

The Policy Advice on Implementation of Social and Emotional Education for Chinese Students in Compulsory Education Stage

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Abstract: With the rapid pace of modernized development and more and more risks and challenges in such a Chinese transforming period, it has been more and more necessary for kids and teenagers to master skills of emotional and social awareness and management, to cope with existing or potential social and emotional problems. At present, there is no professional and systematic social and emotional education (SEE) for Chinese students in elementary and junior high schools, which belong to the compulsory education period. With an intention to propose feasible suggestions for Chinese educational authority to implement SEE in compulsory schooling and help students develop future competency, the paper first introduces the core concept social and emotional learning (SEL) which originates from western countries by reviewing literature, including aspects of originality, definition, function, practical conditions, as well as affected actors. Following that, the necessity of conducting SEE in Chinese compulsory education stage is analyzed. On the basis of that, the paper offers two policy options for decision-makers and executors in Chinese Ministry of Education, which are from different starting points and therefore with different advantages and disadvantages. In conclusion, it's critical to conduct SEE for Chinese students in elementary and junior high schools, and the two offered options here can be taken into consideration depending on the practical circumstances of multiple aspects.

Keywords: social and emotional education, social and emotional learning, compulsory schooling, implementation, policy options

1. Introduction

Nowadays more and worse social and behavioral problems are occurring among kids and teenagers in Chinese elementary and junior high schools, greatly impacts students' healthy growth and preparation for involving in future society, which reflects the significance and urgency of implementation of social and emotional education (SEE), and to promote social and emotional learning (SEL) for students. Originated from the concept of emotional competence proposed by Goleman in 1995, defying the ability to recognize self-emotions, adjust self-emotions and behaviour, then learn to be aware and understand others' emotions, so as to develop constructive interpersonal relationships [1]. The widely-recognized definition of SEL is proposed by Collaborative Association

of Social Emotional Learning (CASEL). According to CASEL, it refers to a learning process during which students attain basic skills for emotional awareness and management, social awareness and relationship skills, meanwhile develop positive attitudes using knowledge and skills.

Theories on social and emotional learning have been proposed and developed by Western scholars, present academic research on proper approaches and the positive effects on implementing SEL are mainly done outside China, where educational and psychological experts found that receiving SEL can promote health physically and mentally, improving academic performance, upgrading socialization degree and obtaining sense of achievement. What's more, mainly three categories concerning methods of executing SEL project are concluded by scholars, to set up an independent curriculum, to integrate SEE into the current curriculum, as well as to create a safe, well-managed and supportive learning environment [2].

Relevant studies in Chinese context are generally involved with 3 areas, the experimental outcomes of integrating SEE in common curricula in certain regions, the attempt and effect of adopting SEE as an approach to help students deal with social and behavioral challenges or significant events such as school bully, transformed learning style during Covid-19, and the introduction of current foreign curriculum and complementary measures on SEE. However, few essays have focused on comprehensive and feasible advice on executing SEE in Chinese education system until now, this paper aims to offer well-founded and pragmatic suggestions for policy-makers in Chinese Ministry of Education, and analyze pros and cons of the options, based on the comparatively advanced implementation approaches of America, Australia and Northern Europe, as well as the practical needs of today's Chinese elementary and junior high school students. The paper serves as a role of reminding Chinese education authority and scholars in the field of education of the insufficiency of all-rounded education for compulsory schooling students, helping enhance the students' psychological capital and interpersonal relationships and the adaption to modern society, eventually to improve the quality of cultivated people of the new generation.

2. General Description of SEL

2.1. Dimensions and Basic Features

Based on the definition introduced above and further study in practical contexts, scholars in western countries concluded five dimensions within the process SEL, as shown in figure 1, they are self-awareness, social awareness, self-management, relationship skills and being responsible for one's

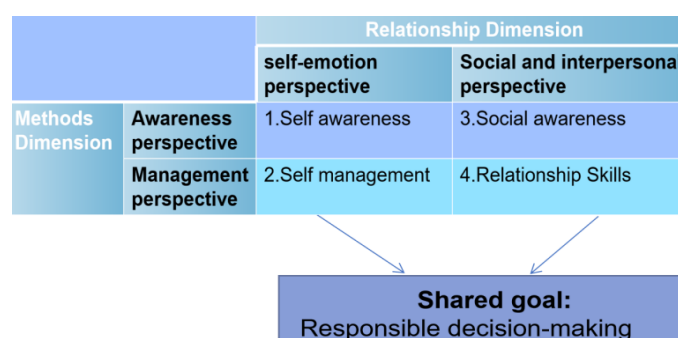


Figure 1: The five dimensions in definition of SEL

own decision [3].

