

# Social-Emotional Learning in Nigeria's K–16 Education System: A Systematic Review of Implementation and Gaps

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**Abstract.** Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) has become a global priority in education, recognised for its role in fostering emotional intelligence, interpersonal skills, and responsible decision-making among learners. Frameworks developed by organisations such as CASEL, the OECD, and the WHO have shaped how SEL is implemented in many education systems worldwide. However, in low- and middle-income countries, particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa, SEL implementation remains uneven and under-researched. This systematic review examines the state of SEL integration across Nigeria's K–16 education system, encompassing early childhood through tertiary education. Drawing on a systematic review methodology, the study analysed peer-reviewed research, reports from NGOs and UN agencies, grey literature, and national policy documents published between 2000 and 2025. Thematic analysis was used to identify key patterns, structural gaps, and culturally specific innovations in SEL practice. Findings indicate that SEL integration is emerging, especially in early and primary education through donor-supported programs, but remains minimal at the secondary and tertiary levels. Systemic barriers include the absence of a nationally recognised SEL framework, limited teacher preparation, overdependence on external funding, and significant disparities in access between urban and rural schools. The review also highlights unique contextual opportunities, such as the role of indigenous storytelling, religious institutions, and communal values like Ubuntu, in enriching SEL design and delivery. It concludes by calling for the development of a culturally grounded national SEL framework, stronger integration into teacher training and curricula, investment in monitoring and research systems, and equity-driven implementation strategies. Taken together, these actions are essential for embedding SEL as a core component of educational quality, youth wellbeing, and long-term national development in Nigeria.

**Keywords:** Social Emotional Learning; Nigeria; Educational Policy; Emotional Intelligence; K-16 Education.

## INTRODUCTION

Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) encompasses the processes through which individuals across the life course develop and apply emotional intelligence, empathy, interpersonal skills, and responsible decision-making [1]. These competencies are foundational not only to academic achievement and behavioural regulation in children but also mental health, resilience, and pro-social engagement across a lifespan [2]. Globally, SEL has become a central pillar in modern education reform, reflecting a growing consensus that traditional academic instruction alone is insufficient for preparing learners to navigate the complexities of the 21st century, including digital transformation, civic engagement, and interpersonal conflict [3]. SEL's benefits extend beyond childhood and adolescence, laying the groundwork for healthy ageing by promoting lifelong emotional regulation, social support systems, and cognitive engagement—factors linked to positive ageing trajectories and problems, especially in Nigeria [4, 5].

In the Sub-Saharan African context, the importance of SEL is magnified by the socioeconomic and psychosocial adversities that many children and youth encounter [6]. Widespread poverty, displacement due to conflict or climate crises, gender-based violence, and poorly resourced schools present daily stressors that erode young people's sense of agency, belonging, and mental wellness [6, 7]. SEL offers an evidence-based approach to building psychological resilience, enhancing school connectedness, and supporting equity in education [8]. For Nigeria, the continent's most populous nation with over 200 million citizens, integrating SEL into educational systems is both a moral and developmental imperative [9]. Nigeria's schooling environment is marked by persistent challenges such as overcrowded classrooms, undertrained teachers, insecurity in conflict-prone regions, and an exam-oriented curriculum that prioritises rote learning over holistic development [10]. These barriers not only hinder cognitive growth but also suppress emotional and social development during critical learning years.

Nigeria's K–16 education continuum spans from early childhood (kindergarten) through to the final year of tertiary education, including colleges of education and universities [8]. While some positive strides have been made, particularly through donor-supported interventions in early

and primary education, SEL remains inconsistently applied and underprioritised at the policy and implementation levels. For instance, while the National Policy on Education includes references to life skills, there is no nationally recognised SEL framework guiding competencies, teacher standards, or learner outcomes across K–16 education [10]. The result is a patchwork of interventions with limited scalability, sustainability, or cultural adaptation.

