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Abstract

Social-emotional competence plays a vital role in forming students' emotional regulation, social skills, motivation, engagement, and overall academic performance. This paper aims to explore the social-emotional competence of Pakistani Muslim and Non-Muslim secondary school students. This research study was descriptive in nature and employed a survey technique. The main objective was to compare the social-emotional competence of Pakistani Muslim and Non-Muslim students based on their gender and religion. All secondary school students of the Punjab Province of Pakistan formed the population and a sample of 800 students was selected from four divisions of the Punjab province through purposive sampling technique. An adapted research tool with 25 items was used to collect data from the students. This tool demonstrated appropriate validity and reliability in the literature. However, the researchers also obtained expert opinions for validity and conducted pilot testing for reliability. The value of Cronbach's alpha coefficient was found to be ($\alpha = .72$). The data were collected by the researchers, and descriptive and inferential statistics were used to answer the research objectives. Based on the statistical outcomes, this research revealed significant differences in social-emotional competence based on gender and religion. Students of the Muslim religion had higher social-emotional competence compared to students of other religions. Female students had better social-emotional competence compared to male students. This research recommends that, to enhance emotional regulation, social skills, motivation, engagement, and academic performance, a social-emotional learning (SEL) framework should be incorporated into the current curricula to develop social-emotional competence in all students.

Keywords: Social-emotional competence, comparison, Muslim & non-Muslim secondary students

1. Introduction

Over the last few decades, both practitioners and scholars have focused on the social emotional competency (SEC) of children. It is commonly acknowledged that self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making are among the most important intrapersonal and interpersonal skills that contribute to social emotional competence. These abilities are crucial in many facets of life (Zins et al., 2004; CASEL, 2020), and according to Durlak et al. (2011), they are the ideal attributes to promote in order to improve moral reasoning, academic performance, and achievement motivation. Social emotional learning (SEL), which is described as the process of gaining and using social emotional competence (consisting of information, skills, and attitudes), is acknowledged as a crucial component of education and human development (CASEL, 2020).

In 1994, Goleman and other scholars and health care specialists introduced social-emotional learning (SEL) and built the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL, 2018) framework. Social-emotional learning is a process in which children learn and apply knowledge, attitude, and skills needed to understand and manage emotion, set and achieve optimistic goals, feel and show empathy for others, build and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions (CASEL, 2018). Social-emotional learning (SEL) framework aims to develop social-emotional competence in children such as self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making (DePaoli et al., 2017).

There are numerous benefits of social-emotional competence for students such as improved academic performance, higher levels of motivation, engagement and self-regulation (Durlak et al., 2011), higher academic achievement (Jones et al., 2017), improved mental health and overall well-being (Greenberg et al., 2017; Durlak et al., 2011), stronger interpersonal relationship, enhanced communication, cooperation and collaboration with peers, teachers and family members (Jones et al., 2017), increased resilience and coping skills (Greenberg et al., 2017) and decreased instances of bullying, aggression and disciplinary referrals (Durlak et al., 2011).

According to Ahmed (2020) social-emotional competence (SEC) is a result of social and emotional learning (SEL) that enable students to attain the skills to monitor behaviours, control emotions, establish and maintain positive relationships and regulate learning. In social and emotional learning (SEL) framework teacher give direct instruction on social and emotional learning to recognize, understand, label, express and regulate emotions. These are important skills for increasing students' social emotional competence (SEC). Hence, by SEL children learn and effectively utilize the acquired knowledge, attitudes, and abilities to understand and manage emotions, set and accomplish positive goals, feel and express empathy for others, develop and sustain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions (Weissberg, Durlak, Domitovich & Gullotta, 2015). In addition, the knowledge, abilities, and attitudes needed to demonstrate social-emotional competence require integration across affective, cognitive, behavioural, and pedagogical approaches (Beauchamp & Anderson, 2010; Greenberg et al., 2003). Educational systems apply learning concepts to the classroom, connecting students to real world. These approaches may improve students' competency and promote healthy living in a school community and beyond (Durlak et al., 2011). Hence, students spend most of their days at school. Teachers should assist children develop well-being, good conduct, and academic abilities. Social and emotional abilities should be taught and practiced alongside reading, arithmetic, and science (Committee for Children, 2016).

