

The impact of socio-emotional learning (SEL) on academic evaluation in higher education

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Abstract

Keywords:

socio-emotional learning (SEL); higher education; self-awareness; self-motivation; evaluation.

The implementation of social and emotional learning (SEL) strategies has been shown to foster cognitive development, boost student motivation and focus, improve teacher-student relationships, and enhance student confidence and achievement. To further promote engagement and social awareness in higher education, greater emphasis should be placed on addressing students' emotional needs in the classroom. By emphasizing respect for others, appreciation for diverse perspectives, and willingness to help those in need, SEL can enhance student motivation, academic achievement, and overall success in higher education. For many students, the transition to higher education can cause anxiety, stress, and a sense of isolation. Without the necessary social and emotional skills to navigate this new environment, students may struggle academically, socially, and emotionally. This is where social and emotional learning (SEL) can play a crucial role in helping students successfully transition to higher education. By developing SEL skills, individuals are better equipped to navigate life's challenges and opportunities, both in their personal and professional lives. The current study explores how students in higher education perceived their experiences related to assessment, performance, anxieties, insecurities, and self-management. The study aimed to gain a better understanding of how students perceive the higher education environment and how it impacts their motivation to learn and succeed.

Zusammenfassung

Schlüsselworte:

sozial-emotionales Lernen (SEL); höhere Bildung; Selbstbewusstsein; Selbstmotivation; Auswertung.

Es hat sich gezeigt, dass die Umsetzung von Strategien für soziales und emotionales Lernen (SEL) die kognitive Entwicklung fördert, die Motivation und Konzentration der Schüler erhöht, die Lehrer-Schüler-Beziehungen verbessert und das Selbstvertrauen und die Leistung der Schüler erhöht. Um das soziale Engagement und Bewusstsein in der Hochschulbildung weiter zu fördern, sollte der Berücksichtigung der emotionalen Bedürfnisse der Studierenden im Unterricht mehr Aufmerksamkeit geschenkt werden. Durch das fördern des Respekts für andere, die Wertschätzung unterschiedlicher Perspektiven und die Bereitschaft, Bedürftigen zu dienen, kann SEL die Motivation der Studenten, die akademischen Leistungen und den Gesamterfolg in der Hochschulbildung verbessern. Für viele Studenten kann der Übergang in die Hochschulbildung Angst, Stress und ein Gefühl der Isolation verursachen. Ohne die sozialen und emotionalen Fähigkeiten, die erforderlich sind, um sich in dieser neuen Umgebung zurechtzufinden, können die Schüler akademisch, sozial und emotional kämpfen. Hier kann soziales und emotionales Lernen (SEL) eine entscheidende Rolle spielen, um den Studierenden einen erfolgreichen Übergang in die Hochschulbildung zu ermöglichen. Durch die Entwicklung von SEL-Fähigkeiten sind Einzelpersonen besser darauf vorbereitet, sich den Herausforderungen und Chancen des Lebens zu stellen, sowohl in ihrem persönlichen als auch in ihrem beruflichen Leben. Die aktuelle Studie untersucht, wie Studierende ihre Erfahrungen mit Beurteilung, Leistung, Ängsten, Unsicherheiten und Selbstmanagement wahrnehmen. **Ziel der Studie war es, **ein besseres Verständnis dafür zu erlangen, wie Studierende das Hochschulumfeld wahrnehmen und wie es ihre Lern- und Erfolgsmotivation beeinflusst.

1. Introduction

The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) first introduced the concept of social and emotional learning (SEL) more than 20 years ago. SEL involves the acquisition and application of knowledge and skills that enable children, adolescents, and adults to understand and manage their emotions, set goals, demonstrate empathy towards others, cultivate positive relationships, and make responsible decisions.

Recently, the definition of SEL has been expanded to include a focus on equity, emphasizing that the development of SEL competencies can help bridge differences related to race, class, gender identity, sexual orientation, learning needs, and age. Social-emotional learning (SEL) refers to the development of knowledge, attitudes, and skills that enable individuals to identify and manage their own emotions, increase their empathy towards others, and set and achieve

personal goals. The framework developed by the Collaboration for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) can be used as a guiding model and can be applied to adult education as well, even though it was originally created for use in K-12 education (Gallagher and Stocker, 2018).