This paper employs a systematic review approach to examine how SEL is currently being implemented across Nigeria's education system. Unlike traditional literature reviews that primarily aggregate findings, systematic reviews emphasise the interconnectedness of institutional policies, actor roles, curricular frameworks, and delivery modalities. This is particularly important in complex systems like education, where change at one level (e.g., teacher training) can ripple across others (e.g., classroom practice, student behaviour, parental involvement). The systemic lens also enables a multilevel understanding of gaps, such as the disconnection between SEL programs in primary schools and the absence of such training in teacher education curricula, while highlighting local innovations and entry points for reform.

Four central questions guide the review:

- 1) What SEL programs and interventions currently exist across Nigeria's K–16 education system?
- 2) How are SEL practices implemented across different educational levels?
- 3) What systemic gaps, challenges, and enablers shape SEL outcomes?
- 4) What novel or context-specific SEL needs and opportunities arise from Nigeria's cultural, religious, and socio-educational context?

These questions are particularly relevant for building a future-ready education system that not only equips children and youth with academic competencies but also nurtures emotionally literate, socially grounded, and ethically responsible citizens.

Importantly, SEL should not be viewed as limited to childhood or adolescent development. Research increasingly highlights the role of emotional wellbeing and social connectedness in healthy ageing [11], suggesting that investments in SEL during school years may yield dividends

later in life, including better mental health, social engagement, and functional independence in old age [12]. In societies like Nigeria, where population ageing is accelerating but eldercare infrastructure remains limited, early social-emotional competencies could help foster more supportive intergenerational networks and promote ageing in dignity [13]. Thus, a systemic approach to SEL is not only vital for today's learners but is also a strategic investment in Nigeria's long-term human capital and health equity.

## METHODOLOGY

*Review Approach.* This study adopts a systematic review methodology to analyse the implementation of SEL across Nigeria's K-16 education continuum. A systematic review goes beyond the scope of traditional literature reviews by mapping relationships between educational levels, institutional policies, and implementation actors [13, 14]. This method is particularly suited to evaluating the multilayered structure of Nigeria's education system, enabling the identification of both vertical gaps, such as the absence of SEL alignment between early childhood, primary, secondary, and tertiary education, and horizontal gaps, such as limited coordination among government bodies, donor agencies, and teacher training institutions.

*Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria.* Documents were included if they were published between 2000 and 2025 and focused on SEL-related interventions, programs, or policies within Nigeria's education sector. The review incorporated peer-reviewed journal articles, government policy documents, reports from NGOs and UN agencies (such as UNICEF and UNESCO), and credible grey literature, including program evaluations and working papers [14]. Publications were excluded if they lacked empirical evidence, addressed non-Nigerian contexts, or discussed general mental health topics without a direct link to SEL in education.

*Search Strategy.* A comprehensive search was conducted using a combination of academic databases and institutional repositories. Key databases searched included ERIC, Scopus, PubMed, JSTOR, and Google Scholar. To supplement these, relevant documents were sourced from the official websites of Nigeria's Federal Ministry of Education, UNICEF Nigeria, and selected international and local NGOs focused on education. The

search strategy involved various keyword combinations, such as: "Social-emotional learning" AND "Nigeria"; "Life skills education" AND "basic education"; "Psychosocial support" AND "teacher training"; "K-16 education" AND "SEL implementation".

*Data Extraction and Analysis.* Data extraction followed a structured matrix approach that categorised each source by the education level it addressed (early childhood, primary, secondary, tertiary), the implementing actor (government, NGO, donor agency), the SEL domain focus (such as self-awareness, empathy, decision-making), and reported outcomes. This classification enabled cross-level comparison and helped highlight patterns, innovations, and systemic gaps. Additionally, the extracted data were then analysed using thematic analysis to synthesise key findings. Thematic coding focused on recurring challenges, promising practices, and contextual factors shaping SEL implementation. This analytic process allowed for a nuanced understanding of SEL not only as a set of educational practices but also as a function of broader systemic dynamics, including governance structures, cultural norms, and resource flows.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) gained international recognition as an educational priority in the 1990s, with its formal emergence credited to the work of the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) in the United States [15]. CASEL aimed to expand the goals of education beyond cognitive development to include competencies such as self-awareness, emotional regulation, empathy, social relationship skills, and responsible decision-making [16]. These competencies were recognised not only for their role in enhancing academic outcomes but also for promoting long-term wellbeing, mental health, and prosocial behaviour. Since then, SEL has been progressively adopted in education systems around the world, evolving through various models and frameworks grounded in empirical evidence and policy innovation [16].