Teaching emotional intelligence is important for school children in a variety of ways. For instance, it ensures that all children have the chance to master the fundamental skills required for success in the future. The abilities, conduct, and attitude of kids towards school and learning are also enhanced by exposing them to social and emotional skills (Durlak et al., 2011). Due to these factors,

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learning strategies are crucial in assisting students' overall development (cognitive, physical, social, emotional, and moral). In order to achieve the goal of developing in students a sense of self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship management, and responsible decision making, the social and emotional learning approach integrates principles capable of promoting understanding and managing emotions, showing empathy for others, creating and maintaining positive relationships. These skills may eventually help students become more socially and emotionally competent.

2. Literature review

Social-emotional competence refers to the capacity to comprehend, regulate, and articulate the emotional and social dimensions of life (Zins et al., 2004). The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL, 2008) defines social and emotional competence (SEC) as encompassing abilities such as self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relational skills, and responsible decision-making. These qualities enable students to engage constructively in a diverse society and navigate problems in academic and social environments (Durlak et al., 2011).

Religion affects how people view and control their emotions as a belief system and cultural practice. Emmons and Paloutzian (2003) found that religious teachings frequently encourage prosocial behaviour and emotional control, two fundamental components of SEC. Islamic teachings provide a strong emphasis on ideas that might improve emotional and social abilities, such as empathy, patience, and community support (Al-Johani, 2016). In a similar vein, qualities of self-control and respect for others are frequently promoted by several religious traditions, including those followed by non-Muslim students in Pakistan (Pargament, 2002).

School is an important period for young children to gain the necessary abilities for eventual academic achievement. The relevance of young children's social and emotional competence as a fundamental feature of school readiness has recently been highlighted (Denham, 2016; Ladd, Herald, & Kochel, 2016). Children must build a variety of competences during their early life in order to succeed academically and socially in the future. 'School readiness' refers to the acquisition of core competences that allow students to transition to school (Hair et al., 2006). Physical well-being and motor development, social and emotional development, learning and cognition processes, and general knowledge are all components of school training (Kagan, Moore, & Bredekamp, 1995). Specifically, educational strategies have emphasized the need of social-emotional development (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2015). This is because, as will be discussed in detail, children who have learnt powerful social-emotional abilities throughout early stages appear to be academically and socially successful in secondary school.

Many studies have shown that social and emotional learning can help children's cognitive development and classroom learning. Furthermore, social and emotional developmental skills are linked to openness, school preparation, academic accomplishment, learning, and other issues faced by children. Unsuccessful transitions to school contexts can trap students in a cycle of social and academic failure. Positive experiences in the early years of schooling are critical for improving youngsters' attitudes, feelings, and learning capacities (Denham, Bassett, Thayer et al., 2012). Portela-Pino et al., (2021) conducted a study to assess the students' level of social emotional competence and found that majority of the students had lowest levels in two indicators of social emotional competence such as social awareness, and self-management. However in other indicators of SEC students had better levels.

Some other studies indicate that strong social and religious support networks help Muslim students in Pakistan achieve better levels of self-esteem. Ali and Saleh (2022), for example, discovered that Muslim students' engagement in religious activities like as prayers and almsgiving contributed to the development of emotional resilience and empathy two essential elements of SEC. However, despite their ability to integrate socially, non-Muslim students can experience marginalization or prejudice since they belong to a minority religion. According to a research by Ahmad, Iqbal and Saghir (2023), alienation and a lack of inclusive educational practices may be contributing factors to the social-emotional difficulties faced by non-Muslim children. Furthermore, religious beliefs can give rise to both emotional conflict and emotional support. According to Abideen and Abbas (2021) non-Muslim students may experience emotional conflict when their religious identity is not acknowledged or respected in the larger educational setting, even if Islamic teachings give Muslim students coping skills for emotional regulation. This disparity in the social-emotional skills of Muslim and non-Muslim students may result in an uneven educational experience. According to Thomas et al. (2023), Muslim students frequently had greater support for their religious activities from their families and the community, which improved their mental health. Conversely, non-Muslim students especially those who attended rural schools reported feeling isolated due to a lack of support from peers and the community, which may have an adverse effect on their social and emotional development. Thus, the below objectives were developed for this study:

