

Primary: Jurnal Pendidikan Guru Sekolah Dasar

journal homepage: https://primary.ejournal.unri.ac.id/

contents lists available at SINTA and DOAJ

Vol. 14 No. 6 (2025): December http://dx.doi.org/10.33578/jpfkip.v14i6.984-997

Social emotional well-being: What we do and its impact on development? A literature review

Devi Risma 1*, Hendriati Agustiani 2, Aulia Iskandarsyah 2, Ratna Jatnika 2

- ¹ Doctoral Program in Psychology, Faculty of Psychology, Padjadjaran University, Bandung, Indonesia, 45363
- ² Faculty of Psychology Padjadjaran University, Bandung, Indonesia, 45363

Article info

Keywords: Socialemotional well-being (SEWB), early childhood, systematic literature

Abstract

Social-Emotional Well-Being (SEWB) is an integral part of a child's development that affects learning readiness, academic success, and long-term psychological well-being. This article examines the impact of SEWB on child development and the approaches that can be taken to improve it, especially in early childhood. The method used was a systematic literature review of articles published between 2010 and 2023, focusing on early childhood SEWB. The technique used was a systematic literature review of 11 articles published between 2010 and 2023, focusing on early childhood SEWB. The research results imply that strategies to improve effective SEWB include increasing physical activity, interaction with nature, art education, a holistic curriculum, and a positive emotional relationship among children, teachers, and parents. SEWB is closely related to mental health, which affects social abilities, academic achievement, and the formation of positive emotions and children's character. In conclusion, this literature review confirms that various efforts to improve children's social-emotional well-being, such as physical activity, engagement with nature, art education, a holistic curriculum, and positive emotional relationships with parents and teachers, have been shown to have a significant impact on children's development. These strategies not only strengthen social and emotional abilities but also improve learning readiness, academic achievement, and long-term psychological well-being. Thus, Social-Emotional Well-Being in children is an essential foundation for optimal growth and development and for future success.

E-mail address: devi19008@mail.unpad.ac.id (Devi Risma)

DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.33578/jpfkip.v14i6.984-997

Received 8 October 2025; Received in revised form 15 November 2025; Accepted 19 November 2025 Available online 4 December 2025

e-ISSN 2598-5949 | p-ISSN 2303-1514 @ The Authors.

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^{*} Corresponding Author.

1. Introduction

The concept of well-being is increasingly discussed across disciplines and used by researchers, practitioners, and policymakers (Anthony et al., 2019; Ben-Arieh & Frønes, 2011; Brooks, 2013; Mayr & Ulich, 2009). The concept of well-being also encompasses various aspects, including mental, physical, and psychological health (Dodge et al., 2012). Improving a child's well-being is essential, as it is the foundation for an individual's life in adulthood. According to Ben-Arieh (Brooks, 2013), the term 'child wellbeing' is an investment in future individuals (child-becoming). Hence, researchers have sought to formulate emerging theories of well-being. Nonetheless, there is some agreement that positive well-being forms the foundation of an individual's future development and functioning (Sabolova et al., 2020).

Honig notes that childhood is a time when children perceive themselves, others, and the world (Bagdi & Vacca, 2005). Early experiences are a forum for learning and a measure of how well children perform in school and manage daily activities in their environment. To achieve well-being, individuals must grow and develop in all developmental aspects. One crucial aspect of development to support well-being is social-emotional development. Social-emotional development is an essential foundation for children's success and prosperity.

Social-emotional development in early childhood is an area of interest and continues to be explored by researchers from various fields of science. Social-Emotional Well-Being (SEWB) in children is becoming increasingly essential in a society that is constantly evolving. Shonkoff & Philips (Bagdi & Vacca, 2005) indicate that everything that happens during the first months and years of life is critical. Not only does the period of development provide an overview of well-being in adulthood, but it also determines the following stages of development, whether they will be strong or fragile. Numerous theories have been proposed to explain how children think, solve problems, and build relationships with others (Bagdi & Vacca, 2005). Ensuring that children are developmentally positive upon entry into school is critical to supporting academic and social success (Denham et al., 2020; Denham & Brown, 2010; Murray & Harrison, 2011).