Developed from the definition and five dimensions of SEL, as well as its identity as a section of education, Chinese scholars have extracted four features of SEL, they are conformity, comprehensiveness, systematicness and long-term function. Conformity is the combination of

awareness and adjustment on both self and social aspects. Comprehensiveness refers to psychological perception and understanding, as well as pragmatic skills in self-management and social interaction. Systematicness covers multiple dimensions of a typical education project. Long-term function reflects that by SEL whom from pupils to high school students can benefit.

2.2. Functions

According to the current researches and relevant theories, SEL is able to play a positive role in promoting students' health physically and mentally, improving academic performance, as well as upgrading socialization level and helping obtain a sense of achievement. To be more generalize, SEL not only helps lay a foundation for cultivating other emotions with social attribute, but also is the necessary process to shape students' sound personality [3].

2.3. Conditions and Affected Actors for SEL Implementation

On the basis of the experimental execution of SEE and consistent evaluation of that, scholars in education and psychology, with teachers in practical field summarized the effective conditions of students' SEL. In the outer aspect, policy support, executors' relevant notion consistent with quality-oriented and holistic education, the input and quality of teachers' training and creating a suitable environment should be considered during the implementation process. In the inner aspect, explicit and specific programs of the curricula, teachers' capability, organizing various activities, cooperating with the support of family and community are what need to be in respect of.

The effectiveness of SEL project can be affected by various actors in a pragmatic context. According to the analysis of curricular systems and practical progress of western countries by Chinese scholars such as Xiaofei Xu and Liuye Yang, key actors which substantially impact SEE's outcome are the educational notions of executors, supportive policies, the teachers' values, capability and skill level, the supply of professional training, the sufficiency level of resources and opportunities for practice, as well as collaboration of school, students' family and community[4].

3. Necessity of Implementing SEL in Chinese Compulsory Education Stage

3.1. The Significance of SEL for Elementary and Junior High School Students

Although kids and teenagers are born with various inherent characteristics, some of which are conducive to dealing with academic, emotional and social challenges smoothly, such as being courageous, patient, and with high self-esteem, there are still other skills and insights needed to be learned, nobody is born prominent on every aspect of social and emotional capability, only through scientific SEE can a student be competent socially and emotionally.

It has been found by many scholars that SEL can effectively enhance students' ability concerning emotional recognition and management, social skills, and reduce the occurrence rate of psychological and behavioral problems [5], some studies have proved that SEL can effectively benefit students' academic performance [6-7]. Obviously, fostering emotional resilience, positive dispositions and social skills during the process of coping with social and emotional challenges will lay a foundation for strong social and emotional ability [8]. Furthermore, excellent social and emotional ability will enable students to grow into well-rounded persons, adapt to social life well and make achievements at an individual level, which can be expanded into being equipped with qualities of taking the responsibility of the country's future prosperity at a national level.

Undoubtedly, pupils and teenagers are the future generation who're going to undertake the mission of society's progress, offering social and emotional courses all over the country and conducting training for teachers are expected to gain sufficient attention.

3.2. The Necessity of SEL Arisen from Modern Life and Mental & Physical Traits of Kids and Teenagers

With the modernization process proceeding in China, various environmental actors that can bring about emotional and interpersonal relationship challenges for kids and teenagers arise, including fast-paced living and fierce competition, isolated neighborhood and frequent moving, mass media as well as tempt related to entertainment places or experience, intensifying risks of students to be faced with social and emotional problems, such as over stressed, solitude and depression, addiction to alcohol, cigarette or Internet, peer conflict and fight, self-abasement, unhealthy self-image expectation and even suicide, which may prevent kids and teenagers from developing a sound personality and adapting to surrounding environment fluently. Viewing that from a preventive perspective, being unable to deal with social and emotional challenges correctly will negatively impact teenagers' social integration and even leads to illegal behavior, at a more general level, the prevalence of such phenomenon may result in unsafety and instability of society, as well as the comprehensive quality of the new generation.

