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CHALLENGES OF INTEGRATING SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE INTO HIGHER EDUCATION

1. The present paper examines the main challenges affecting the integration of social and emotional intelligence into higher education.

2. Contemporary higher education is undergoing profound transformation driven by globalisation, technological advancement, social instability and changing labour market requirements. Universities are no longer expected solely to transmit disciplinary knowledge; instead, they are increasingly responsible for preparing students to function effectively in complex social environments, manage emotional challenges, collaborate across cultures, and adapt to uncertainty. In this context, social and emotional intelligence becomes a critical educational priority.

3. In current academic discourse, social intelligence is understood as an individual's capacity to perceive and interpret their own behaviour and that of others accurately and to regulate their actions effectively within diverse social contexts. This concept is intrinsically linked to emotional intelligence, which refers to the capacity to identify, regulate and effectively utilise emotions in directing thinking, behaviour, and interpersonal relations. These competencies enable students to cope with academic

stress, maintain psychological well-being, build meaningful relationships, and demonstrate responsible and ethical behaviour.

4. Social-emotional learning represents the primary pedagogical framework for integrating social and emotional intelligence into higher education. SEL refers to the process through which individuals acquire and use knowledge, skills and attitudes to form healthy identities, regulate emotions, pursue personal and collective goals, demonstrate empathy, build supportive relationships, and make responsible and ethical decisions [4].

5. Core SEL competencies include self-awareness, self-regulation, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. When embedded into university curricula, SEL transforms social-emotional development from an incidental outcome into a systematic and intentional educational objective. SEL is grounded in experiential and reflective pedagogical approaches, such as collaborative learning, discussion, role-play, guided reflection and feedback. These methods create supportive learning environments in which students can practice and internalise social and emotional skills. Influenced by the works of **Daniel Goleman** [3], **Howard Gardner** [2] **John Dewey** [1], SEL aligns with a holistic vision of education that integrates intellectual, emotional and social growth.

6. The development of social and emotional intelligence has increasingly become a matter of educational policy at both national and international levels. In many developed countries, social and emotional competencies are introduced in early childhood education, further developed in schools, and refined in higher education.

7. In the United States, SEL standards have been implemented across all states, providing a coherent framework for social-emotional development throughout the educational trajectory. In the United Kingdom, the SEAL programme represents a comprehensive approach to promoting social and emotional skills within schools. China and Ukraine have also demonstrated growing institutional commitment through large-scale assessments and pilot programmes.

8. At the global level, organisations such as UNESCO, UNICEF, and the OECD play a decisive role in promoting and standardising social and emotional competencies.

The OECD's report "*Skills for Social Progress: The Power of Social and Emotional Skills*" [5] and the following comprehensive international assessment of adolescents' social and emotional skills have marked the beginning of systematic measurement and implementation of social and emotional competence worldwide.

9. Despite growing international recognition of the value of social and emotional intelligence, its integration into higher education remains inconsistent and fragmented due to the following key challenges:

- Traditional education prioritises theoretical and academic instruction over social-emotional development, with teachers focusing more on task performance and engagement than on emotional regulation and interpersonal skills, particularly among older students. Such misconceptions about SEL weaken teacher commitment and institutional support, thereby hindering its effective implementation.

- Assessing social-emotional learning remains problematic due to the absence of reliable measurement tools, leading to inconsistent and non-standardized evaluation practices. As a result, despite the implementation of various SEL initiatives, a number of universities lack effective mechanisms for assessing students' social-emotional competencies, leaving their actual level of development largely unmeasured.

- Insufficient teacher training and limited institutional support hinder the implementation of SEL in universities. Educators often lack preparation, face time constraints and may resist adopting new practices, as universities frequently fail to provide adequate resources, guidance or administrative backing, leaving SEL programmes marginal and inconsistently applied.

- Cultural differences and misunderstandings can create major obstacles to the effective implementation of SEL. Programmes developed in Western contexts may conflict with local norms, values and understandings of emotions, social interactions, and child-rearing. Without cultural adaptation, SEL initiatives often face challenges such as misalignment with community expectations, unclear competency definitions, and difficulties integrating with local educational goals.

- Online education, while increasing access and flexibility, can limit direct interpersonal interaction and foster social isolation, hindering the development of

social and emotional skills. For Ukrainian students, the COVID-19 pandemic and ongoing war have intensified these effects by reducing peer interaction, limiting opportunities for communication, empathy, and collaboration, as well as increasing stress and anxiety. Trauma, displacement and disrupted learning environments further compromise emotional well-being, trust, and sense of belonging, underscoring the urgent need for socially supportive educational strategies.

10. In response to the identified challenges in promoting social and emotional learning in universities, the following strategies are proposed to ensure its effective and sustainable implementation:

- Universities should embed social and emotional competencies directly into core academic activities rather than treating them as optional. Integrating SEL principles into group work, case studies and reflective assignments allows students to develop essential social-emotional skills within the context of their disciplinary learning, supporting both academic achievement and personal growth without adding extracurricular burden.

- To improve the evaluation of social and emotional competencies, educators should employ formative and qualitative methods, such as self-assessments, peer feedback, portfolios, and reflective exercises. Establishing clear performance criteria enhances consistency and transparency, while a developmental focus emphasizes students' progress and skill growth rather than solely summative outcomes.

- To overcome insufficient teacher training and limited institutional support, universities should implement systematic professional development that equips educators with the skills and knowledge to integrate social and emotional competencies into teaching. This should be complemented by strong institutional commitment, including leadership backing, clear policies and dedicated resources. Incorporating SEL into staff induction, offering ongoing mentoring and recognizing educators' efforts through incentives or workload adjustments can further promote sustainable and effective integration of social-emotional learning.

- To address cultural and conceptual misunderstandings, universities should adopt culturally responsive approaches to integrating social and emotional

competencies, respecting diverse values, communication styles, and social norms. Developing clear frameworks and shared definitions promotes a common understanding among educators and students, while engaging learners in dialogue, co-creating activities, providing intercultural training for staff, and adapting SEL practices to local contexts enhances inclusivity, relevance, and effectiveness.

- To overcome challenges in online education, institutions should create digital environments that facilitate social interaction and emotional engagement. This involves structured collaborative activities, discussion forums and peer-feedback exercises, alongside explicit instruction in digital social-emotional skills. Virtual mentoring and counselling can further support students' ongoing social and emotional development.

11. Implementing these strategies can enhance students' social and emotional development, strengthen interpersonal skills, improve emotional regulation, foster collaboration and empathy, and increase engagement and a sense of belonging. By integrating SEL into core academic activities, culturally responsive practices, professional development for educators, and supportive online environments, universities can promote both academic success and holistic personal growth.

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