Globally, three major frameworks have shaped how SEL is conceptualised and operationalised in educational settings. The CASEL framework, still widely influential, outlines five interrelated competencies: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsi-

ble decision-making [16]. The OECD's Learning Compass 2030 positions SEL within a broader set of "transformative competencies" that prepare learners to navigate complexity and contribute meaningfully to society [16]. Meanwhile, the World Health Organisation's Health Promoting Schools model integrates SEL through its emphasis on life skills and psychosocial wellbeing as essential for both health and education outcomes [17]. While these frameworks have informed SEL implementation in diverse regions, many of their components reflect Western assumptions about emotional expression, individual autonomy, and interpersonal communication, raising questions about how well they translate to non-Western cultural contexts [18].

In Sub-Saharan Africa, SEL has gradually entered educational discourse and policy, largely in response to pressing issues such as youth mental health crises, widespread educational disparities, and the psychosocial toll of conflict and displacement [19]. Across the region, SEL is frequently introduced through donor-supported life skills curricula, peacebuilding programs, or psychosocial interventions, often labelled under alternative terms such as "values education," "citizenship education," or "emotional literacy." Despite the semantic variation, these programs share a common focus on nurturing emotional resilience, positive identity, and ethical behaviour among learners [20]. Regional innovations include the promotion of child-friendly school environments, teacher wellbeing initiatives, and community-based resilience programming — each reflecting efforts to localise SEL principles within existing educational and cultural systems [21].

Several African countries provide illustrative examples of SEL integration at different levels of education. In Ghana, UNICEF-supported initiatives have helped embed SEL content into primary school curricula through life skills modules and teacher training programs [22]. Kenya has made SEL a formal component of its Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC), focusing on emotional intelligence, empathy, and civic responsibility [23]. South Africa includes SEL elements in its Life Orientation curriculum, which addresses topics like social justice, mental health, and moral development. However, socioeconomic inequality and resource limitations continue to challenge

consistent delivery [24]. These examples demonstrate the importance of contextual adaptation: SEL frameworks must resonate with local realities, languages, and values to be meaningful and effective.

Nigeria shares many of the same structural challenges and cultural complexities as its regional counterparts, including wide disparities between urban and rural school systems, ethno-religious diversity, and an exam-driven educational culture [25]. These factors make a one-size-fits-all approach to SEL neither feasible nor appropriate. At present, SEL efforts in Nigeria remain fragmented and largely dependent on short-term donor projects [25]. No nationally recognised SEL framework or policy offers cohesive guidance across the K–16 education spectrum. Yet, the country also possesses rich cultural resources – such as oral storytelling traditions, communal parenting models, and faith-based education networks—that could provide powerful foundations for culturally grounded SEL practices [26].

The experiences of countries like Ghana, Kenya, and South Africa offer both inspiration and caution for Nigeria. While global models can provide structure and evidence-based guidance, they must be critically adapted to fit Nigeria's unique educational, social, and cultural context [27]. This means moving beyond the direct transplantation of Western SEL frameworks to create systems that are locally informed, linguistically accessible, and aligned with indigenous knowledge and values. In doing so, Nigeria can develop a national approach to SEL that not only strengthens emotional and interpersonal competencies in students but also reinforces social cohesion, inclusion, and resilience across generations [27].

