

## INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF ORGANIZATIONAL LEADERSHIP

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journal homepage: <https://www.ijol.cikd.ca>



# Integrating Socio-Emotional Learning into Primary Education: A Leadership- Driven Approach to Fostering Holistic Student Development

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### ABSTRACT

#### Keywords:

Socio-emotional learning,  
Emotional regulation, Social  
skills, Primary school,  
Educational environment

#### Received

23 February 2025

#### Received in revised form

20 March 2025

#### Accepted

01 May 2025

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Socio-Emotional Learning (SEL) is an important element of modern education that contributes to the formation of emotional literacy, social skills and academic success of students. The study's relevance is due to the need to integrate innovative methods to create a favourable educational environment in the face of constant social and psychological challenges. The study aims to investigate the impact of socio-emotional learning programmes on the development of emotional and social competences of primary school students. The research methodology uses quantitative and qualitative approaches, including a quasi-experimental design, questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. The study's results confirmed the significant positive impact of SEL programmes on students' emotional regulation, social skills and academic performance. The introduction of interactive methods, such as role-playing, integration of SEL into academic subjects, and active parental involvement, helped improve classroom psychological climate and reduce conflict. In particular, students in the experimental group showed significantly higher results in all criteria compared to the control group. The study's practical significance lies in using the data obtained to develop strategies for the long-term integration of SEL programmes into the educational process of primary schools. The results may be helpful for educators, psychologists and curriculum developers.

Modern education requires new approaches to developing students' skills, including those that contribute to academic success and harmonious social and emotional development. In this context, Socio-Emotional Learning (SEL) is becoming a key component of educational reforms in many countries worldwide. The study's relevance is due to the growing challenges related to students' psychological well-being, classroom conflicts, and decreased learning motivation. Implementation of SES programmes helps create a favourable environment for emotional growth and the development of cooperation and self-regulation skills, which are necessary for successfully adapting children to society. Recent studies confirm the effectiveness of SEN in different age groups. Domitrovich et al. (2022) highlighted the positive impact of the Facing History and Ourselves programme on the emotional literacy of secondary school students, while Hosokawa et al. (2023) demonstrated such programmes' effectiveness in Japan's preschools. As noted by Molyneux et al. (2023), programmes adapted to the cultural context promote the development of socio-emotional competences in younger students, mainly through active natural learning. In their meta-analysis, Shi and Cheung (2024a) identify key components of successful SEN programmes, focusing on integrating emotional literacy into educational practices. However, despite significant progress in the study of ESP, several challenges remain. In particular, the long-term impact of such programmes on students' life achievements, the best approaches to integrating them into the educational process in a multicultural environment, and ways to effectively engage parents in these programmes are poorly understood. In addition, the research has been conducted within the Ukrainian education system's unique cultural and social characteristics.

This study aims to analyse how a socio-emotional learning programme has affected the creation of emotional and social abilities of primary school pupils in Ukraine. The objectives are: analysis of existing approaches to realising SES programmes, an evaluation of their impact on psychological climate in classrooms, key factors for successful realisation of such programmes in the environment of local education, and recommendations for their integration into the educational process.

## Literature Review

Modern research on socio-emotional learning is important in shaping successful educational practices. More specifically, Domitrovich et al. (2022) demonstrate the effectiveness of the Facing History and Ourselves programme on emotional literacy in secondary school students. Hosokawa et al. (2023) analyse the impact of SES programmes on preschoolers in Japan, confirming the effectiveness of such interventions at an early age. At the same time, Molyneux et al. (2023) propose innovative approaches that use nature-based learning to promote the emotional development of younger students.

Morton et al. (2024) highlight the impact of school racial composition on children's motivation and academic engagement. Bottiani et al. (2024) developed the R-CITY programme to promote social and emotional development through equity. Schlag et al. (2024) focus on the challenges of implementing school-based initiatives in returning to full-time education.

Shi and Cheung (2024a) use a meta-analysis to identify key components of successful SES programmes. Jones et al. (2023) focus on assessing the psychometric characteristics of student surveys on school climate and SES in collaboration with researchers. Martinez-Yarza et al. (2023) systematically review instruments measuring social-emotional skills, while Arda

Tuncdemir and Napoli (2024) explore how children's literature shapes teachers' attitudes towards SES.