Meanwhile, the mental and physical traits of students in compulsory education stage reveal that they have not mature enough to cope with most of the social and emotional problems independently, in need of particular training on social emotional ability.

According to the study of Chinese researcher Jia Liu, usually three special psychological features occur when students step into the teen period. First, self-awareness has enhanced, whose evaluation on others begins to switch to a deeper level, that is inner world and personal quality, getting to know characters and pay attention to interpersonal connection, while in this stage, subjectivity and bias of their opinion are also evident. Second, emotions and sentiments of teenagers are strong and unstable, with more detailed and richer social emotions, but reflects a contradiction as well, that is the desire to be understood by covering self-sentiment at the same time. Third, their sociality develops quickly. Teenagers in this period gradually adapt to their social roles and environment, starting to be aware of the social expectations for them and trying to improve themselves. On the other hand, there's the negative side of the development of their sociality, meaning that psychological rebellion exists within some teenagers, and is likely to attack others. Apart from these, the physical condition in the teen period hasn't been strong or mature enough to stand aggressive conflict or some risky and dangerous attempt.

What the physical and psychological features of teenagers commonly reflect is, students in compulsory education stage need to be offered a guiding curriculum to recognize and understand inner feelings, discover and cultivate positive dispositions, as well as objectively evaluate their own abilities and foster healthy self-awareness. Relevant training projects should also play a role in guiding students to rationally control emotions and improve emotional literacy, in order to respond to others' needs and thoughts properly and reduce interpersonal obstacles and problems effectively. What's more, it relieves student's stress.

3.3. Lack of SEE Reflected by Insufficient Public Cognition and the Lag of Educational Practice

As far as the execution of SEL in Chinese fundamental education system, most elementary and middle schools which have provided lessons on SEL just teach them as part of the psychological tutorship, or as the pragmatic method to cope with current social threats like school bullying, rather than an independent subject. At the same time, the difference in the implementation process of SEL between regions as well as rural and urban areas is obvious these years in China. To be specific, some metropolitan cities like Beijing and Shanghai have offered the SEL lesson for students for several years, provided by teachers who have received professional training, while schools in small towns

and countryside commonly haven't set up courses aiming at socialization and properly dealing with emotional situations.

4. Policy Suggestions on Implementing SEE in Chinese Compulsory Education Stage

On the basis of the significance of SEL for kids and teenagers, the necessity of SEE brought by modern life challenges and the psychological features of students in the stage, as well as the insufficiency of SEE execution at present, the author proposes two options for policy-makers and executors in Chinese Ministry of Education, in accordance with the survey attainment of present progress of SEE implementation and feasible approaches from America and Australia.

4.1. Option I: To Highlight the Status of SEL in the Existing Psychological Education System and Infiltrate It into Regular Curricula

4.1.1. Detailed Items of Option I with Evidence

a. Encourage relevant experts and scholars to conduct experimental research on SEE, accumulate practical experience and develop indigenous theories. Serving as a role of providing scientific evidence for reference, adequate study and conclusion is a solid foundation for taking measures to reform the current psychological education system and effectively integrate SEE into the regular curriculum. It is suggested that Chinese educational department cooperates with universities and study institutions to provide SEE education in some schools of certain regions, making records, conducting evaluations and conclude feasible practical methods afterwards, aiming at being well prepared for following implementation.

b. Rearrange current psychological health education curricular system, with the objection of enabling kids and teenagers to handle social and emotional challenges in life. It is suggestive for policymakers in Chinese educational department to adjust educational notions on talent cultivation which suit to fostering a well-rounded new generation who can adapt to society well, and revise the specific goals, content and format of psychological health education corresponding with attaching greater importance to SEE and explicitly offer students guidance on social and emotional ability as a whole. Meanwhile, the reform of psychological education is supposed to be in line with the physical and mental traits of students in primary and junior high schools.

In addition, according to the paper's survey on current arrangement of psychological education in the compulsory education stage, there are different educational goals set for students of different ages, this principle should be insisted in the design of social and emotional curriculum, with an intention to cohere with the particular needs of students in diverse growth stages. Similar to which, the practical curriculum provision in different regions is expected to be elastically set in correspondence with the region's economic, social and cultural conditions.