Social-Emotional Well-Being is part of an individual's psychological well-being. Emotional well-being refers to an individual's emotional qualities in everyday life, especially those related to happiness, stress, sadness, anger, and other feelings that make a person comfortable or uncomfortable. Positive emotions developed in children can improve emotional well-being, increasing comfort in the future and encouraging children to open up and interact with others. The child's social-emotional development will affect the child's functioning and well-being in the future. Vice versa, stunted social-emotional development will hinder children's functioning in families, schools, and other environments in their lives (Darling-Churchill & Lippman, 2016).

Numerous researchers define social-emotional development as Social-Emotional Well-Being. Social-Emotional Well-Being can be described as a child's understanding of himself, relating to others close to him, and how they behave (Isakson et al., 2009). The beginnings of Social-Emotional Well-Being as a field of study can be attributed to Howard Gardner's research on multiple intelligences. The theory of multiple intelligences states that individuals possess several intelligences, in addition to the intelligences of reading, writing, and mathematics; social and emotional intelligence is also vital for individual development. Based on this theory of multiple intelligences, Daniel Goleman also developed the theory of emotional intelligence. Those research results provide a source that academic, social, and emotional learning collaboration is essential for individual development to educate children to have good Social-Emotional Well-Being (Dacey et al., 2016).

The World Health Organisation (WHO) defines mental health as embodying social, emotional, and spiritual well-being. According to the WHO, Social-Emotional Well-Being is characterised by individuals realising their abilities, coping with daily life pressures, working productively, and contributing to their environment. The concept of well-being is closely related to mental health. Social-Emotional Well-Being is one part of mental health. Research on mental health is seen systematically as a positive development, and mental well-being, which aims to achieve the concept of "positive development." Mental health for children is defined as milestones in expected cognitive, social, and emotional development, including secure attachments, satisfying social relationships, and practical coping skills (Davis et al., 2010). According to (Anthony et al., 2019) Social-Emotional Well-Being is how children feel about themselves, how they relate to others (including caregivers, teachers, and peers), and how they behave. The concept of Social-Emotional Well-Being refers to the idea of social and emotional development in children (Dacey et al., 2016; Kelly et al., 2019).

A national organisation in the United Kingdom, CASEL (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning), defines Social-Emotional Well-Being as the ability to recognise one's emotions, manage emotions, develop care and concern for others, make responsible decisions, build positive relationships, and handle challenging situations effectively (Dacey et al., 2016). Another policy that developed within the education system in the United Kingdom, the National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE), classifies Social-Emotional Well-Being into two models: the positive and negative models. The positive model affirms and promotes Social-Emotional Well-Being. In contrast, the negative model aims to improve or develop responses to issues of social problems, such as depression, anxiety, and antisocial behaviour (Watson et al., 2012). Another definition developed by Mayr & Ulich (2009) is that emotional well-being is the ability to describe social-emotional competencies consisting of making contact/social performance, self-control/thoughtfulness, self-assertiveness, emotional stability/coping with stress, task orientation, and pleasure in exploring.

Based on several studies, it is known that problems that develop in childhood often persist into adolescence and adulthood; thus, early promotion of mental health is crucial (Newman, Moffitt & Caspi in Davis et al., 2010). In accordance with Bagdi & Vacca (2005), which states that an individual's early experiences will be the basis for how well the child is doing in school and managing daily activities in their environment. Emotional well-being has been generally accepted as a positive statement of well-being that enables individuals to function and face daily challenges with the ability to recover from illness, change, and adversity effectively (Denham et al., 2013; Denham & Brown, 2010; Lam & Wong, 2017). In line with Parlakian (Ashdown & Bernard, 2012), social-emotional skills help children to be more confident and competent in developing relationships, building friendships, solving problems, surviving challenging situations, coping with anger and frustration, and managing emotions.