2. SEL in higher education

According to the CASEL model, there are five key components of SEL: Self-Awareness, Self-Management, Responsible Decision Making, Social Awareness, and Relationship Skills. Self-Awareness involves understanding one's own emotions, thoughts, and values, as well as recognizing how they influence behavior. Self-Management involves regulating one's own emotions, thoughts, and behaviors, especially in challenging situations, and setting and working towards personal and academic goals. Responsible Decision Making involves making ethical and safe choices based on an evaluation of the consequences of one's actions and consideration for the well-being of oneself and others.

Social Awareness involves taking the perspectives of others and demonstrating empathy towards people from diverse backgrounds and cultures, while also understanding social and ethical norms. Relationship Skills involve building and maintaining healthy and positive relationships with a variety of individuals and groups, including clear communication, active listening, collaboration, conflict resolution, and seeking and offering help when needed. By developing these five competencies, individuals can enhance their own well-being and success, as well as contribute to the betterment of their communities. Social and emotional learning (SEL) has been increasingly recognized as a critical component of education, as it helps students develop the skills and attitudes necessary for success in school and in life. Research (Shriver and Buffett, 2015) has shown that when students receive explicit instruction in SEL, they are more likely to develop positive attitudes towards themselves and others, have better relationships with peers and adults, and perform better academically.

In the education system, there has been a push to integrate SEL into curricula at all levels, from pre-school to higher education. Teachers and school administrators have recognized the importance of addressing the whole student, including their emotional and social development, in addition to their academic progress (Keefer et al., 2018). This has led to the creation of programs and initiatives that focus

on developing SEL skills in students, such as mindfulness practices, conflict resolution training, and leadership development programs.

The growing emphasis on social and emotional learning reflects a broader recognition of the importance of addressing the whole person, rather than just their academic or professional abilities. Transitioning from high school to higher education can be a challenging and stressful experience for many students. It is often the first-time students are away from home and their support system, and they are expected to adapt to a more independent and demanding academic environment. The academic and social demands of higher education can be overwhelming, particularly for students who are not prepared for the increased workload, academic rigor, and social expectations. This diversity can be a source of enrichment, but it can also create challenges in terms of communication, understanding, and interaction (Destin et al., 2021). Students entering higher education often find themselves in a diverse environment, meeting other students from different cultural and socio-economic backgrounds.

3. Evaluation in higher education

The field of educational evaluation has expanded significantly in the last two decades, as the importance of evidence-based decision making in education has become increasingly recognized.

Evaluation serves various purposes, including measuring student progress and learning outcomes, evaluating the effectiveness of educational programs and policies, and ensuring accountability for educational outcomes. For instance, evaluations may be conducted to assess the impact of a new teaching strategy, determine the effectiveness of a curriculum, or measure the progress of students in meeting academic standards.

Evaluations are also being conducted by school administrators and teachers to improve school performance and foster creative spaces for learning. These evaluations may involve gathering feedback from students or stakeholders, observing classroom practices, or analyzing student work (Love, 2010). By using evaluation data to identify strengths and weaknesses, educators can make informed decisions about how to improve instruction, curriculum, and other aspects of the educational system.

Taking a holistic approach to education that goes beyond content delivery and includes student wellness

and social-emotional development has been seen as an important focus for teacher. The significance of social and emotional learning in higher education is supported by research, which demonstrates that students' social and emotional adjustment is positively associated with academic outcomes such as performance and retention (Valiente et al., 2012; Li et al., 2018).

4. Performance for students

The prediction of academic success is an important aspect of higher education that can benefit both students and universities. By predicting which students are at risk of struggling academically, universities can allocate resources and support services to help those students succeed (Beattie et al., 2018). This not only benefits the students themselves but also contributes to the overall success and reputation of the university.

To predict academic success, universities collect data on their students both before and during their enrollment. The data collected before enrollment is known as enrollment data and includes information such as high school grades, standardized test scores, and personal information such as demographic data. This data is used to determine whether a student meets the criteria for admission to the university and can also be used to predict their likelihood of success. Once students are enrolled, universities continue to collect data on their academic performance, such as grades, course completion rates, and retention rates (MacMillan and Anderson, 2019). This data can be analyzed using statistical techniques to identify patterns and trends that may indicate which students are at risk of struggling academically.

To predict academic success, universities can use statistical methods like regression analysis, decision trees, and neural networks. These methods look at information about students, like their grades, test scores, and background, and use it to create a model that can predict how likely they are to succeed in their studies. This can help universities provide support and resources to students who may need extra help to achieve academic success. Once at-risk students have been identified, universities can allocate resources and support services to help them succeed. This may include tutoring, academic advising, counseling, or other interventions that can help students overcome academic challenges and improve their chances of success. Predicting academic success is an important

aspect of higher education that can benefit both students and universities.