4.1.2. The Potential Advantages and Disadvantages

Three advantages can be concluded from this option. First, option I saves time, personnel and money since it supplies SEE curriculum directly based on improving current psychological health education system and training teachers on duty.

Second, the curriculum keeps a balance between being structural and flexible, the course is given on the basis of scientific research and comparatively mature experience from western countries where standard handbooks and scripts are provided in SEL course, and transforming from a systematic national plan.

Third, it's friendlier for students taught under current educational mode to adapt to, what they're required is just pay a certain amount of attention to learning skills on dealing with surrounding challenges, without spending lots of time and switching present school lifestyle drastically.

Meanwhile, two disadvantages may exist if option I is implemented. First, the relative negligence of training professional social and emotional teachers is not conducive to the further development of SEE projects. Second, the effectiveness of only integrating SEE in regular curricula is hard to guarantee, given by experts in common disciplines and with limited exercising scenes, which may lead to the relevant reform and input a waste.

4.2. Option II: Develop a SEE System of High Quality, Pluralistic Subjects Suitable for the Whole Compulsory Period

4.2.1. Detailed Items of Option II with Evidence

a. Develop and strengthen SEE supporting system: promote the collaboration of teachers, parents and community. The supportive outer system for SEE should be built based on at least the following three aspects. At teachers' level, the policy is supposed to quicken the cultivation and employment of professional teachers on SEE, offer professional and practical training for current teachers of regular courses and provide teachers and education administrators with psychological health knowledge to the whole school district extent. At parents' level, it is suggested that the educational authorities cooperate with schools to conduct relevant education for parents or students' other carers on a regular basis, which can be carried out by different means, including lectures, video courses, calling communication, establishing online learning platform for parents and home-visiting when necessary. At community level, the cooperative action of communities in the U.S.A has gained effective results since it's convenience to put SEE into practice taking schooling districts as units and powers and responsibilities of relevant subjects are clear and specific, inspiring the paper that policies should be enacted to guide communities in the district to focus the service duty on the needs of families with kids and teenagers, supplying relevant advantageous regulations, facilities and activities to support students' SEL[9]. If the condition can be met, the relevant scientific institution ought to participate in SEE's implementation, playing a role in making feasible executive schemes for specific schools or student groups faced with severe social and emotional problems, providing consultation in the process, assessing the effect and offering advice on the amendment will definitely be supportive.

b. Provide specialized courses based on high-incidence social and emotional problems and practical national conditions. It has been widely witnessed that the social events involving students in primary and junior high schools have happened from time to time in recent years, which brought about wide effects, such as school violence, delinquency with lower-aged main crimes, threatened kids and teenagers' growth mentally and physically, the roots of such events are closely related to the young generation's social and emotional competence on dealing with extreme pressure and sharp changes. Therefore, specialized courses based on surveys and priority of relevant social events at high incidence are critically needed for enhancing kids and teenagers' ability to handle properly and independently. Policy should be enacted to promote the cooperation of professional researching institutions and local schools, providing extracted training with particular goals for the students on pragmatic skills of dealing with current challenges.

c. Improve the SEE-involved multi-dimensional quality-oriented education system, taking cultivating those who are well-adapted to society as the overall goal. With regard to current quality-oriented education provision, and the practical social and cultural situation in different Chinese regions, it's necessary that three dimensions are involved in the quality-oriented education system.

The first dimension is psychological health education, within which SEE should be at a significant status, since SEE is the most constructive part for the reform of current psychological education system, in response to the social reality of modernization.

The second dimension is value education, serving as an indispensable section of quality-oriented education, it is the direction for teenagers who are in the process of vibrating mental changes, being easy to be misled and making irrational decisions.