Globally, mental health problems and social-emotional difficulties in children and adolescents are becoming a growing public health issue. According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), 2021, around one in seven adolescents aged 10–19 years have mental health disorders, with anxiety, depression, and behavioural disorders as the leading causes of pain and disability in these age groups. UNICEF also reports that about 13% of children and adolescents worldwide live with mental health conditions, and most have not received adequate services and early intervention (UNICEF, 2021). In Indonesia, recent research has identified that preschoolers are already experiencing challenges in social skills, emotional regulation, and behaviour, indicating vulnerability to social-emotional problems from a very early age (Meriyandah et al., 2025). More broadly, national analysis

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reveals that the prevalence of emotional-mental disorders in Indonesia increased from around 6% in 2013 to 9.8% in 2018 (Basrowi et al., 2024). In the context of early childhood, the latest data show that the 0–6 age group is a critical stage during which social, emotional, and cognitive development occurs rapidly and sustainably (*Badan Pusat Statistik* (BPS), 2024). This data emphasises the essentials of Social-Emotional Well-Being as a vital component for child development that needs serious attention in the education system and public policy.

Based on these theoretical and empirical studies, children's Social-Emotional Well-Being can be defined as favourable conditions that reflect the child's ability to recognise, understand, and manage self-emotions; build healthy social relationships; show empathy; make responsible decisions; and adapt to daily life challenges. Social-Emotional Well-Being includes a balance between the social and emotional aspects. The social element encompasses interaction, cooperation, and a sense of belonging. Meanwhile, emotional factors, such as emotional regulation, a sense of security, and self-confidence, comprehensively support children's cognitive, social, emotional, and psychological development. Thus, Social-Emotional Well-Being serves as the foundation for learning readiness, academic success, and long-term psychological well-being.

Although much research on social-emotional development has been conducted, much of it still focuses on measuring social-emotional competence or on implementing Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) programs in schools. There have been few systematic reviews of concrete strategies that can be implemented by various parties (parents, teachers, and the educational environment) to support children's Social-Emotional Well-Being, as well as their direct impact on numerous aspects of child development. In addition, literature reviews highlighting children's SEWB as a foundational phase in the development of emotional and social well-being are also limited. As such, this paper is compiled to examine children's Social-Emotional Well-Being further, focusing on what can be done to improve it and how it impacts child development, especially in early childhood. This article makes a new contribution through a systematic literature review that integrates two main dimensions: (1) what we do — strategies and approaches that can be taken to improve children's SEWB, and (2) how it impacts — the influence of SEWB on children's social, emotional, cognitive, and academic development. This approach provides a comprehensive perspective—SEWB is not just the result of internal factors, but a dynamic process shaped by interactions among children, families, schools, and social environments. Thus, this article enriches the literature on promoting children's Social-Emotional Well-Being, especially in early childhood.

2. Method

A systematic literature Review was conducted by PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis). The published study was identified using a thorough search strategy across the ScienceDirect, PubMed, and Google Scholar databases. A literature review on children's Social-Emotional Well-Being, using the keywords 'Social-Emotional Well-Being, Children, and Young Children'. Article references are also reviewed, and appropriate abstracts and full articles are reviewed and accessed where relevant. This literature review focused on articles on children's Social-Emotional Well-Being. Reviewers only choose English articles. Publications were restricted from 2010 to 2023, but there were no restrictions for regional articles. The target population for this review was early childhood and development through age 12. There are no restrictions related to gender or race under normal conditions. The researchers excluded articles with adult and general population data, recurring data points due to updates, systematic reviews, narrative reviews, brief

comments, and editorial communications from these reviews. According to the inclusion and exclusion criteria, 11 articles were included for this systematic review.