5. Anxiety and student life

University students come from diverse backgrounds and possess varying levels of abilities, aspirations, and expectations. These factors can impact how easily they adjust to college life after leaving high school. One-third of the decrease in faculty graduation rates in recent years can be attributed to an increase in the number of students who have lower levels of academic preparation (Bound and Turner, 2011). The changing demographics of university students may be contributing to a decline in graduation rates. As more students from underrepresented groups or with weaker academic backgrounds pursue higher education, they may face more significant challenges in adjusting to the academic demands and expectations of faculty. This, in turn, can impact their ability to succeed and complete their degree programs. By acknowledging the diversity of backgrounds and experiences that faculty students bring to campus, universities can better support the academic success of all students, regardless of their initial preparation or background (Office of Planning, Evaluation and Policy Development, 2016). Students in university education settings encounter a variety of everyday challenges that can cause stress. These stressors include academic demands, such as assignments, exams, and coursework (Unesco, 2012). It is common for students to report experiencing academic-related stress, including pressure to perform well and fear of receiving poor grades. This stress can be particularly challenging for students who feel like their academic success is linked to their future prospects, such as finding a good job or getting accepted into a preferred university.

Given the prevalence of academic-related stress among students, it is important for educators and support staff to recognize the impact of these stressors on student well-being and academic performance (Barbayannis et al., 2022). By providing resources and support to help students manage and cope with academic-related stress, educators can help students succeed and thrive in their educational pursuits. This may include offering study skills workshops, mental health counseling, and other interventions to support student success and alleviate stress.

6. Research methodology and results

The purpose of this study was to explore how students in higher education perceive their experiences related to evaluation, performance, self-awareness, anxieties, insecurities, and self-management. The study aimed to gain a better understanding of how students perceive the higher education environment and how it impacts their motivation to learn and succeed. Self-reported data was used in this investigation.

The study recruited a total of 163 participants who were students at the Gheorghe Dima National Music Academy. These students were enrolled in both bachelor's and master's level programs and were in their first or second year of study. To collect data, the researchers designed a questionnaire consisting of 26 items that required the participants to make a choice on a five level Likert scale.

The questionnaire was specifically designed to measure the students' perceptions of assessment, performance, anxiety, and self-management. Additionally, demographic data such as age, level of study, and gender were also collected to provide a better understanding of the study population (see tables 1 and 2).

The study used the data obtained from the questionnaire to understand the students' perceptions. Figure 1 shows that there are variations in the means of the responses. Questions 8, 9, and 29 received higher mean scores, indicating that students perceive these aspects positively. In contrast, questions 10 and 27 received lower mean scores, suggesting that

students prefer written assessments over online assessments and prefer working in groups rather than individually. These findings provide insight into the students' preferences and attitudes towards different modes of assessment and learning.

Table 1. Age and study level Crosstabulation

	Age	Study level		Total
		Bachelor	Masters	
	18 - 24 years old	122	17	139
	25 - 34 years old	5	6	11
	35 - 44 years old	2	6	8
	45 - 54 years old	1	2	3
	above 55 years old	2	0	2
	Total	132	31	163

Table 2. Year of study and Gender Crosstabulation

	Year of study	Gender		Total
		Female	Male	
	1	70	40	110
	2	37	16	53
	Total	107	56	163