Kaspar and Massey's (2023) research focuses on integrating SEN into primary school. They propose approaches to integrating SEN into the daily practice of primary schools, focusing on introducing interactive methods. Green et al. (2021) evaluate the SPARK programme that promotes skills development in younger students - the researchers analyse the SPARK programme, which improves social skills and emotional resilience in primary school students through interactive methods. Valido et al. (2023) conducted a pilot evaluation of the Sources of Strength programme, focusing on its effectiveness in primary school.

Al-Jbouri et al. (2023) evaluate the impact of a teacher-centred approach to developing social-emotional skills, proving its effectiveness in primary school. Hosokawa et al. (2024) confirm the effectiveness of early development interventions through social-emotional learning. Coelho et al. (2023) examine a Portuguese SEN programme that promotes the development of competences in younger students.

Maglica et al. (2020) analyse the relationship between socio-emotional competences and academic achievement, while Wong et al. (2014) investigate a programme to develop SES skills among Hong Kong primary school students. Lörinczová (2017) examines the social acceptance of integrated students in mainstream schools, highlighting the issue of inclusion. Ülvey and Özkul (2018) developed a scale for assessing socio-emotional competences among secondary school students.

Martinez-Yarza et al. (2024) investigate the impact of family involvement on students' socio-emotional development, highlighting the role of school engagement as a mediator, especially in the European context. Shi and Cheung (2024b) evaluate the effectiveness of a socio-emotional curriculum for primary schools in China, focusing on its impact on emotional regulation and social skills. Valido et al. (2023) investigate the Sources of Strength programme, which positively impacts the psychosocial climate of schools and students' social skills. Adiba and Latip (2021) emphasise the development of responsible character through SES programmes, while Kaur and Sharma (2023) highlight the critical need for socio-emotional competences for the successful development of primary school students.

Although significant progress has been achieved in socio-emotional learning, the long-term effects of SEL on students' life achievements and optimal approaches to incorporating such programmes into the educational process in different cultural contexts have been explored less.

## Method

This study used a comprehensive approach combining quantitative and qualitative methods. The effectiveness of Socio-Emotional Learning (SEL) programmes was evaluated using a questionnaire and a quasi-experimental design. The SES programme sample was an experimental group of 255 primary school students; the control group (256 students) studied under the standard programme. The student's social skills level was assessed using psychometric instruments like the Emotional Competence Scale and a teacher questionnaire. Statistical methods were used to analyse quantitative data, such as the arithmetic mean, standard deviation and t-test to compare the mean between groups. The evaluation was conducted in three stages: at the beginning of the study, one year later, and two years after the programme implementation. Standardised data collection and research methods were used to ensure the data's reliability and validity. The qualitative part of the

research was presented as semi-structured interviews with teachers and parents that helped us gain knowledge of their perceptions of the efficiency of SER programmes. We also looked at teachers' reports of how students performed academically and how they changed behaviourally to get a more nuanced picture of how programme impact played out. As a result of the findings, we got a holistic picture of socio-emotional learning programmes' effectiveness in the Ukrainian education system.

## Results

Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) educational programmes demonstrate substantial effectiveness in building emotional and social abilities in primary school children based on research analysis. Through EFL programming, students learn emotional regulation, empathy, conflict resolution skills, and cooperation, leading to better classroom climate and student-student relationships. Research by Kaspar and Massey (2023) proves that interactive methods effectively build social competences among primary school students. Green et al. (2021) showcase how SPARK actively engages children in social and emotional learning to build resilience and develop social competences, leading to reduced bullying and better behavioural results. Shi and Cheung (2024a) demonstrated through their meta-analysis that programmes delivering emotional literacy integration with daily classroom teaching and parental education participation achieve maximal success for social and emotional needs. Martinez-Yarza et al. (2024) demonstrate that the primary social development of children depends heavily on active involvement from parents and the school community.

Programmes that adapt their SES designs to match local cultural dynamics and social norms are necessary. According to Hosokawa et al. (2024) research, child-specific educational interventions implemented in Japanese classrooms create meaningful outcomes in early childhood emotional skills development alongside fundamental interpersonal competences. Social and emotional learning programmes effectively develop primary school students' emotional and social competences. Additionally, research must investigate the optimal implementation strategies of these programmes while addressing challenges in a multicultural setting.

