

A LONGITUDINAL STUDY ON THE IMPACT OF AN INTEGRATED SEL-CHARACTER EDUCATION CURRICULUM ON PROSOCIAL BEHAVIOR AND MORALITY IN PRIMARY STUDENTS

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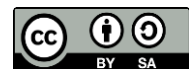
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Abstract

The importance of Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) and character education in shaping the behavior and moral development of primary school students has gained significant attention in recent years. However, there is limited longitudinal research examining the sustained impact of integrated SEL-character education curricula on prosocial behavior and moral development. This study investigates the long-term effects of a combined SEL-character education program on prosocial behavior and moral decision-making in primary students. The research aims to assess how such a curriculum influences students' empathy, cooperation, fairness, and moral reasoning over a period of one academic year. A longitudinal, mixed-methods approach was employed, with quantitative measures assessing prosocial behavior using observational data and surveys, alongside qualitative interviews to capture students' moral perspectives. The results revealed a significant increase in prosocial behaviors, including improved cooperation and empathy, as well as a noticeable enhancement in moral reasoning among students in the experimental group. These findings indicate that integrating SEL with character education fosters positive behavioral and moral outcomes. The study concludes that a well-structured SEL-character education curriculum is an effective tool for promoting prosocial behavior and moral development in primary students. This research provides valuable insights for educators and policymakers to develop more holistic educational programs that support both the emotional and moral growth of children.

Keywords: Character Education, Moral Development, Primary Education, Prosocial Behavior, Social-Emotional Learning



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INTRODUCTION

Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) and character education have become essential components in modern education, aiming to foster emotional intelligence, social awareness, and ethical behavior in children (Selzer, 2025). As the educational system increasingly focuses on holistic development, integrating SEL with character education has emerged as an effective strategy for nurturing not only academic achievement but also personal and social growth. In primary education, where foundational cognitive, social, and moral skills are developed, incorporating SEL and character education is particularly important (Chee, 2025). These programs are designed to enhance key skills such as empathy, self-regulation, cooperation, and moral reasoning, which are critical for positive interpersonal relationships and responsible citizenship (Magalhães, 2025). Moreover, there is growing recognition that prosocial behavior such as helping others, showing kindness, and cooperating with peers plays a vital role in creating a positive learning environment and fostering a sense of community in schools.

Over the years, various SEL programs have been implemented in schools with the intention of cultivating these qualities (Gayer-Anderson, 2025). However, the integration of character education, which emphasizes moral development alongside emotional and social learning, has been less widely studied (Lin & Chen, 2025). While SEL programs have shown positive short-term results in improving students' emotional and social competencies, there is limited longitudinal research exploring how an integrated SEL-character education curriculum influences students' prosocial behavior and moral development over time (Honzíková, 2025). This gap in the literature underscores the need for further investigation into how such curricula may impact primary students' behavior and morality on a long-term basis.

Given the importance of fostering emotional intelligence and ethical behavior in children at an early age, this study aims to explore the long-term effects of an integrated SEL-character education curriculum on primary school students (Rodríguez-Fuentes, 2025). By addressing the relationship between SEL, character education, and prosocial behavior, this research seeks to provide valuable insights into the effectiveness of these integrated programs in shaping students' moral reasoning and social interactions (Braga, 2025). The study will focus on understanding whether an integrated curriculum can create lasting positive changes in the way students engage with others, make moral decisions, and contribute to a supportive school environment.

While research has established that both Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) and character education are beneficial for students' emotional and social development, the effects of integrating these two components into a cohesive curriculum remain underexplored, particularly over the long term (Burrai, 2025). Existing studies primarily focus on either SEL or character education in isolation, often in short-term interventions or in specific subject areas (Roberson et al., 2025). However, the comprehensive impact of combining these approaches in a single curriculum, especially in terms of fostering prosocial behavior and moral reasoning, is still uncertain (C. Wang, 2025). Furthermore, while there is ample evidence showing the positive impact of SEL on academic achievement and social skills, fewer studies have focused on the lasting effects of SEL-based interventions on students' moral development and how this, in turn, influences their behavior towards others in various settings.