Figure 1. Assessment from the student's perspective, mean calculations



Figure 2. Anxiety from the student's perspective, mean calculations

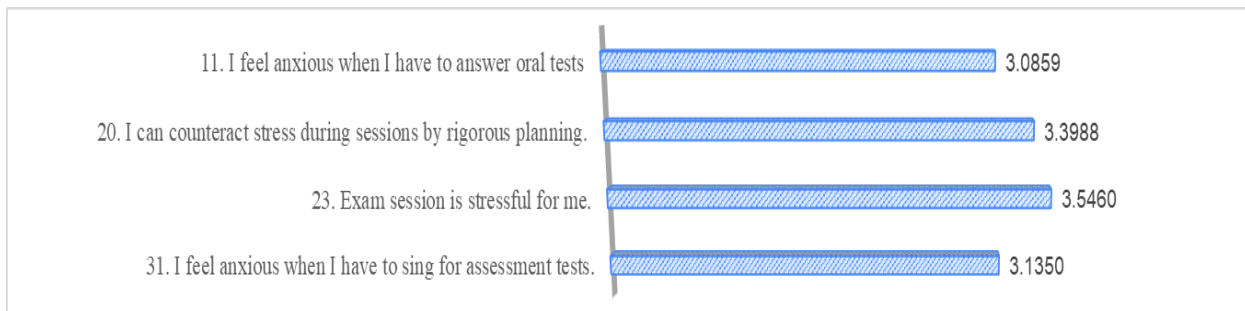
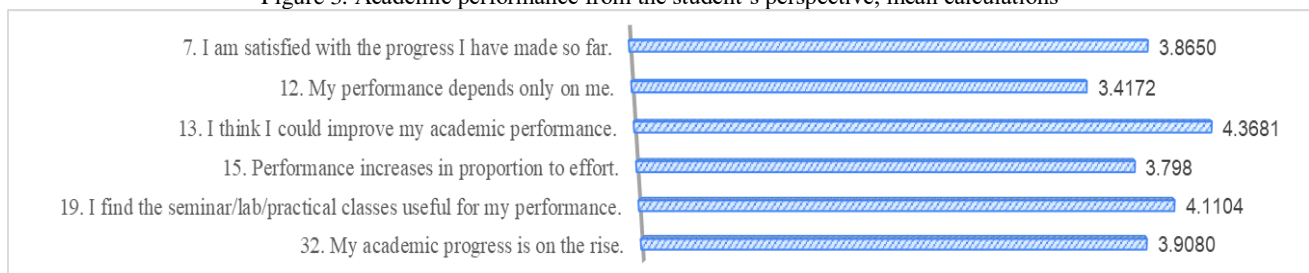


Figure 2 displays the means for the different items related to anxiety in the academic life of the participants. One item that stands out is the mean score of 3.546 for exam sessions, which suggests that the students perceive exams as a significant source of anxiety. This is a common perception among students, as exams are often associated with pressure and stress. Another item that received a relatively high mean score of 3.39 is planning, which implies that students use planning as a strategy to cope with stress and

anxiety in their academic life. The item related to oral exams had a lower mean score of 3.08, suggesting that students may find oral exams more challenging and anxiety-provoking compared to other types of assessments. The means obtained from these items provide insights into the perceptions of students regarding anxiety in their academic life, and can inform strategies for managing anxiety and improving academic performance.

Figure 3. Academic performance from the student's perspective, mean calculations



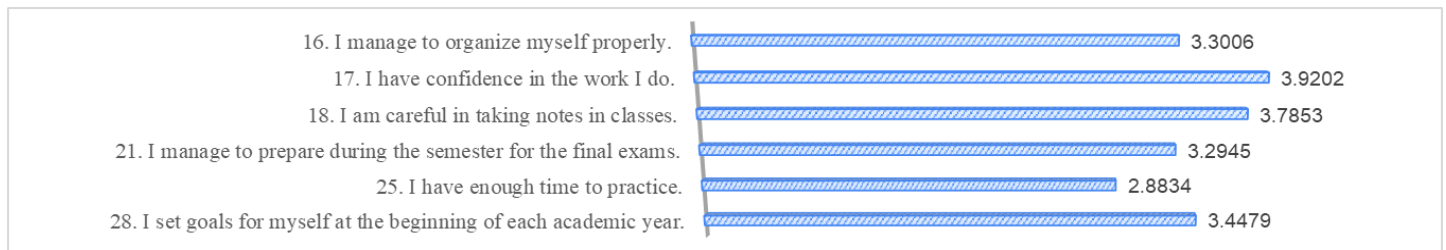
In addition to the items related to assessment and anxiety, the study also aimed to evaluate students' perceptions of their academic performance. Figure 3 displays the means obtained from the students' responses for this category. It can be observed that the students rated highly for improvement of academic performance, with a mean of 4.36. This suggests that the students felt they were making progress in their academic performance and were likely motivated to continue their efforts. Another high mean score was obtained for the usefulness of classes and courses taken during their academic year, with a mean of 4.11. This indicates that the students perceived that the classes and courses they were taking were useful and relevant to their academic goals. The mean score of 3.90 for confidence in their progress suggests that the students felt confident in their ability to succeed academically and were motivated to continue their efforts. The mean score of 3.798 for performance due to efforts suggests that the students believed that their academic performance was a result of their own hard work and effort. This may reflect a growth mindset among the students, as they see their performance as

something that can be improved through effort and dedication.