*SEL in Nigeria's K–16 Education System: Review Findings.* This section presents synthesised findings on how SEL is implemented across Nigeria's K–16 education continuum, highlighting progress, gaps, and opportunities at each educational level. To better illustrate the state of SEL across the Nigerian education system, Table 1 summarises the presence, delivery modes, challenges, and opportunities of SEL implementation across each level of education from early childhood to teacher training.

Table 1 – Overview of SEL Implementation Across Education Levels (K–16) in Nigeria

Education Level	SEL Presence	Delivery Mode	Challenges	Opportunities
Early Childhood	Emerging	Donor-supported programs	Low teacher capacity	Indigenous practices
Primary	Limited	ECCE curriculum + NGOs	Resource constraints	Storytelling, communal learning
Secondary	Inconsistent	Life skills curriculum (partly)	Exam-focused culture, low uptake	Value the educational potential
Tertiary	Largely Absent	Mental health clubs, informal	No curricular integration	Peer mentoring, youth-led organisations
Teacher Training	Absent	No SEL courses in the curriculum	No formal training	Entry point for reform

1) Early Childhood and Primary Education. SEL integration at the early childhood and primary levels in Nigeria is limited but gradually emerging. The National Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) curriculum, developed by the Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC), includes elements related to emotional development, interpersonal relationships, and basic life skills [28]. However, these components are frequently under-implemented in practice due to systemic issues such as insufficient teacher preparation and widespread resource constraints. Teacher training programs at this stage focus primarily on literacy and numeracy, leaving educators with minimal understanding of how to cultivate socio-emotional competencies in young learners [29]. Consequently, children's emotional and relational needs are often neglected in favour of academic instruction.

Additionally, to address these challenges, several NGO-led interventions have been introduced to foster SEL at the foundational level [30]. UNICEF Nigeria has supported initiatives that promote child-friendly classrooms, train teachers in psychosocial support, and emphasise positive discipline. Likewise, programs such as Teach for Nigeria (TFN) have incorporated SEL-informed pedagogy into their fellowship training to serve learners in underserved communities better [31]. Although these efforts are promising, they tend to be donor-funded, geographically limited, and disconnected from national education systems, making their long-term sustainability uncertain.

2) Secondary Education. In secondary schools, SEL content is formally situated within the National Life Skills curriculum, which is integrated into health and civic education. Key topics covered include self-esteem, goal setting, conflict resolution, and responsible citizenship. However,

implementation remains inconsistent across schools and states [31]. Teachers often deprioritise these topics due to limited time, lack of relevant training, or a perception that they are less important than academic subjects. One of the most significant structural barriers to SEL at the secondary level is Nigeria's exam-centric culture [31]. With enormous emphasis placed on high-stakes examinations such as the West African Senior School Certificate Examination (WASSCE), both teachers and students focus heavily on test preparation, leaving little room for emotional and social learning [32]. Moreover, secondary schools face additional constraints, including overcrowded classrooms, limited access to psychosocial support services, and a shortage of qualified staff, all of which further inhibit the effective delivery of SEL content.

3) Tertiary Education (Post-Secondary / University Level). SEL is largely absent from the formal curricula of Nigerian universities and other post-secondary institutions. Academic programs are typically discipline-specific and rarely include modules on emotional intelligence, leadership development, or mental wellness [33]. Where SEL-related content does exist, it is generally found in peripheral structures such as counselling centres, entrepreneurship initiatives, or student clubs. In recent years, some universities – particularly in urban centres – have witnessed a growth in student-led mental health and SEL advocacy [34]. Organisations such as Mentally Aware Nigeria Initiative (MANI) and She Writes Woman have collaborated with university communities to raise awareness about emotional wellbeing, create safe spaces, and build peer-support systems [35]. Despite their potential, these efforts remain sporadic, underfunded, and overly reliant on student enthusiasm rather than institutional backing. Without integration into

core curricula or faculty training, SEL remains a marginal component of tertiary education [35].