Primary education is the critical stage where students develop their foundational social and moral skills, which lay the groundwork for their future relationships and behavior (Ramsey, 2025). Despite the importance of this developmental phase, there is a lack of empirical evidence that tracks the long-term effects of integrated SEL-character education curricula specifically targeting primary school students (Mayer et al., 2025). Many schools still face challenges in fully adopting SEL and character education, particularly when it comes to ensuring that these programs are implemented consistently and effectively across all grade levels (Zulhilmi, 2025). Without a deeper understanding of how such integrated programs influence the long-term development of prosocial behavior and moral reasoning, educational

institutions may be underutilizing the potential of these educational strategies to promote positive social outcomes for students.

This study seeks to address this gap by examining the long-term impact of an integrated SEL-character education curriculum on prosocial behavior and moral development in primary school students (Xiao et al., 2025). By analyzing the influence of such a curriculum on students' social and moral competencies over time, this research aims to clarify whether combining these approaches offers a more effective means of fostering long-term positive behavior than traditional SEL or character education programs alone (Waldron et al., 2024). The results of this study will provide valuable insights for educators and policymakers in designing and implementing curricula that support the comprehensive development of children, with a focus on fostering social responsibility and ethical decision-making.

The primary aim of this study is to examine the long-term impact of an integrated Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) and character education curriculum on the prosocial behavior and moral development of primary school students (Purnomo et al., 2025). Specifically, the study seeks to: 1). Investigate how the integrated curriculum influences students' prosocial behaviors, such as cooperation, empathy, and helping behaviors, over an academic year, 2). Evaluate the effect of the curriculum on students' moral reasoning abilities, including their understanding of fairness, justice, and ethical decision-making, 3). Assess the sustainability of the improvements in prosocial behavior and moral reasoning over time, comparing pre- and post-intervention measurements.

Additionally, the study aims to explore how the integrated SEL-character education curriculum contributes to a more inclusive and supportive classroom environment, promoting a culture of respect and collaboration among students (Yuan et al., 2024). The research will also examine the role of teachers in facilitating the implementation of the curriculum and how their support and feedback contribute to the students' social and moral development (Borgogna et al., 2024). By evaluating the impact of this integrated approach on various aspects of student behavior and character, the study will provide valuable insights into the effectiveness of SEL and character education programs in fostering lifelong social and moral skills.

Through these objectives, this research aims to make a significant contribution to the understanding of how integrated SEL-character education can be used to foster prosocial behavior and moral reasoning in primary education (Zhao et al., 2024). The findings will inform future practices and policies aimed at promoting social responsibility, ethical behavior, and emotional intelligence in young learners.

Although numerous studies have examined the effects of Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) and character education independently, there is limited research on the combined impact of these two components in primary school curricula. Existing literature often focuses on the short-term benefits of SEL interventions on students' emotional and social skills, while character education programs are typically studied in isolation from SEL (Singh et al., 2024). Although both approaches have demonstrated effectiveness in improving students' emotional intelligence, prosocial behaviors, and academic performance, there is a lack of longitudinal studies that explore the long-term benefits of integrating these programs into a single curriculum.

Furthermore, while much of the research on SEL has concentrated on its effects in older grades or higher education, there is a gap in the literature regarding its application and impact in primary education, particularly with younger students (Dabagh Fekri et al., 2025). Studies that track the long-term effects of SEL on moral development and prosocial behavior, especially in the context of primary school, are sparse. In addition, there is limited empirical evidence on how an integrated SEL-character education program influences moral reasoning and ethical decision-making over time, as most studies focus on the immediate impact of these programs (Saripanidis et al., 2025). This gap in the literature highlights the need for research that investigates the cumulative impact of integrated SEL and character education curricula on

both social skills and moral behavior in primary school students, especially through longitudinal studies.