Modern education uses SES as an essential component for developing student abilities in emotional skills and social competences and achieving overall wellness outcomes. SEN enhances primary school learning conditions by facilitating communication and self-regulation skill development (Green et al., 2021). Curricula exclusively tailored to cultural settings support learning effectiveness and elevate student participation in their social circle (Hosokawa et al., 2023). The educational process aims to discover methods that support parents' engagement and dynamic participatory involvement within their children's education (Shi & Cheung, 2024a). The best practices for implementing socio-emotional learning into educational fields are organised in Table 1.

**Table 1**

*Optimal Methods of Integrating Socio-emotional Learning into Educational Practice*

Methodology	Implementation features	Expected results
Interactive games	Using role-playing games and simulations to develop social skills	Improving communication skills, reducing the level of conflict
Integration of SE into educational subjects	Using SES principles in the study of mathematics, language, and natural science	Developing emotional regulation, improving academic engagement
Parental involvement	Conducting joint trainings, workshops, open lessons	Strengthening cooperation between students, teachers and parents
Use of technology	Interactive platforms, applications for the development of emotional literacy	Increasing student engagement, developing emotional resilience

Source: Developed by the authors based on (Green et al., 2021; Hosokawa et al., 2023; Shi & Cheung, 2024a)

Primary school practices incorporating SEN lead to better development of children's essential social and emotional competences. Role-playing games and implementing SES principles in curriculum subjects while actively engaging parents and using technology show exceptional potential for education improvement. The successful integration of these approaches requires consideration of cultural factors alongside how they affect each individual child and assessing the school's community needs. Additional studies will help maximise these educational methods to achieve enduring educational results.

Students' Academic performance depends heavily on their social-emotional learning achievements because these skills develop their emotional and social abilities. Research indicates that SES programmes deliver short-term educational enhancements and create foundational skills needed for success in school and life. Green et al. (2021) explain how their SPARK programme enhanced students' cognitive skills and motivation. According to Shi and Cheung (2024b), students must control their emotions to reach optimal academic results. The development of a positive psychosocial learning setting helps lower student risk of experiencing emotional burnout, according to Valido et al. (2023). The long-term effects of Social and Emotional Learning programmes on student academic achievement appear in Table 2.

**Table 2**

*The Long-term Impact of SEN Programmes on Students' Academic Performance*

Influencing factor	Mechanism of action	Long-lasting results
Emotional regulation	Learning to control emotions through interactive exercises	Improved concentration and reduced stress levels
Social skills	Development of skills of cooperation, empathy, active listening	Improved interaction with peers, reduced conflict
Motivation.	Developing a positive attitude to learning through encouragement and support	Increased academic performance and interest in the learning process
Psychosocial environment	Involving families in the educational process, creating a supportive environment	Strengthening self-esteem, improving cognitive and behavioural performance

*Source:* Developed by the authors based on (Green et al., 2021; Shi & Cheung, 2024b; Valido et al., 2023)

Students who participate in socio-emotional learning programmes demonstrate long-term improvements in learning abilities and conduct, improve motivation, and establish circumstances that support their sustained growth. This impact consists of four core elements: regulation of emotions along with social skills acquisition and the establishment of a constructive psychosocial milieu and purposeful parental engagement. Socio-emotional learning majors are an educational system that trains students to control their emotions while learning skills for building positive social relationships, managing disputes, and making ethically sound choices. By integrating emotional and social components into education, teachers create enhanced student academic outcomes and foster strong, psychologically adjusted learners who develop confidence and resilience.

The primary purpose of the programme centres on developing emotional intelligence in students. Students need to learn about emotional self-identification, expression techniques, management tools of their emotions, and interpretation skills that monitor societal emotional states. Educating children about empathy is necessary because it enhances classroom interactions while creating positive classroom atmospheres with maintained trust. As part of the SEN programme, students develop interaction skills by incorporating cooperation, active listening, conflict resolution abilities, and establishing constructive relationships. Children



learn practical communication skills, teamwork, and partnership through interactive role-playing activities, group discussions, and independent projects. Ending the educational process at school requires inclusive student engagement alongside family and community stakeholders. Fieldwork requires building alliances between students and their teachers alongside their family members. Joint workshops, training, and events function to maintain approach integrity by building a unified support system for children.