4) Teacher Training Colleges and Policy Gaps. A fundamental obstacle to effective SEL implementation across all levels of education in Nigeria lies in the preparation of teachers. Currently, Colleges of Education and Faculties of Education do not offer structured courses on SEL, and pre-service training remains focused primarily on pedagogy and subject-specific content [36]. This lack of formal training means that most teachers are ill-equipped to nurture SEL in their students or to address their emotional wellbeing. In-service teacher development programs also rarely address SEL, and there are no nationally endorsed standards for SEL-related teaching competencies [37].

This absence of teacher preparation is mirrored in national policy frameworks. Although Nigeria's National Policy on Education refers to life skills, no dedicated policy or curriculum framework defines SEL competencies, sets goals, or provides guidance for implementation and evaluation. In many cases, SEL is conflated with religious or moral instruction, which varies significantly by region and is often interpreted through narrow doctrinal lenses [38]. The lack of standardised terminology, monitoring systems, or accountability mechanisms further complicates coherent implementation. As a result, SEL remains peripheral within Nigeria's broader education reform efforts and continues to rely heavily on fragmented, externally funded initiatives [38].

*Cross-cutting themes and systemic gaps.* While awareness of SEL has grown within Nigeria's education discourse, implementation across the K-16 continuum remains fragmented and inequitable. A closer examination reveals deeply embedded systemic challenges that cut across education levels and stakeholder roles. These challenges include policy fragmentation, weak institutional capacity, cultural misalignment, and structural inequalities that limit the effectiveness, scalability, and sustainability of SEL initiatives.

1) Absence of a Unified National Framework and Institutional Ownership. One of the most significant barriers to SEL implementation in Nigeria is the lack of a nationally recognised policy framework that defines competencies, learning outcomes, and teacher responsibilities across all education levels [39]. While elements of SEL—such as empathy, self-regulation, and decision-making—appear sporadically in civic or moral education

curricula, there is no coherent structure guiding their development or assessment [39]. This policy vacuum has led to a disjointed landscape where different actors interpret and apply SEL differently, often without alignment between ministries, schools, and teacher training institutions.

Compounding this gap is Nigeria's heavy reliance on externally funded SEL programs led by NGOs and development agencies. Organisations like UNICEF, Save the Children, and Teach for Nigeria have pioneered important SEL innovations, particularly in early and primary education [40]. However, these interventions are often localised, short-term, and externally driven, limiting national ownership and long-term scalability [40]. Without consistent government investment or integration into public systems, successful models often fail to expand beyond pilot phases. This dependence on donor funding also makes SEL programming vulnerable to shifts in external priorities and funding cycles.

2) Cultural Misalignment and Limited Local Adaptation. Many SEL models currently applied in Nigeria are derived from global frameworks, particularly those developed in Western contexts such as CASEL. These models tend to emphasise individual emotional expression, autonomy, and open dialogue [41]. However, in many Nigerian communities, especially in rural or conservative regions, cultural norms prioritise emotional restraint, collective identity, and respect for hierarchy. SEL content that ignores these norms or fails to incorporate local languages, religious values, and indigenous practices may face resistance, be misinterpreted, or receive only superficial adoption [7]. For instance, an SEL module promoting assertiveness may conflict with social norms that value humility and communal consensus.

This cultural mismatch is exacerbated by the lack of contextualised teaching materials and culturally responsive pedagogy. Programs that fail to leverage Nigeria's rich traditions of storytelling, proverbs, religious teachings, and communal learning miss important opportunities to anchor SEL in locally resonant practices [41]. Without cultural adaptation, SEL risks being perceived as externally imposed or irrelevant, particularly in underserved areas.

3) Weak Teacher Capacity and Competing Academic Priorities. Teachers are expected to be frontline implementers of SEL, yet most enter the profession with little or no training in social-

emotional pedagogy. Pre-service teacher education in Nigeria primarily emphasises subject knowledge and classroom management, leaving social-emotional development largely unaddressed [8]. In-service training opportunities are limited, fragmented, and rarely include SEL components. The daily realities of teaching in Nigeria – overcrowded classrooms, rigid schedules, limited support staff, and poor working conditions – further discourage teachers from engaging with emotionally responsive teaching practices [3].