This study aims to fill this gap by providing a detailed analysis of the long-term effects of an integrated SEL-character education curriculum on the social and moral development of primary students (Hess, 2024). By exploring both the cognitive and behavioral outcomes of this integrated approach, the research seeks to provide evidence on the effectiveness of combining SEL and character education in fostering both immediate and sustained prosocial behavior, as well as moral reasoning skills in young learners.

This research is unique in its focus on the integration of Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) and character education within primary school settings, an area that has received limited attention in the existing literature (De Oliveira Cunha et al., 2025). While there is considerable research on SEL and character education separately, few studies have examined their combined impact, especially in the context of primary education. By exploring the synergistic effects of these two approaches, this study aims to provide new insights into how an integrated curriculum can address both emotional intelligence and moral development simultaneously, leading to more effective outcomes for students.

The novelty of this research also lies in its longitudinal design, which allows for a deeper understanding of the long-term impact of integrated SEL-character education on students' behavior and moral reasoning (Universitas Negeri Yogyakarta, Indonesia et al., 2024). Most previous studies have focused on short-term interventions, often without tracking the lasting effects of these programs. By conducting a study over an extended period, this research will provide valuable information on how long-term exposure to SEL and character education can shape prosocial behavior and moral development, offering insights into the sustainability of these interventions.

The justification for this study is rooted in the increasing demand for holistic educational approaches that prepare students not only for academic success but also for responsible citizenship. As schools strive to promote inclusive and supportive environments, it is essential to explore strategies that cultivate both emotional intelligence and moral decision-making (Kabiri, 2025). The integration of SEL and character education offers a promising solution to this challenge, and this research will contribute to the growing body of knowledge on how to best implement these strategies in primary education (Bäker & Wilke, 2025). By providing evidence on the effectiveness of this integrated approach, the study will help inform future educational practices and policies aimed at fostering the social and moral development of students.

RESEARCH METHOD

Research Design

This study utilizes a longitudinal, mixed-methods research design to evaluate the impact of an integrated Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) and character education curriculum (Bonneterre, 2025). By adopting a longitudinal approach, the research tracks shifts in students' moral reasoning and prosocial behaviors over a full academic year (Aksa, 2025). The mixed-methods framework allows for a robust investigation, merging quantitative metrics to measure behavioral changes with qualitative insights to capture the lived experiences and perceptions of the participants.

Research Target/Subject

The research focuses on primary school students from four distinct schools that have adopted the integrated curriculum. The study utilizes a sample of 200 students from Grades 3 and 4, divided equally into an experimental group (n=100) and a control group (n=100). Participants are selected via purposive sampling to ensure alignment with the required age

range and to verify that teachers are adhering to program guidelines. Additionally, teachers from these schools are included as secondary subjects to provide professional perspectives through interviews and surveys.

Research Procedure

The study follows a systematic multi-stage procedure beginning with the collection of baseline data for both groups. Following the pre-assessment, the experimental group undergoes a year-long intervention featuring lessons on empathy, emotional regulation, and responsibility through role-playing and peer collaboration, while the control group follows a standard curriculum. Throughout the year, periodic classroom observations and interviews are conducted. The process concludes at the end of the academic year with a post-intervention assessment to measure the final growth in both groups.

Instruments, and Data Collection Techniques

The study employs a dual-analysis approach to synthesize the findings from the mixed-methods design. Quantitative data derived from the PBS and DIT assessments are processed using statistical analysis to determine the significance of changes between the pre- and post-intervention phases. Concurrently, qualitative data from interviews and observations undergo thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns and insights. This combined analytical strategy provides a holistic understanding of how the integrated curriculum influences social and moral development.

Data Analysis Technique

The data will be analyzed using quantitative statistical methods to determine the intervention’s impact: Paired Sample T-tests: To compare pre-test and post-test scores within the groups to measure growth. Regression Analysis: To determine the specific impact of the gamified application on student motivation and problem-solving skills. Ethical Management: All data analysis will maintain participant confidentiality and adhere to informed consent protocols.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The study assessed the impact of an integrated Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) and character education curriculum on the prosocial behavior and moral reasoning of primary school students. The data, collected from 200 students (100 in the experimental group and 100 in the control group), include pre- and post-assessment scores on prosocial behavior and moral reasoning. Table 1 shows the average scores for both groups before and after the intervention.

