

# SKILLS4DEV



MAY 2023 | ISSUE 4

## Fostering Socioemotional Skills in Low- and Middle-Income Countries: From the *Why* to the *How*

Dear Skills community,

We are delighted to present you with the fourth issue of the *Skills4Dev* Knowledge Digest! In this month's edition, we dive into the topic of **socioemotional skills training, from childhood to adulthood, in low- and middle-income countries**. With the support of World Bank experts, we have curated a collection of resources and put together Skills GSG services that we hope will help your work.

We would like to hear from you! Please send us your ideas, suggestions, questions, or collaboration opportunities at [skillsgsg@worldbankgroup.org](mailto:skillsgsg@worldbankgroup.org). Learn more about what the GSG can do for you at the end of this digest.

Happy reading!

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## Editorial

Though it was not obvious a decade ago, the importance of socioemotional skills for children and adults in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) has become widely accepted. [Policymakers recognize these skills](#) – defined as attitudes and behaviors that enable people to navigate personal and social situations effectively – as part of the set of foundational skills, along with literacy and numeracy.

This increased acceptance is partly explained by a growing evidence base in LMICs. Building on studies in high-income countries (HICs), [longitudinal](#) and cross-sectional surveys of [children](#) and [adults](#) in different regions showed that socioemotional skills were linked with [educational](#), [labor market](#), and [other outcomes](#) in LMICs. Such surveys also revealed that [measuring socioemotional skills is challenging in such contexts](#), which opened the door to systematic analyses of measures' validity and [innovations in measurement](#). Besides, positive impacts of socioemotional learning programs at each life stage – from [early childhood](#), to [middle childhood \(ungated\)](#), [adolescence](#), [youth \(ungated\)](#), and [adulthood \(ungated\)](#) – demonstrated that it is possible to foster these skills through relatively low-cost interventions in LMICs.

At the same time, global trends have raised the profile of socioemotional skills. The rapid pace of technology in HICs, and increasingly in LMICs as well, has [increased the demand for jobs more intensive in skills that cannot be automated](#), such as socioemotional skills. The COVID-19 pandemic also exposed the key role of socioemotional skills in supporting well-being and learning: school closures hampered the socioemotional well-being of [children](#) and [youth](#), and fostering socioemotional skills was acknowledged as [crucial to recover foundational learning](#) once schools reopened.

If policymakers in LMICs are now confident as to *why* they need to focus on socioemotional skills, challenges remain in *how* to foster these skills. The plethora of terms covering different constructs (e.g. “non-cognitive skills,” “life skills,” “21st century skills,” “soft skills”) and the explosion in the number of taxonomies have brought confusion, despite [valiant efforts at developing crosswalks between different frameworks](#) and proposing [integrative approaches](#). Partly because of this conceptual complexity, the process of diagnosis and identification of relevant skills to foster in a particular context remains *ad hoc*. Importantly, there is also limited understanding of how to adapt successful programs from HICs to very different LMIC contexts and how to scale up socioemotional skills programs and integrate them into the broader education systems. Still, the progress already made in the last decade and the continuing rapid pace of research and policy practice in this area make us confident that we will see more integrated knowledge on socioemotional skills in LMICs in the coming years.



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## FEATURED WORKS ON SOCIOEMOTIONAL SKILLS



### [Eight Weeks of Therapy, Plus some Cash, can Change the Lives of Violent Men](#)

Blattman | Op-Ed about an impact evaluation | 2022 | Liberia

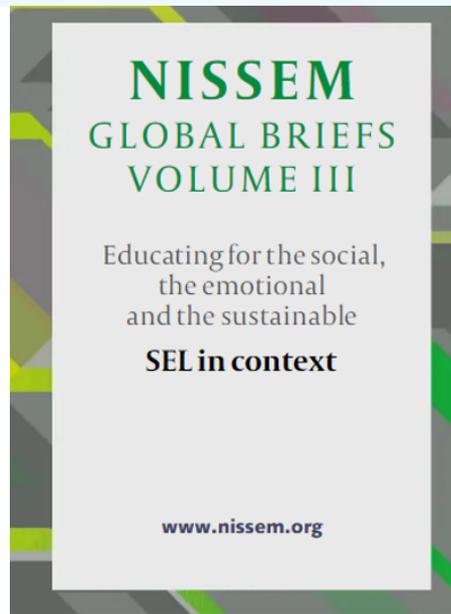
This Op-Ed summarizes a [forthcoming article \(ungated\)](#) on how cognitive



### [Reducing Bullying: Evidence from a Parental Involvement Program on Empathy Education](#)

Cunha et al. | Impact evaluation | 2023 | China

A scalable and low-cost program for **parents of middle schoolers in China** delivered



### [NISSEM Global Briefs Volume III: SEL in Context](#)

NISSEM | Brief compilation | 2022 | Global

The third edition of a collection of briefs on the **research and practice of school-based**

behavioral therapy plus a cash grant halved crime and violence behaviors for the most troubled young men in Liberia at least 10 years later with remarkable cost-effectiveness.

through a social network increased parents' time investment and children's empathy and reduced bullying incidents.

socioemotional learning interventions in LMICs.

## ESSENTIAL READING



### [Taking Skills Seriously: Toward an Integrative Model and Agenda for Social, Emotional, and Behavioral Skills](#)

Soto et al. | Framework paper | 2021 | Global

This paper proposes an **integrative framework** for socioemotional skills with five major domains (social engagement, cooperation, self-management, emotional resilience, and innovation) that clarifies the **distinction between skills and personality traits** and suggests a policy agenda.