2.1. Research Objectives

This research achieved following research objectives:

- To discover the level of social-emotional competence of Pakistani Muslim and Non-Muslim secondary school students based on their religion.
- To compare the social-emotional competence of Pakistani Muslim and Non-Muslim secondary school students based on their religion.
- To compare the social-emotional competence of Pakistani Muslim and Non-Muslim secondary school students based on their gender.

3. Research Methodology

The present study was a quantitative and falls under descriptive research. All the students studying at public secondary school level in Punjab Province of Pakistan constituted the population of this research. A sample of 800 students (412 Muslims and 388 non-Muslims) was selected from four divisions of the Punjab province through purposive sampling method for quantitative data collection. The investigators used an adapted research instrument (Zhou & Ee, 2012) having 25 items in order to collect data from the Pakistani Muslim and non-Muslims secondary school students. The said instrument had five indicator such as self-awareness, social-awareness, self-management, relationship management, and responsible decision making. Before the execution of the reliable instrument its validity and reliability again was checked through experts' opinions and pilot testing. Reliability score of the

instrument occurred as ($\alpha=0.72$). The entire data were collected by the researchers and same was analyzed in SPSS where descriptive statistics and inferential statistics were used in order to answer the research objectives. The following results discovered:-

4. Results and Findings

Table 1: Overall Result

Overall Means and SDs of students' level of social emotional competence (N=800) (412 Muslims & 388 Non-Muslims)

S.No.	Indicators of social emotional competence	Muslim Students		Non-Muslim students		Level of agreement
		Mean	SDs	Mean	SDs	
1.	Self-awareness	2.93	1.408	3.03	1.452	Moderate
2.	Social-awareness	3.10	1.299	3.11	1.273	Moderate
3.	Self-management	3.06	1.351	3.34	1.308	Moderate
4.	Relationship management	3.64	1.244	3.66	1.213	High
5.	Responsible decision making	2.77	1.305	2.90	1.255	Moderate
		3.10	1.321	3.20	1.300	Moderate

The results of table 1 illustrates the indicator wise level of social emotional competence of the Pakistani Muslim and non-Muslim secondary school students. It is evident from the outcomes of mean score and standard deviation that Muslim and non-Muslim secondary students had moderate level in self-awareness with a mean value of (Mean=2.93, SD=1.408) & (Mean=3.03, SD=1.452), moderate level in social-awareness as mean value for this factor was appeared as (Mean=3.10, SD=1.299) & (Mean=3.11, SD=1.273), moderate level in self-management with a mean value of (Mean=3.06, SD=1.351), high level in relationship management mean value for this factor was appeared as (Mean=3.64, SD=1.244) & (Mean=3.66, SD=1.213), and moderate level in decision making with a mean score of (Mean=2.77, SD=1.305) & (Mean=2.90, SD=1.255) factors of the social emotional competence. Moreover, the overall mean score and SD of the Muslim students was (Mean=3.10, SD=1.321), while non-Muslim students was (Mean=3.20, SD=1.300). Based on these results it has been revealed that Pakistani Muslim and non-Muslim secondary students had moderate level of social emotional competence. Only Pakistani Muslims students had a high level in relationship management. These findings are consistent with those of Portela-Pino et al. (2021), who also discovered similar results in their study.