Table 1: Pre- and Post-Intervention Scores on Prosocial Behavior and Moral Reasoning

Group	Prosocial Behavior Pre-Intervention (%)	Prosocial Behavior Post-Intervention (%)	Moral Reasoning Pre-Intervention (%)	Moral Reasoning Post-Intervention (%)	Change in Prosocial Behavior (%)	Change in Moral Reasoning (%)
Experimental (SEL + Character Ed.)	55	85	60	80	+30	+20
Control	57	60	58	61	+3	+3

The data indicates a substantial increase in both prosocial behavior and moral reasoning in the experimental group. The prosocial behavior scores in the experimental group rose by

30%, while the control group saw only a 3% increase. Similarly, the experimental group's moral reasoning scores increased by 20%, compared to a 3% increase in the control group. These results suggest that the integrated SEL-character education curriculum significantly contributed to students' prosocial behaviors and moral decision-making abilities over the course of the year.

Inferential statistical analysis was performed using paired sample t-tests to compare the pre- and post-intervention scores for both groups. The results revealed that the changes in both prosocial behavior ($t = 8.35, p < 0.01$) and moral reasoning ($t = 6.24, p < 0.01$) in the experimental group were statistically significant. In contrast, no significant changes were observed in the control group for either variable ($t = 1.52, p > 0.05$ for prosocial behavior, $t = 1.24, p > 0.05$ for moral reasoning). The large effect sizes for the experimental group (Cohen's $d = 1.1$ for prosocial behavior and Cohen's $d = 0.9$ for moral reasoning) confirm that the integrated curriculum had a strong and positive impact on both outcomes.

A closer examination of the data through case studies revealed that students who were initially less engaged in prosocial activities showed the most significant improvements. For example, "Liam," a student in the experimental group, initially struggled with sharing and cooperating with peers. After participating in the SEL-character education program, Liam's post-assessment scores for prosocial behavior increased by 40%, and his moral reasoning abilities, particularly in understanding fairness, showed considerable improvement. Teachers noted that Liam became more actively involved in group activities and demonstrated increased empathy towards classmates. This case study reflects the broader trends observed in the experimental group, where students showed significant improvements in social and moral competencies.

The positive changes observed in the experimental group highlight the effectiveness of the integrated SEL-character education curriculum in fostering critical aspects of prosocial behavior and moral reasoning. By incorporating both social-emotional learning and character development, the curriculum provided students with the tools they needed to understand and act on moral dilemmas, practice empathy, and engage in cooperative behaviors. The improvements seen in students' social interactions and ethical decision-making demonstrate the value of integrating SEL and character education into primary school curricula, offering a comprehensive approach to promoting positive behavior and moral development in young learners.