Moreover, the structure of Nigeria's education system places disproportionate emphasis on high-stakes examinations. Particularly at the secondary level, standardised tests like the West African Senior School Certificate Examination (WASSCE) dictate curriculum coverage, instructional time, and teacher accountability [3]. In this context, SEL is often perceived as non-essential or irrelevant to students' academic success. Teachers, under pressure to meet exam targets, are less likely to allocate time to developing students' emotional or interpersonal competencies, even if they recognise their value.

4) Inadequate Monitoring, Evaluation, and System-Level Data. The lack of robust monitoring and evaluation (M&E) systems presents a significant obstacle to understanding the scope and impact of SEL programs in Nigeria [19]. Most education ministries and implementing partners cannot track SEL-related indicators, and few initiatives use validated tools to measure student outcomes in emotional, social, or behavioural domains [19]. Without reliable data, it becomes difficult to assess effectiveness, make evidence-based improvements, or advocate for SEL in policy and funding decisions. This data gap reinforces a cycle of underinvestment and policy neglect, keeping SEL outside the mainstream of education reform efforts.

5) Exclusion of Tertiary Institutions and Unequal Implementation. A glaring omission in Nigeria's current SEL ecosystem is the near-total absence of SEL integration at the tertiary level. University curricula are narrowly discipline-based, offering little space for emotional intelligence, wellbeing, or leadership development [34]. Campus-based counselling services are often under-resourced, and faculty members receive minimal training in how to support students' social-emotional growth [34]. As a result, students entering adulthood face academic, social, and psychological

stressors such as identity formation, career uncertainty, and mental health challenges without adequate institutional support [42]. This neglect contributes to rising mental health concerns among youth in higher education, which remain poorly addressed by university systems. In addition, SEL access is highly unequal across geographic and institutional lines. Urban schools, particularly private or donor-funded ones, are more likely to benefit from trained personnel, SEL resources, and enrichment programs [19]. In contrast, rural schools often face acute shortages in infrastructure, teacher availability, and community engagement, which limit the delivery and sustainability of SEL initiatives. This urban–rural divide not only reflects broader educational disparities but also restricts SEL's potential to serve as a tool for equity and social mobility.

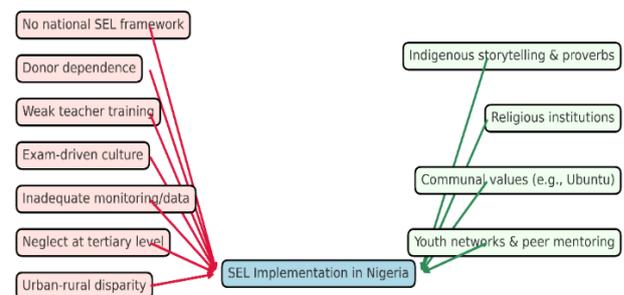


Figure 1 – Systemic Barriers and Cultural Enablers Shaping SEL Implementation in Nigeria's Education System

The above systems map illustrates the interplay between major systemic barriers (e.g., lack of national policy, teacher training gaps, donor dependence) and local cultural enablers (e.g., storytelling traditions, religious institutions, communal values) in shaping SEL implementation across Nigeria's education system.

*Novel findings and contextual insights.* Although formal SEL frameworks remain underdeveloped in Nigeria's education policy and curricula, this review reveals that several indigenous cultural practices and informal community structures already support the development of core SEL competencies [42]. These contextual strengths present promising entry points for designing SEL programs that are not only culturally grounded but also more likely to gain acceptance and long-term traction across diverse Nigerian settings.

One of the most compelling insights is the pedagogical potential of storytelling, proverbs, and communal learning traditions. In many Nigerian communities, particularly in rural areas, oral narratives are deeply embedded in the transmission of values and wisdom across generations. Folktales often revolve around moral dilemmas, empathy, perseverance, and respect for others—concepts that align strongly with SEL domains such as self-awareness, responsible decision-making, and social awareness. Integrating these traditional storytelling practices into classroom settings could enhance the relevance and cultural resonance of SEL, especially at the early childhood and primary school levels, where foundational values are shaped.