The information explored was research data (author, year, region, geography, age group of the study, research title), demographic data (including age and gender, age range), data related to the impact and efforts to improve Social-Emotional Well-Being, and results and conclusions of the review article. After extensive searching, 314 publications were found relevant to the keyword. After primary review, eight articles were removed due to duplication. After a thorough review, 61 eligible articles were identified from the initial set. Of the 61 articles that were then selected, which were from journals, 45 irrelevant articles were removed, and only 16 eligible articles were selected for full-text review. In the end, 11 articles were included in the final evaluation (PRISMA flowchart in Figure 1). The selected studies are presented in Table 1.

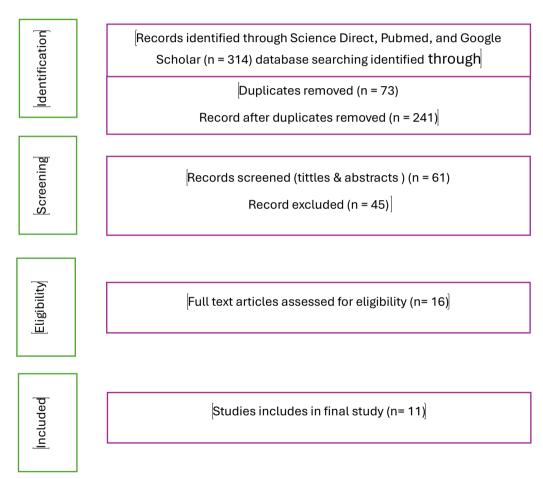


Figure 1. Literature review search method

3. Results

A literature review was conducted on 12 articles related to the theme of this research. The following is a list of articles reviewed in Table 1.

Table 1. The list of articles that include a literature review and findings

No.	Titles and Authors	Aim (s) of Study	Results of the Study Findings
1	Correlation of motor competence and preschool children's Social-Emotional Well-Being (Salaj & Masnjak, 2022)	The research purpose was to determine a correlation between motor skills and social-emotional functioning in typically developing preschool children and to identify differences in social-emotional functioning in children with different levels of motor competence	 The main research result is a weak correlation of children's motor skills to social-emotional functioning. Preschool children with high and low motor competencies do not differ in risk for social and emotional difficulties What we can do: Train motor skills Train motor skills Train motor skills Train motor skills
2	How Elementary In- School Play Opportunities Relate to Academic Achievement and Social-Emotional Well-Being: Systematic Review (Burson & Castelli, 2022)	To understand the relationship between inschool play opportunities and academic achievement (AA) and Social-Emotional Well-Being among elementary students	 Student behaviour and social-emotional outcomes benefited from more recess. Mixed results were found between recess participation and academic outcomes. What we can do: Rest is necessary to improve academic achievement and Social-Emotional Well-Being.
3	Promoting Social and Emotional Well- Being in schools (Barry et al., 2017)	This paper provides a critical perspective on the international evidence on promoting young people's social and emotional learning and well-being in schools. Practice of school systems.	The school is a unique setting for promoting Social and Emotional Well-Being. Educational curricula are incorporating a holistic focus on social-emotional learning. Preliminary case study findings are presented, exploring this approach in school-based intervention development for post-primary school students. What we can do: Designing a curriculum holistically for the development of SEWB.
4	Complexities of assessing social and emotional competence and well-being in young children (Barblett & Maloney, 2010)	To report the findings of a major literature review to examine the assessment of social and emotional competence and well-being in young children.	 Developing strong social and emotional competence is essential for children's everyday well-being, as well as for engagement and learning in school and beyond. Healthy growth in this area is vital for positive mental health and affects growth in all other domains. Social and emotional competence and well-being should be situated within a comprehensive policy on assessment How it impacts the child: Positive mental health affects growth in all areas. What we can do: Comprehensive approach and assessment within SEWB to design teaching program policies that are appropriate to children's needs.