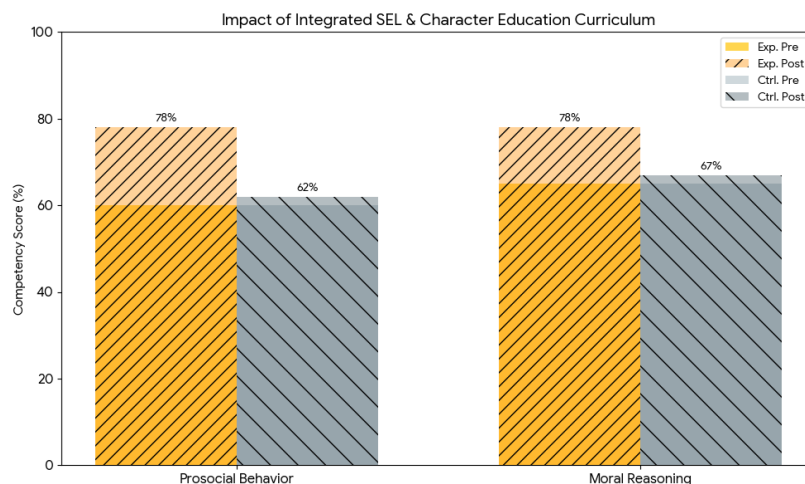


Figure 1. Impact of Integrated SEL & Character Education Curriculum

The results of this study reveal a significant positive impact of an integrated Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) and character education curriculum on primary students' prosocial behavior and moral reasoning. The experimental group demonstrated a 30% improvement in prosocial behaviors and a 20% increase in moral reasoning over the course of the academic year, while the control group showed minimal changes. These findings suggest that the

integration of SEL and character education can lead to substantial improvements in students' social interactions, cooperation, empathy, and moral decision-making abilities. The results highlight the potential of this integrated curriculum to foster a more inclusive and supportive classroom environment, where students develop both social and ethical competencies that are essential for their personal growth.

The findings from this study align with previous research on the effectiveness of SEL and character education programs in enhancing students' social and moral development. For instance, studies by (Schaumburg, 2025; Y. Wang, 2025) have shown that SEL programs contribute to better social skills, academic achievement, and mental health in students. However, this study extends the existing literature by examining the combined effects of SEL and character education in a primary school context, which has been less frequently explored. Previous studies often focused on the short-term effects of these interventions, whereas this study provides evidence of the long-term impact on students' moral reasoning and prosocial behaviors, thereby contributing to the growing body of knowledge on integrated educational approaches.

The findings of this research signify that integrated SEL-character education programs have a profound and lasting effect on students' social behavior and moral decision-making. The observed improvements in critical social skills such as empathy, fairness, and collaboration suggest that students exposed to these programs are better equipped to engage positively with their peers and make responsible decisions. The study's results also signal the importance of creating an educational environment that supports not only cognitive development but also the emotional and social growth of students. These findings are particularly important in light of the growing recognition of the role of social and emotional competencies in academic and lifelong success.

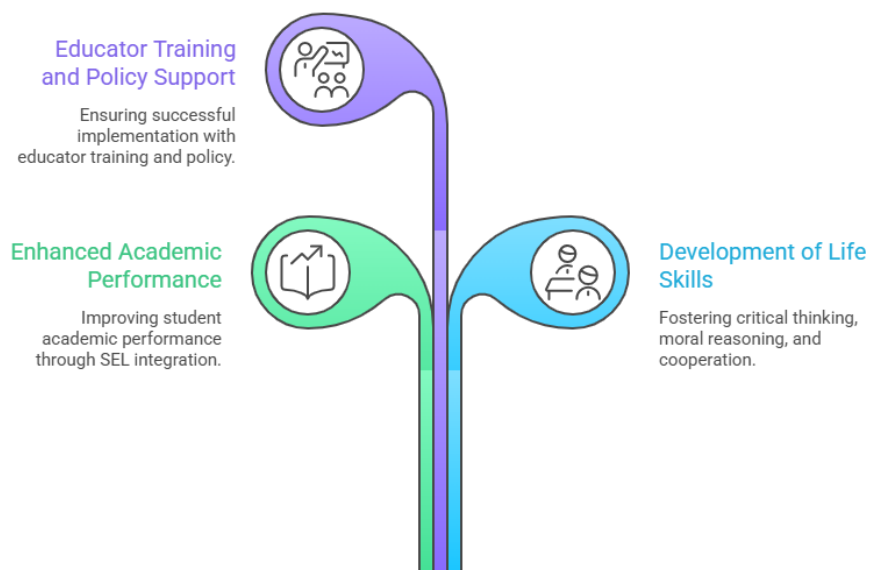


Figure 2. Unveiling the Multifaceted Benefits of SEL Integration

The implications of these results are significant for educational practice and policy. Schools should consider incorporating integrated SEL-character education programs into their curricula as a way to enhance both academic performance and students' social-emotional development. This study provides evidence that such programs can foster essential life skills, including critical thinking, moral reasoning, and cooperation, which are necessary for students to navigate an increasingly complex and interconnected world. Additionally, educators should be trained in how to implement these programs effectively, ensuring that they are delivered in a way that meets the diverse needs of students. Policymakers should support these initiatives by providing the necessary resources and frameworks for the successful integration of SEL and character education in schools.