The third dimension is providing specialized SEE for kids and teenagers in non-mainstream cultural regions such as distant rural and minority nationality areas and who are in special schools. Regarding the distant differences in economic, social and cultural conditions between regions in Chinese mainstream culture (usually cities and towns) and minority culture, it's inappropriate to directly enforce the curriculum and relevant administrative mode in non-mainstream regions and special schools, in order to evident condition among students in such areas, the SEE scheme is expected to adjust to the local practice.

d. Establish the SEE teaching and research institution for compulsory education stage: strengthen the management of textbooks and improve the statistical means. Measures are expected to be taken to increase the amount of research personnel in academic institutions of psychology and education, organizing relevant specialists, scholars, instructors, and schooling managers to conduct experimental studies on SEE, students' SEL and correlative teachers' training in the whole process, professional statistic tools for supervision and evaluation are also supposed to be invented. In cooperation with the results of the study, the compilation, censorship and selection of all the SEE's materials should meet the standard requirement of the guidelines from Chinese Ministry of Education, and the feedback channels of textbooks and teaching's outcome are expected to be smooth, being well-prepared to improve in the primary implementation stage.

4.2.2. The Potential Advantages and Disadvantages

In terms of the advantages of option II, three points can be drawn up from which. Firstly, the comprehensive system is suggested here to establish a focus on improving social and emotional ability from the roots of education, which is the cultivation of students majoring in Normal universities, laying a solid foundation for the professional quality of teachers majoring in SEE and psychology, which is beneficial to improve the execution outcome radically and be of more sustainability. Secondly, the supportive system which includes various subjects of students' outer environment and the whole process of formal education can lead to a more systematic provision of SEE, strengthening the scientific extent and overall outcome of students' SEL manifestly. Additionally, considering the popularity of current psychological health education has already been high, the majority of kids' and teenagers' social and emotional problems can be coped with based on the present psychological provision in schools, meaning no worries about the solution to students' immediate relevant challenges may be delayed because of a lack in conditions. Meanwhile, there are several disadvantages to implementing Option II. Obviously, it will take much effort from educational administrative executors, teachers, researchers as well as relevant universities, and it takes a long time before an effective outcome is witnessed. Closely related to that, the implementation of this option acquires more funding, covering the teaching stage. What's more, the decision-making concerning the conduction of option II is more complex since it involves diverse subjects. Higher administrative costs are needed and more interests may be referred to during the process of setting up a system and reaching a common agreement.

4.3. Comprehensive Comparison of the Options

Regarding to the content of the options above, the author chose four criteria to evaluate the policy suggestions comprehensively, taking the common dimensions of policy metrics from the public-policy research department of EU as references [10].

Table 1: Comprehensive comparison results on the Options for policy-makers.

	Sustainable Positive Impact On Social&Emotional Ability	Political Feasibility	Affordability	Efficiency
Option I	Medium	High	High	Low
Option II	High	Low	Medium	Medium

Selecting the sustainable positive impact on social and emotional ability, political feasibility, affordability and efficiency as evaluation metrics and mark high of each option's level based on the four criteria when it shows better than average performance of current congeneric policies and the other option here, mark medium when it shows similar level to congeneric policies and the other option, and low when it is estimated perform worse than the policies and the option, depending on which, the extent to which the option the decision-makers and executors of Chinese educational authority will give priority to or adopt can be concluded.

According to table 1, in terms of the number of High, Medium and Low reflected by option I and option II under the evaluation criteria, it's suggestive that policy-makers of Chinese Compulsory system take Option I into first consideration, since it occupies two Highs, a Medium and a Low under the criteria, while option II is assessed to occupy one High, two Mediums and a Low.

To summarize, compared with the four-dimensional results of option II, option I demonstrates a certain advantage.

5. Conclusion

The advanced development of SEE implementation in western countries reflects the comparative insufficiency of SEE in China, especially which shares many similarities with China in aspects of population, geography, educational administration and local cultural diversity. The practical situations of modernizing social life and relevant challenges for the new generation, as well as the particular mental and physical features of students in elementary and junior high schools commonly prove the necessity of implementation of SEE, regardless of the extensive benefits it can bring out for students mentioned above. Two options here are offered to decision-makers in Chinese Ministry of Education to improve the social and emotional ability of today's kids and teenagers to adapt to school life and future society more fluently, by means of optimizing Chinese current compulsory education system. With respective pros and cons, it's to decide which option is better for various subjects.

Frankly considering, there do exist some space for improvement of the paper. Some items in each option are not specific enough to be directly conducted, especially for schools, out of the limitation of the passage length, evidence of some items of the options is not provided here. In addition, due to insufficient of practical experiments on SEE in many Chinese regions, the pragmatic effect of the suggestions above can be hard to guarantee at present. These all lead to further survey, inference and discussion starting from the paper.

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