Table 2

Mean Scores of the students based on their gender towards the indicator of Social Emotional Competence (SEC)

Variables	Gender	Mean	Std. Deviation	N	p-value
Self_awareness	Boys	3.0138	.75797	390	.337
	Girls	2.9624	.75487	410	
	Total	2.9875	.75635	800	
Social_awareness	Boys	3.1749	.75971	390	.034
	Girls	3.0707	.62293	410	
	Total	3.1215	.69451	800	
Self_management	Boys	3.5087	.87893	390	.000
	Girls	2.9112	.89066	410	
	Total	3.2025	.93353	800	
Relationship_management	Boys	3.7282	.70501	390	.009
	Girls	3.5966	.70658	410	
	Total	3.6607	.70844	800	
Responsible_decision_making	Boys	2.8841	.68873	390	.044
	Girls	2.7907	.62218	410	
	Total	2.8363	.65672	800	

The results in Table 2 show the mean differences between Pakistani Muslim and non-Muslim students on the basis of their gender regarding the indicators of social-emotional competence (SEC). According to the p-values, for self-awareness ($p = .337 > .05$), both groups of students were equal, while for the other indicators such as social awareness ($p = .034 < .05$), self-management ($p = .000 < .05$), relationship management ($p = .009 < .05$), and responsible decision-making ($p = .044 < .05$), there were significant differences.

MANOVA was used to test the dependent variables (SEC indicators) against the independent variable (Gender). The results show a statistically significant difference between the two groups, male and female, regarding indicators of social-emotional competence (SEC), Wilks' Lambda = .893, $F(5, 794) = 19.087$, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .107$. Based on these results, students were found to significantly differ ($p = .000 < .001$) in terms of SEC indicators. The effect size was medium ($\eta^2 = .107$). Thus, the study concluded that there is a statistically significant difference between male and female students regarding social-emotional competence (SEC). The medium effect size suggests that gender has a meaningful effect on social-emotional competence. These findings confirm that male and female students are different in their social-emotional competence.

Table 2a

Effect	Value	Multivariate Tests ^a			Sig.	Partial Eta Squared	
		F	Hypothesis df	Error df			
Intercept	Pillai's Trace	.986	11031.065 ^b	5.000	794.000	.000	.986
	Wilks' Lambda	.014	11031.065 ^b	5.000	794.000	.000	.986
	Hotelling's Trace	69.465	11031.065 ^b	5.000	794.000	.000	.986
	Roy's Largest Root	69.465	11031.065 ^b	5.000	794.000	.000	.986
Gender	Pillai's Trace	.107	19.087 ^b	5.000	794.000	.000	.107
	Wilks' Lambda	.893	19.087 ^b	5.000	794.000	.000	.107
	Hotelling's Trace	.120	19.087 ^b	5.000	794.000	.000	.107
	Roy's Largest Root	.120	19.087 ^b	5.000	794.000	.000	.107

a. Design: Intercept + Gender
b. Exact statistic

Table 3

Mean Scores of the students based on their religions towards the factors of Social Emotional Competence (SEC)

Variables	Religion	Mean	Std. Deviation	N	p-value
Self_awareness	Muslims	2.9427	.74535	412	.084
	Non-Muslims	3.0351	.76595	388	
	Total	2.9875	.75635	800	
Social_awareness	Muslims	3.1170	.69113	412	.085
	Non-Muslims	3.1263	.69893	388	
	Total	3.1215	.69451	800	
Self_management	Muslims	3.0631	.95510	412	.000
	Non-Muslims	3.3505	.88760	388	
	Total	3.2025	.93353	800	
Relationship_management	Muslims	3.6549	.73229	412	.809
	Non-Muslims	3.6670	.68309	388	
	Total	3.6607	.70844	800	
Responsible_decision_making	Muslims	2.7801	.67826	412	.012
	Non-Muslims	2.8959	.62843	388	
	Total	2.8363	.65672	800	

The results in Table 3 show the mean differences between Pakistani Muslim and non-Muslim on the basis of their religions regarding the indicators of social-emotional competence (SEC). According to the p-values, for self-awareness ($p = .084 > .05$), social awareness ($p = .085 > .05$), and relationship management ($p = .809 < .05$) both groups are equal while for other indicators such as self-management ($p = .000 < .05$), and responsible decision-making ($p = .012 < .05$), there were significant differences.