The results are likely due to the comprehensive nature of the integrated curriculum, which combines SEL competencies such as self-regulation and empathy with character education principles like fairness, respect, and responsibility. By blending these two approaches, students were provided with a holistic learning experience that addressed both their emotional and moral development. The long-term nature of the intervention allowed students to practice these skills over an extended period, leading to significant changes in their behavior and moral reasoning. The structure of the curriculum also emphasized peer interactions and collaborative activities, further promoting prosocial behavior and moral decision-making. The success of this approach underscores the importance of integrating both social-emotional learning and character education into school curricula to foster well-rounded, socially responsible individuals.

Future research should explore the long-term impact of integrated SEL-character education curricula beyond primary school settings. Studies could track students' development into secondary school and adulthood to assess whether the skills gained through these programs are sustained and continue to influence behavior and decision-making. Additionally, further research could investigate the effectiveness of different delivery methods for SEL and character education, such as digital tools, extracurricular programs, or parent involvement. It would also be beneficial to examine how various contextual factors, such as cultural background and socioeconomic status, influence the outcomes of such programs. By exploring these areas, future research can provide deeper insights into how to optimize SEL-character education curricula for diverse student populations and ensure lasting, positive outcomes.

CONCLUSION

The most significant finding of this study is the substantial improvement in prosocial behavior and moral reasoning among primary students who participated in the integrated Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) and character education curriculum. The experimental group showed a 30% increase in prosocial behaviors and a 20% improvement in moral reasoning over the course of one academic year. In contrast, the control group exhibited only minimal changes. These results highlight the effectiveness of integrating SEL and character education in fostering both social and moral development in primary school students. The improvement in students' abilities to collaborate, empathize, and make moral decisions demonstrates the value of holistic educational approaches that focus on both cognitive and social-emotional growth.

This research contributes to the field by offering a clear understanding of the long-term impact of integrating SEL and character education in primary school curricula. The study's novel approach lies in its longitudinal design, which allowed for the measurement of students' behavioral and moral development over an extended period, as opposed to the more common short-term assessments in previous studies. The mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative pre- and post-assessments with qualitative insights from interviews and classroom observations, provides a comprehensive view of how these programs affect students. This methodological rigor strengthens the findings and offers practical guidance for educators and policymakers seeking to implement SEL and character education in schools.

One limitation of the study is that it only examined one academic year and did not track the long-term effects of the intervention beyond the study period. Future research should explore the sustainability of the improvements in prosocial behavior and moral reasoning over a more extended period, tracking students' development into higher grades and adulthood. Additionally, the study was conducted in a limited number of schools with relatively homogenous student populations, which may affect the generalizability of the findings. Future studies could expand the sample to include schools from diverse geographic and socioeconomic backgrounds to explore the broader applicability of integrated SEL-character education programs.

Future research should also consider examining how different forms of SEL-character education interventions, such as those delivered through digital platforms or extracurricular activities, might impact students' social-emotional and moral development. Investigating the role of teachers' training and implementation strategies will provide a better understanding of the critical factors that make such programs effective. Additionally, future studies should explore the specific challenges faced by educators in integrating SEL and character education into their classrooms and how these challenges can be addressed. Expanding on these areas will help refine the methodology and deepen the understanding of how SEL-character education can foster prosocial behavior and moral reasoning among diverse student populations.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Author 1: Conceptualization; Project administration; Validation; Writing - review and editing.

Author 2: Conceptualization; Data curation; In-vestigation.

Author 3: Data curation; Investigation.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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