Religion and spirituality also play a central role in shaping emotional development and moral behaviour in Nigerian society. Both Islamic and Christian teachings, along with traditional religious beliefs, emphasise compassion, forgiveness, discipline, and social responsibility—qualities that mirror key SEL goals [7]. Faith-based schools, religious gatherings, and spiritual leaders often serve as informal yet powerful agents of emotional and ethical learning. Although these influences typically exist outside the formal education system, they represent valuable allies in advancing SEL. Collaborating with religious institutions and leaders could help embed SEL concepts in ways that reduce resistance, foster community buy-in, and reflect shared social ideals.

In addition to spiritual and oral traditions, a variety of informal community structures function as platforms for social-emotional growth. Youth groups, religious fellowships, local associations, and peer mentoring networks create spaces where children and adolescents can develop leadership, conflict resolution, active listening, and problem-solving skills [2]. These settings often compensate for the lack of psychosocial support services in overstretched schools, particularly in underserved or conflict-affected areas. By recognising and reinforcing these organic SEL environments, policymakers and educators can widen the scope of SEL delivery beyond the classroom and leverage existing community capacity.

Perhaps most importantly, the review highlights a strong alignment between SEL objectives and indigenous African values, including Ubuntu ("I am because we are"), communalism, respect for

elders, and collective responsibility. These values emphasise interconnectedness, empathy, reciprocity, and social harmony – all of which are foundational to SEL. Yet, such principles are rarely acknowledged in formal educational discourse or curriculum planning. Incorporating them explicitly into SEL frameworks and materials would not only enhance cultural relevance but also affirm the validity of local knowledge systems and traditional social ethics.

*Implications for Policy, Practice, and Research.* This review points to the urgent need for a nationally contextualised SEL framework in Nigeria – one that harmonises global best practices with the country's diverse cultural, linguistic, and religious contexts. Policymakers should prioritise embedding SEL across the K–16 education continuum by advancing curriculum reform, strengthening teacher professional development, and establishing learner assessment systems that capture emotional and interpersonal competencies [43–45]. Integrating SEL into both pre-service and in-service teacher training is essential to ensure educators are equipped to model and teach these skills effectively. Equity must be central to implementation, with particular focus on rural schools, marginalised populations, and conflict-affected regions to ensure fair distribution of SEL resources, training opportunities, and support mechanisms. Leveraging innovative delivery channels such as EdTech platforms, mobile learning solutions, and public-private partnerships can help expand SEL access and scalability in under-resourced settings. However, significant research gaps remain, including the need for longitudinal studies to evaluate the long-term impact of SEL on student outcomes, as well as implementation science research to identify what works, for whom, and under which conditions. Systematic policy tracking and evaluation mechanisms should also be established to monitor SEL integration, fidelity, and effectiveness across federal and state education systems. Taken together, these strategic actions can position SEL as a cornerstone of educational quality, national development, and youth wellbeing in Nigeria.

## CONCLUSIONS

This review shows that while SEL is beginning to take root in Nigeria's education system, its implementation is still fragmented and largely driven by short-term donor-funded efforts. At the same time, it reveals a wealth of cultural

strengths such as storytelling, communal values, and faith-based teachings that already support emotional learning in everyday life. These are powerful yet often overlooked tools that could help build an SEL approach that truly fits Nigeria's unique context. What's missing is a coordinated national effort with clear policies, better teacher training, and a shared understanding of what SEL should look like across all levels of education. Now is the time to move beyond scattered

initiatives and make SEL part of the broader vision for education in Nigeria. By grounding SEL in local traditions and expanding access to all learners, especially in rural and underserved areas, Nigeria has a real chance to create more inclusive and supportive schools. In doing so, the country can better prepare young people not just to succeed academically but to thrive emotionally, socially, and ethically in a changing world.

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