., 2017^[15]; Jones et al., 2021^[16]).

A huge body of evidence reviewed by the OECD (Steponavičius, Gress-Wright and Linzarini, 2023^[3]), including multiple meta-analyses of SEL interventions around the world, have determined that social and emotional skills can be taught in school settings across age groups and national contexts. Impact varies, however, depending on the implementation and context. In addition, considered separately, not all social and emotional skills can be considered equally teachable. OECD's latest review of recent studies found that evidence is robust for 12 of the 23 examined skills but moderate, limited or unclear for 11 of them. Empathy, metacognition, co-operation, self-control, assertiveness, stress resistance, emotional control, social problem-solving and self-efficacy were found to be the most teachable skills, based on the most recent studies (Steponavičius, Gress-Wright and Linzarini, 2023^[3]).

Previously, the OECD has found that deliberate interventions at school can develop skills such as open-mindedness, creativity, curiosity and critical thinking. Specifically, CERI's project titled 'Fostering and Assessing Creativity and Critical Thinking in Education' has developed a shared professional language for creativity and critical thinking in education, thereby facilitating its teaching, learning, and formative assessment across countries within various curricula (Vincent-Lancrin et al., 2019^[17]). An international network of schools and teachers from 11 countries, representing diverse cultures and educational approaches, carried out two school years of fieldwork and data collection. The team developed and field-trialled a series of OECD rubrics on creativity and critical thinking. They also created additional resources for teachers, including design criteria for lesson plans, about 100 peer-reviewed lesson plan examples, and other pedagogical resources to foster students' creativity and critical thinking. Teachers received robust professional development plans, including training sessions, individual feedback, and participation in a professional learning community through both face-to-face meetings and digital platforms. The project underwent rigorous evaluation and demonstrated that creativity and critical thinking can indeed be taught, learned, and assessed in schools at both primary and secondary levels.

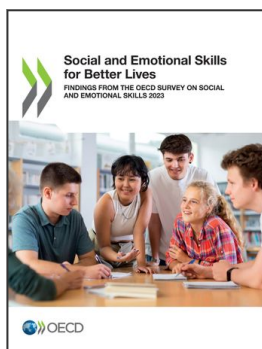
This first volume of SSES 2023 findings focuses on the social and emotional skills that predict key life outcomes. This chapter aimed to convey the evidence that many of these foundational skills can be taught. However, for the latest analyses on teaching and schooling practices currently used to support social and emotional learning in SSES-participating sites, readers will need to wait for the publication of the second volume on SSES 2023 findings later this year. In the meantime, this current report includes text boxes that

feature interesting country cases, showcasing how social and emotional skills can be developed through school-based interventions.

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From:

Social and Emotional Skills for Better Lives

Findings from the OECD Survey on Social and Emotional Skills 2023

Access the complete publication at:

<https://doi.org/10.1787/35ca7b7c-en>

Please cite this chapter as:

OECD (2024), "Measuring to enhance social and emotional skills", in *Social and Emotional Skills for Better Lives: Findings from the OECD Survey on Social and Emotional Skills 2023*, OECD Publishing, Paris.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1787/fbe43e32-en>

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