The final item that was evaluated from the students' perspective was self-management, as shown in Figure 4. The means for the responses indicated that students had high levels of confidence in their work ($M=3.92$), indicating that they were likely satisfied with the quality of their work and believed in their abilities. They also demonstrated moderate levels of goal-setting abilities, with a mean of 3.44, suggesting that they were able to set realistic and achievable goals for themselves.

However, the mean of 2.88 for time management suggests that students struggled with managing their time effectively, perhaps due to having too many responsibilities or struggling to prioritize tasks. Additionally, the mean of 3.29 for self-preparation during exam periods indicates that students may have felt that they did not adequately prepare for exams or were not able to use their time effectively during these periods.

Figure 4. Self-management from the student's perspective, mean calculations



The combined variables which were analyzed were anxiety, performance, assessment and self-evaluation. We performed a one-sample mean test to

determine the mean for each of the combined variables that are displayed in table 3.

Table 3. Mean of variables after the combined process

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Assessment	163	3.5141	.67411	.05280
Anxiety	163	3.2914	.79313	.06212
Performance	163	3.9110	.77497	.06070
Self-management	163	3.4387	.81375	.06374

For assessment ($M=3.51$) participants felt moderately positive about their assessment experiences in higher education. They were likely to feel that they were evaluated fairly and accurately. This variable incorporated questions for the assessment process, also online and written assessment, their confidence regarding preparations for evaluation sessions (exams, papers, projects).

Anxiety ($M = 3.29$): would indicate that, on average, the participants experienced moderate levels of anxiety related to their studies. They may have felt stressed or worried about their academic performance or future prospects. During the exams time students feel a lot more pressure than in the rest of the year, even when they are preparing projects or giving a paper for evaluation, their level of anxiety may rise.

Based on the mean score of 3.91 for performance during their academic year, it can be inferred that, in general, the participants had a positive perception about their academic performance. This suggests that they were likely satisfied with their level of achievement and felt that they were doing well. It is important to note that academic performance is not solely determined by individual effort, but can also be influenced by the effectiveness of the course materials and assessment methods provided by the professors. Therefore, the higher mean score for performance could indicate that the participants felt their efforts were being rewarded, and that improvements in their

academic performance may be due to a combination of their own hard work and effective teaching.

The mean score of 3.43 for self-management implies that the participants had moderate proficiency in managing themselves during their academic year. While they may have been capable of organizing and prioritizing their tasks effectively, they may also have faced some difficulties in this regard. Effective note-taking and having sufficient time to practice could be essential prerequisites for good self-management. Additionally, their confidence levels could be an indicator of the self-management skills they developed during their academic year.

7. Discussions and conclusions

The current study explored the perceptions of students in higher education regarding their evaluation experiences, academic performance, anxiety, and self-management. The findings indicate that the participants had positive perceptions of their academic performance, believed that the classes and courses they take are useful, and felt confident in their progress. However, the results also showed that students face challenges in managing their time and preparation during exam periods. Findings suggest that while students had some strengths in self-management, there were also areas in which they could improve. Students may benefit from developing strategies to improve their time management skills, such as creating

schedules or to-do lists, and taking steps to reduce distractions. Additionally, they may need to work on developing more effective study habits to better prepare for exams. Universities should focus on providing students with resources and strategies to improve their self-management skills, such as time management, goal-setting, and stress-reduction techniques.

Moreover, the study found that students preferred written assessments over online assessments and preferred to work in groups rather than alone. It is important for universities to consider these preferences when designing their curricula and assessment methods. Furthermore, the study revealed that students experienced anxiety during exam periods, particularly for oral exams. Thus, universities should prioritize the mental health and well-being of their students by offering support services, such as counseling and therapy, to help students manage their stress and anxiety levels.

This study provides insights into the perceptions of students in higher education and highlights the importance of addressing their needs and preferences. It is crucial for universities to create a supportive and conducive learning environment for students, where they can develop their academic and personal skills while maintaining their mental and emotional well-being.

8. Limitations

The current study provides insights into the perceptions of students in higher education, but there are several limitations that should be acknowledged. First limitation, the study was conducted at a single institution, the Gheorghe Dima National Music Academy, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other higher education institutions. Different institutions may have unique cultures and academic expectations that could impact student perceptions differently. Second, the study relied on self-reported data collected through a Likert scale questionnaire.

Finally, the study only examined a limited set of variables related to student perceptions in higher education. Other factors, such as social support, access to resources, and extracurricular activities, could also impact student perceptions and academic success. Future research could investigate a wider range of variables to provide a more comprehensive

understanding of student experiences in higher education.

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Authors note:

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