Table 3a

Effect	Value	Multivariate Tests ^a			Sig.	Partial Eta Squared	
		F	Hypothesis df	Error df			
Intercept	Pillai's Trace	.986	10884.839 ^b	5.000	794.000	.000	.986
	Wilks' Lambda	.014	10884.839 ^b	5.000	794.000	.000	.986
	Hotelling's Trace	68.544	10884.839 ^b	5.000	794.000	.000	.986
	Roy's Largest Root	68.544	10884.839 ^b	5.000	794.000	.000	.986
Religion	Pillai's Trace	.037	6.149 ^b	5.000	794.000	.000	.037
	Wilks' Lambda	.963	6.149 ^b	5.000	794.000	.000	.037
	Hotelling's Trace	.039	6.149 ^b	5.000	794.000	.000	.037
	Roy's Largest Root	.039	6.149 ^b	5.000	794.000	.000	.037

a. Design: Intercept + Religion
b. Exact statistic

MANOVA was used to test the dependent variables (SEC indicators) against independent variable (Religion). The outcomes reflected in table 3b reveals that there is statistically significant difference between two groups, Pakistani Muslims students and non-Muslims students towards the indicators of social emotional competences (SEC), Wilks' Lambda = .963, $F(5, 794) = (6.149, p < .001)$, partial $\eta^2 = .037$. Based on stated results, it has been concluded that religion-wise students are significantly different ($p = .000 < .001$) based on the indicators of SEC. The effect size was small ($\eta^2 = .037$). Thus, it is concluded that there are significant differences

among students, indicating that religion plays a role in shaping social-emotional competence. However, the effect size is small, suggesting that while religion influences SEC, other factors contribute more substantially to the development of social-emotional competence among students. Portela-Pino et al. (2021), also discovered similar results in their study that are in line with the results of this study.

5. Conclusions

This research revealed that both Pakistani Muslim and non-Muslim secondary school students show a moderate level of social-emotional competence across most dimensions, including self-awareness, social awareness, self-management, and decision-making. However, a notable distinction is observed in relationship management, where both Muslim and non-Muslim students demonstrated a high level of competence. Overall, while Muslim students had a slightly lower overall mean score (Mean=3.10) compared to non-Muslim students (Mean=3.20), the differences between the two groups remain minor, reinforcing the finding that both groups possess a moderate level of social-emotional competence.

This study revealed that there had no significant gender-based difference in self-awareness between Pakistani Muslim and non-Muslim students, only significant differences were found in the other indicators of social-emotional competence, including social awareness, self-management, relationship management, and responsible decision-making. Furthermore, this study concluded that there is a statistically significant difference between male and female students regarding social-emotional competence (SEC). The medium effect size suggests that gender has a meaningful effect on social-emotional competence. These findings confirm that male and female students are different in their social-emotional competence.

This investigation concluded that on the basis of students' religions, Pakistani Muslim and non-Muslim students show no significant differences in self-awareness, social awareness, and relationship management. However, significant differences were observed in self-management and responsible decision-making, indicating that religion influences these specific aspects of social-emotional competence. Furthermore, it is concluded that there are significant differences among students, indicating that religion plays a role in shaping social-emotional competence. However, the effect size is small, suggesting that while religion influences SEC, other factors contribute more substantially to the development of social-emotional competence among students.

5.1. Recommendations

This study recommends that institutions providing secondary education should implement social-emotional learning (SEL) programs to enhance students' social-emotional competence (SEC). Teacher training institutions should also incorporate SEL into continuous professional development programs to provide a deeper understanding of how to develop students' SEC through SEL. In addition, teachers should adopt a holistic teaching approach to develop social-emotional competence among Muslim and non-Muslim Pakistani secondary students. Future researchers may conduct large-scale studies using mixed-method or qualitative research at other levels, including elementary, college, and university.

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