No.	Titles and Authors	Aim (s) of Study	Results of the Study	Findings
			that has a shared knowledge, a shared language, and an extensive and coordinated approach to its implementation. • Assessment should be comprehensive and support teaching programs and processes that relate directly to children's needs.	
5	Promoting the emotional well-being of preschoolers (Mihaela, 2015)	This article underlines the educational aspects that are the most relevant for the emotional development of preschoolers.	 Positive emotional experience with parents and teachers is the most important factor in a preschooler's development of Social and Emotional Well-Being, which includes the context and the social opportunities that arise, adequate answers from the parents and teachers, and the personal way of expressing feelings and dealing with emotional and social problems. Educational relationships that promote the welfare of children, that meet their specific rights and needs, must become the main force to develop an efficient education. Children with good social skills have better school outcomes. 	Establish positive emotional experiences with parents and teachers, i.e. by taking advantage of the social context and social opportunities that arise, adequate answers from parents and teachers, and personal ways to express feelings and everything related to social and emotional issues. Efficient educational development by promoting SEWB, which meets the special needs of children. How it impacts the child: Good academic
6	Arts and health as a practice of liminality: Managing the spaces of transformation for Social and Emotional Well-Being with primary school children	The paper examines arts- based interventions in two primary schools in which small groups of children are taken out of their everyday classrooms to participate in weekly sessions	 Arts-based interventions have transformative potential for well-being. Management of liminal time-space is crucial for success. 	

No.	Titles and Authors	Aim (s) of Study	Results of the Study	Findings
	(Atkinson & Robson, 2012)			
7	The effect of exposure to nature on children's psychological well-being: A systematic review of the literature (Liu & Green, 2023)	To explore the notion that such problems can be mitigated to some extent through exposure to nature within the context of built environmental settings	Development and application of innovative ways of more precisely measuring psychological responses to children's nature exposure experiences would also be worthwhile. This might include developing new technical and digital methods of measuring associations between nature exposure and children's psychological well-being within various environments and geographic and cultural settings to understand potential differences better.	What we can do: Invite children to interact more with nature in various environments and geographical and cultural settings, in order to understand the potential differences in each environment.
8	Examining the link between preschool social-emotional competence and first-grade academic achievement: The role of attention skills (Rhoades et al., 2011)	The present study examines the associations between preschool emotion knowledge, kindergarten attention skills, and firstgrade academic competence in a sample of mostly disadvantaged children.	Results indicate that attention during kindergarten is a significant mediator of this association, even after accounting for the effects of maternal education, family income, and children's age, sex, and receptive vocabulary skills.	What we can do: Improving knowledge about emotions and attention skills in children improves their academic competence.
9	Emotional Well-Being: The role of social achievement goals and self-esteem (Shim et al., 2013)	The study examined how self-esteem and social achievement goals affect individuals' emotions independently and jointly	 Social development goals were related to positive emotions. Social demonstration-avoid goals were related to maladaptive patterns (negative emotions). 	Impact on the child: Social development is related to the development of positive emotions.
10	Effective evidence- based interventions for Emotional Well- Being: lessons for policy and practice (Bywater & Sharples, 2012)	This study aims to examine evidence-based interventions that are effective in improving children's Emotional Well-Being in schools, as well as provide important lessons for educational policies and practices.	 School-based SEL programs can impact educational achievement. Implementing programs with fidelity is necessary for success. 	What we can do: SEL programs can influence the achievement of educational goals.
11	Changing the subject: the educational implications of developing Emotional Well-Being (Ecclestone & Hayes, 2009)	The paper discusses the implications of focusing on Emotional Well-Being in education and challenges assumptions about wellbeing and government-sponsored interventions.	 Emotional Well-Being is seen as integral to successful education. Preoccupation with well-being attacks the human subject and subject knowledge. 	Impact for children: A good SEWB is seen as an integral part of the success of education carried out by the government.