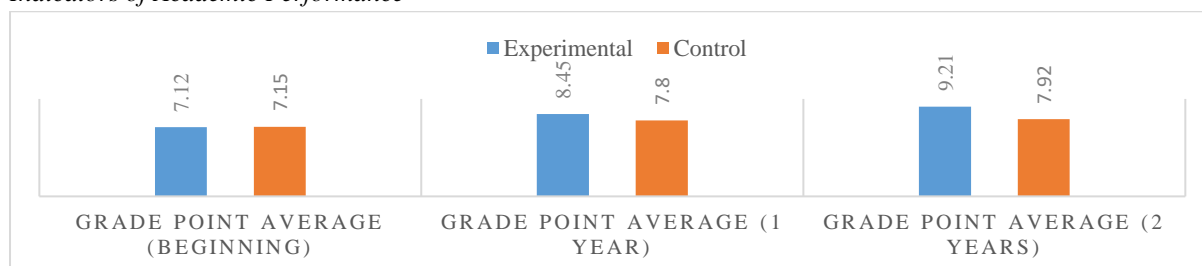
The programme adjusts its content according to cultural dynamics and social requirements while accommodating the individual characteristics of each school district. Each nation within the programme adopts different targets according to their local educational reality to reduce bullying and develop emotional resilience while promoting inclusive education. The programming structure maintains adaptability, proving effective within varied educational settings. SEN is a vital educational instrument that supports students in reaching emotional maturity while fostering social growth and delivering academic accomplishment. SEN integration within educational settings builds balanced learning spaces that allow students to achieve maximum development potential.

A three-year longitudinal study of primary school students in five schools in Ukraine was conducted to assess the impact of SEN programmes: Taras Shevchenko Lyceum No. 1 in Kyiv, Kharkiv Specialised School No. 132, Lyceum No. 5 in Lviv, Chernivtsi Gymnasium No. 3 and Zaporizhzhia Specialised School No. 71. The study involved 511 students divided into two groups: A study included two groups: the experimental group having 255 students who participated in the SEN programme alongside the control group with 256 students who studied through the standard programme. Researchers evaluated the enduring effects of socially-based educational learning (SEL) programmes on academia-based performance outcomes for students in primary education settings. The research evaluated core subject performance in mathematics and Ukrainian language and sciences and tracked student emotional and social development across three academic years.

The research utilised three key assessment criteria: students' mathematical and language subject grades, emotional competence evaluations through psychological scales, and social competences evaluated by the teachers. The research team employed statistical approaches to data analysis with arithmetic mean, standard deviation, and t-test to evaluate group mean differences. Researchers investigated the current data twice during one subsequent year following the project's startup and then investigated it again after another year had passed. [Figure 1](#) showcases the analysis results, which evaluate how socio-emotional learning affects primary school students' academic outcomes.

**Figure 1**

*Results of the Analysis of the Impact of Social and Emotional Learning Programmes on Primary School Students: Indicators of Academic Performance*