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The results of a review of eleven articles show that improving children's Social-Emotional Well-Being (SEWB) can be achieved through various strategies involving physical activity, meaningful learning experiences, and social support from the surrounding environment. Physical activity and play at school have been shown to help children's social and emotional development (Burson & Castelli, 2022; Salaj & Masnjak, 2022), while art-based learning and interaction with nature provide reflective experiences that strengthen emotional balance and empathy (Atkinson & Robson, 2012; Liu & Green, 2023). While art-based learning and interaction with nature provide reflective experiences that strengthen emotional balance and empathy (Barblett & Maloney, 2010; Barry et al., 2017; Bywater & Sharples, 2012). A positive relationship between children, parents, and teachers is the main foundation for building a healthy SEWB from an early age (Mihaela, 2015). Meanwhile, the support of a positive school climate also strengthens education policies oriented towards children's welfare (Ecclestone & Hayes, 2009).

The impact of a good SEWB is reflected in the improvement of emotional regulation, attention, and social skills that support children's academic success and self-adjustment at school (Rhoades et al., 2011; Shim et al., 2013). SEWB is also closely related to positive character building, confidence, and adaptive problem-solving skills (Denham & Brown, 2010). Overall, the research results confirm that strengthening SEWB from an early age, through collaboration between schools, families, and social environments, is a strategic step to form children who are emotionally, socially, and academically healthy and ready to face the challenges of life in the future.

4. Discussion

This literature review aims to determine the impact of Social-Emotional Well-Being on children's development and ways to improve it. The discussion is organised into two main themes: strategies for promoting SEWB (what we do) and its developmental outcomes (how it impacts children). The findings indicate that children's Social-Emotional Well-Being is an essential aspect that needs to be strengthened through collaboration between families, schools, and social environments as part of a complete education system.

4.1 What we do for social-emotional well-being

Efforts to improve Social-Emotional Well-Being can be carried out through various activity-based approaches, learning environments, and relational support. Increased motor activity has been shown to improve early childhood social-emotional function (Goh et al., 2022), in line with the view that exploratory experiences in physical and social environments help children develop curiosity, risk-taking, courage, and comfort in navigating new challenges (van Dijk-Wesselius et al., 2018). Interaction with nature and participation in art activities in small groups also provide significant social-emotional stimulation (Atkinson & Robson, 2012; Liu & Green, 2023). Physical activity in general, including active play, helps children develop positive emotional behaviours and quality interpersonal relationships (Li et al., 2022; Lubans et al., 2012; Wang, 2022), while school breaks are an essential part of maintaining emotional well-being (Burson & Castelli, 2022).

In addition to activity-based activities, the Social-Emotional Well-Being improvement strategy also includes the development of a holistic curriculum and comprehensive social-emotional assessment to make learning more responsive to children's needs (Barblett & Maloney, 2010; Barry et al., 2017; Mihaela, 2015). Family support also plays a crucial role in the formation of Social-Emotional Well-Being. Parental involvement in learning has been proven to contribute to the

development of children's social behaviour and emotional stability (Nida et al., 2022), as well as to the foundation of children's social personality and character from an early age (Mulyani et al., 2022). Unstable family conditions, such as a broken home, can affect children's psychological well-being and their ability to manage emotions (Awalia et al., 2022). In addition, the high intensity of gadget use is associated with children's emotional and behavioural problems (Nurjanah et al., 2023); thus, parental support is indispensable in managing digital media use. The development of emotional intelligence also needs to be strengthened as it relates to children's communication and critical thinking skills (Anggrarina et al., 2025), while adaptive learning environments such as the Universal Design for Learning (UDL) approach help increase children's social-emotional engagement and comfort (Efastri et al., 2025). In addition, strengthening Social-Emotional Well-Being is also relevant in efforts to prevent mood disorders and depression from an early age through appropriate interventions (Chairilsyah & Kurnia, 2025).