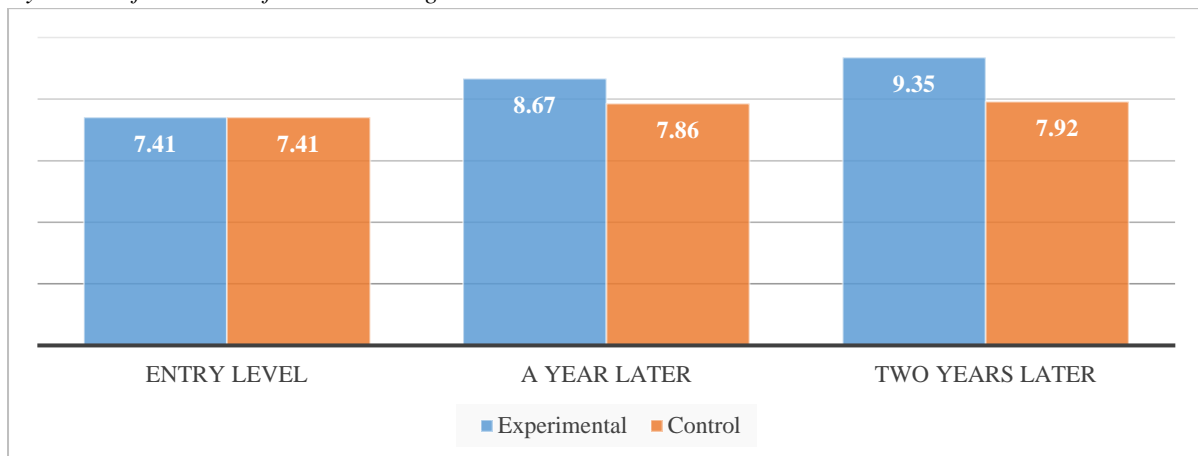


At the beginning of the study, the average score of the experimental group was 7.12, and the control group was 7.15, which indicates that the student's level of knowledge in both groups was almost the same. However, a year after the implementation of the SES programme, there was a significant increase. In the experimental group, the average score rose to 8.45 (+1.33), while in the control group, this figure rose only to 7.80 (+0.65). Two years after the start of the programme, the experimental group gained another +0.76, reaching 9.21, while the control group's average score increased by only +0.12, to 7.92. These results indicate a significant positive impact of the SEN programme on the academic achievement of students in the experimental group.

Figures 2 and 3 show the study results of emotional regulation and social skills.

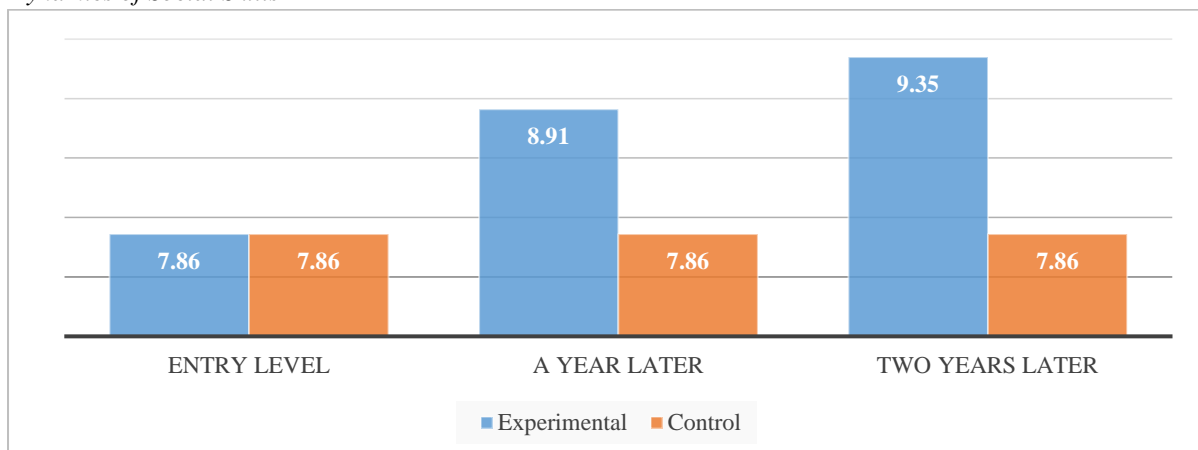
**Figure 2**

*Dynamics of the Level of Emotional Regulation*



**Figure 3**

*Dynamics of Social Skills*



Researchers found that emotional regulation scores at the study start averaged 7.41 points among control and experimental participants. A year later, the SES programme implementation produced a 1.26 point (+1.26) average level increase in emotional regulation for experimental group participants, while control participants experienced a standard deviation increase to 7.86 (+0.45). Research shows that children substantially improve emotional control through interactive SEN programme methods. Both evaluations of social skills development

demonstrate significant positive effects from implementing the SEN programming. The experimental group participants demonstrated improved emotional control scores, moving from 7.86 to 9.35 (+1.49), but control group participants recorded a minimal score increase to 7.86 (+0.45). The SEN programme effectively develops empathy, children's cooperative behaviour, and the ability to interact with others.

The experimental group's improved test scores stem from innovative educational practices through role-playing games, interactive learning materials, and active parental classroom engagement. Through these innovative teaching approaches, students improve their academic performance and develop stronger emotional maturity and social adaptability skills. The control group's traditional teaching methods delivered small results because these methods failed to incorporate adaptive or interactive practices needed for emotional and social competence development. Educational results from the experimental group demonstrate the urgent need for Social-emotional Skills integration in education to promote students' complete development. Comparison data regarding academic achievement, emotional regulation, and social capabilities between experimental and control group participants can be found in [Tables 3 and 4](#).