All things considered, the results indicate that physical exercise, a comprehensive educational strategy, steady family support, controlling the digital environment, and creating a supportive school climate can all help to enhance SEWB. Building children's Social-Emotional Well-Being requires cooperation among families, schools, and the broader social environment.

4.2 Impacts social emotional well-being for children's development

Good Social-Emotional Well-Being has a wide impact on children's development across academic, social, and emotional domains, as well as long-term mental health. Children with positive SEWB tend to have better school readiness, stronger early literacy skills, and high adaptability (Ashdown & Bernard, 2012; Darling-Churchill & Lippman, 2016; Mayr & Ulich, 2009). The ability to manage emotions, follow instructions, and build social relationships contributes significantly to the quality of a child's learning experience (Denham, 2006; Denham & Brown, 2010). Self-control as part of SEWB has also been shown to affect long-term quality of life, including health, economic stability, and a reduced risk of harmful behaviours (Moffitt et al., 2011).

Additional findings from various Indonesian studies reinforce this relationship. Strong emotional intelligence is linked to children's communication and critical thinking skills, which are a crucial part of executive function and academic achievement (Anggrarina et al., 2025). The high intensity of gadget use has been shown to interfere with emotional regulation and trigger behavioural problems, suggesting that SEWB plays a role in children's resilience to digital environmental risks (Nurjanah et al., 2023). In addition, increasing attention to cases of depression and mood disorders in children confirms that strengthening Social-Emotional Well-Being from an early age is an important preventive step to support long-term mental health (Chairilsyah & Kurnia, 2025).

Social-Emotional Well-Being not only affects children's development today but also determines their readiness to face future challenges—systematic efforts to support emotional aspects, as well as long-term mental health. School, family, and social environments are essential investments in children's overall development.

5. Conclusion and implications

The results of this literature review confirm that Social-Emotional Well-Being is the main foundation for successful early childhood development. Various efforts to improve Social-Emotional Well-Being include structured physical activity, art-based learning and interaction with nature, adequate rest time, and a holistic curriculum focused on child welfare. Collaboration between teachers and parents is also an important factor in fostering a positive emotional

experience for children, as sensitive support and responses from the immediate environment can help them develop empathy, social skills, and emotional regulation. A positive and inclusive school environment also plays a significant role in fostering a sense of security, social connectedness, and children's motivation to learn. Thus, what educators, parents, and educational institutions do directly foster optimal Social-Emotional Well-Being.

The impact of good Social-Emotional Well-Being is reflected in various aspects of child development, including more mature cognitive, social, and emotional abilities. Children with strong Social-Emotional Well-Being imply greater adaptability, stronger self-control, and more positive interpersonal relationships at school and in their social environment. Social-Emotional Well-Being, which develops from an early age, has also been shown to predict academic success, psychological well-being, and resilience to future life stresses. Thus, strengthening Social-Emotional Well-Being not only affects childhood but also represents a long-term investment in the welfare of individuals and society.

The practical research implications suggest that teachers should integrate social and emotional aspects into daily learning through fun, collaborative, and reflective activities. The curriculum in early childhood education institutions should emphasise the balance between children's cognitive and emotional aspects and be equipped with assessments that address social-emotional development. For parents, it is crucial to create loving, responsive, and open relationships so that children feel accepted and emotionally safe. Meanwhile, policymakers in early childhood education need to strengthen policies that support teacher training and the development of Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) programs as integral parts of the national curriculum. With collaboration between families, schools, and communities, efforts to improve SEWB can contribute to the creation of a generation of children who are intellectually intelligent, emotionally resilient, and have positive social character.

Credit authorship contribution statement

First Author: Conceptualisation, Formal Analysis, Methodology. Last Authors: Methodology, Formal Analysis.

Declaration of competing interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have influenced the work reported in this paper.

Ethical Declaration

All participants provided informed consent before their involvement in the study. They were informed about the study's purpose, procedures, and their right to withdraw at any time without consequence.

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