**Table 3**

*Comparative Results of Emotional Regulation and Social Skills of the Experimental and Control Groups*

Group	Level of emotional regulation (beginning)	Level of emotional regulation (1 year)	Level of emotional regulation (2 years)	Social skills (beginning)	Social skills (1 year)	Social skills (2 years)
Experimental	7.41	8.67	9.35	7.86	8.91	9.35
Control	7.41	7.86	7.92	7.86	7.86	7.86

**Table 4**

*Comparative Results of Academic Performance of the Experimental and Control Groups*

Group	Academic grade point average (beginning)	Academic grade point average (1 year)	Grade point average (2 years)
Experimental	7.12	8.45	9.21
Control	7.15	7.80	7.92

Students in the experimental group attained improved average scores during one and two years of SES programme delivery compared to students in the control group. Core subjects improved average scores from 7.12 to 9.21 in the experimental group, while the control group advanced only from 7.15 to 7.92. Two years of data analysis demonstrated statistically noteworthy differences between both groups ( $p < 0.05$ ).

The experimental group members demonstrated peak emotional regulation capability as measured through a score of 8.67, surpassing the results achieved by the control group (7.41). The evaluation demonstrated that participants in the experimental group had higher social skills capability scores than their control group peers (9.35 versus 7.86). The research findings demonstrated that educational programmes targeting social-emotional learning produced important beneficial outcomes regarding academic performance, students' emotional control, and social competences. The findings demonstrate that schools can implement SES programmes effectively to generate sustained developmental impacts in children daily. The gathered data serves as foundations for research investigations and educational programme improvement initiatives.



## Discussion

Multiple studies validate the study results, showing how effectively socio-emotional learning programmes teach primary school students functional, emotional and social competences. For example, Kaspar and Massey (2023) emphasise the importance of interactive methods for developing students' social skills, consistent with our results. The SPARK programme analysed by Green et al. (2021) confirms the effectiveness of actively engaging children in interaction, which helps to reduce bullying and improve behavioural outcomes, similar to our findings. However, some aspects remain controversial.

A unique aspect of our study is the analysis of the impact of the SEN programme in the context of Ukrainian schools. For example, the adaptation of programmes to students' cultural and social characteristics demonstrates an increase in emotional regulation and social skills, especially in the experimental group. Hosokawa et al. (2024) report similar results in their study of preschoolers in Japan, which confirms the universality of SES principles. A comparison of our data with the results of other researchers shows that the general trends are consistent. However, differences in the impact of programmes in different contexts may be explained by cultural differences or differences in methodology. For example, the study by Bottiani et al. (2024) emphasises the role of racial equality in SEA programmes, which is less relevant to the Ukrainian context but important in multicultural countries.

In addition to the positive aspects, some limitations are worth noting. In particular, SEN programmes must be integrated into the classroom in the long term to ensure sustainable results. Our data show gains in academic achievement and social-emotional skills after two years, but further research is needed to assess the long-term impact. Schlag et al. (2024) highlight the challenges of implementing SEN in the post-pandemic period, which also requires additional research. The study findings validate the SES programme's success while following international patterns yet mandating customisable solutions to suit specific settings. Further research about multicultural environments, parent involvement, and interactive teaching approaches should be done to maximise benefits.

## Conclusion

The study's results confirmed the vital role in enhancing primary school students' emotional regulation, social skills and academic performance. The findings indicate that interactive methodologies, parental involvement and cultural application of programmes positively affect the educational atmosphere. The study compared the results to what was expected; however, the results indicated more significant increases in emotional regulation and social skills in the experimental group than the expected results. The study's contribution is twofold: it shows how local circumstances of the Ukrainian education system affect the results of the SES effectiveness and expands scientific knowledge on their potential. The study's practical significance lies in using data to improve educational practices. The study's main limitations were the long time it took to implement the programmes and the dependence on the involvement of all participants in the educational process. Further research should focus on developing long-term strategies for integrating SEN in a multicultural environment, assessing their impact on students' life achievements, and developing universal methods for different educational contexts.

## Declarations

## Acknowledgements

Not applicable.

## Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

## Ethics Approval

Not applicable.

## Funding Acknowledgements

Not applicable.

## Citation to this article

Pavlushchenko, N., Kuznetsova, O., Tolmachova, I., Yeromenko, O., & Bludova, Yu. (2025). Integrating socio-emotional learning into primary education: A leadership-driven approach to fostering holistic student development. *International Journal of Organizational Leadership*, 14(First Special Issue), 609-619. <https://doi.org/10.33844/ijol.2025.60504>

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