### [Estimating the Production Function for Human Capital: Results from a Randomized Controlled Trial in Colombia](#)

Attanasio et al. | Impact evaluation | 2021 | Colombia

An **early childhood intervention in Colombia** that promoted suitable parenting and stimulation to children improved the children's cognitive and **socioemotional skills** through the increase of **parents' material and time investments** in their children ([ungated](#)).

### [NAVIGATING SEL FROM THE INSIDE OUT](#)

LOOKING INSIDE & ACROSS 33 LEADING SEL PROGRAMS  
A PRACTICAL RESOURCE FOR SCHOOLS AND OST PROVIDERS

#### **PRESCHOOL & ELEMENTARY FOCUS**

REVISED & EXPANDED SECOND EDITION

JULY 2021

Stephanie M. Jones, Katharine E. Brush, Thelma Ramirez, Zoe Xinyi Mao, Michele Marens, Samantha Wettje, Kristen Finney, Natasha Raich, Nicole Podoloff, Jennifer Kahn, Sophie Barnes, Laura Stickle, Gretchen Brion-Meisels, Joseph McIntyre, Jorge Cuartas, and Rebecca Bailey

THE EASEL LAB @ THE HARVARD GRADUATE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION  
WITH FUNDING FROM THE WALLACE FOUNDATION



EASEL  
Lab

Commissioned by  
Wallace

### [Navigating SEL from the Inside Out. Looking Inside & Across 33 Leading SEL Programs](#)

Jones et al. | Policy report | 2021 | Global

This policy report provides a **detailed practical guide of 33 pre-K through primary school programs**, encompassing curricular content, program highlights, and evidence of effectiveness, including in some LMICs.

# WHAT'S BREWING AT THE WBG?



## [Can Psychosocial Interventions Make Anti-poverty Programmes More Cost-effective? Evidence from Niger](#)

Bossuroy et al. | Blog on an impact evaluation | 2023 | Niger

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An anti-poverty program for women had **higher impacts** on consumption and revenues when combined with **components fostering their aspirations and socioemotional skills** than alone and at a low extra cost.



## [Measuring Socioemotional Skills and Emotion Regulation in the Field](#)

Dinarte-Diaz | Blog on impact evaluations | 2023 | Central America

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This blog presents **innovative approaches and tools** used to **measure socioemotional skills** in impact evaluations in **Central America**, including electroencephalograms, AI-based algorithms, and task-based games.



## [Which Socio-Emotional Skills Matter Most for Women's Earnings?: New Insights from Sub-Saharan Africa](#)

Ajayi et al. | Brief based on a research paper | 2023 | Africa

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This brief summarizes findings from survey data in **17 African countries** on **gender differences in socioemotional skills** and how they link to their education and labor market outcomes.

## Additional publications on Socioemotional Skills

### [Human Capital Development: New Evidence on the Production of Socio-Emotional Skills](#)

Mitchell et al. | Working paper | 2020 | Peru

A **14-year panel survey in Peru** provides rare empirical evidence on the development of cognitive and **socioemotional skills from childhood to young adulthood**.

### [Building Social Cohesion in Ethnically Mixed Schools: An Intervention on Perspective Taking](#)

Alan et al. | Published article | 2021 | Turkey

A program to develop **perspective-taking** in children in **Turkish elementary schools** affected by a large **influx of Syrian refugee children** significantly improves **prosocial behavior** (trust, reciprocity, and altruism).

### [Can Grit Be Taught? Lessons from a Nationwide Field Experiment with Middle-School Students](#)

Santos et al. | Working paper | 2022 | North Macedonia

A nationwide low-cost **primary-school curriculum in North Macedonia** designed to foster **grit and self-regulation** made students more perseverant and industrious but also less able to maintain consistent interests for long periods.

### [Can Teaching Growth Mindset and Self-Management at School Shift Student Outcomes and Teacher Mindsets Evidence from a RCT in Indonesia](#)

Johnson et al. | Working paper | 2020 | Indonesia

A large-scale **middle-school curriculum in Indonesia** shifted some of students' **socioemotional skills and study behaviors**, and **teachers' mindsets** towards positive perception of failure for learning and progress but **did not raise students' national exam scores or educational aspirations**.

### [The Impact Evaluation of Vietnam's Escuela Nueva \(New School\) Program on Students' Cognitive and Non-cognitive Skills](#)

Dang et al. | Working paper | 2022 | Vietnam

A **primary-school classroom reform program in Vietnam**, inspired by a program from Colombia, did not raise cognitive skills but **improved socioemotional skills**, with stronger impact for students from **ethnic minorities**.

### [Making Entrepreneurs: Returns to Training Youth in Hard Versus Soft Business Skills](#)

Chioda et al. | Working paper | 2021 | Uganda

A mini-MBA for **high school students in Uganda** covering **business and socioemotional skills** increased their **earnings four years later**, most of which was generated through self-employment.

### [Training, Soft Skills and Productivity: Evidence from a Field Experiment in Retail](#)

Prada et al. | Working paper | 2021 | Chile

An intervention to **boost leadership and communication skills** among **store managers and sales associates** from a large retailer increased substantially their store-level **productivity and total sales** and numbers of transactions for all workers.

### [Conscientiousness and Labor Market Returns: Evidence from a Field Experiment in West Africa](#)

Allemand et al. | Working paper | 2023 | Senegal

A training fostering **conscientiousness-related skills of low-skilled employees in Senegal** raised their likelihood to **stay in their job and have higher wages** after 9 months.

### [70 to 700 to 70,000: Lessons from the Jamaica Experiment](#)

Araujo et al. | Working paper | 2021 | Jamaica, Colombia, Peru

This working paper provides lessons from **scaling up an early childhood development intervention** with impressive impacts on ~70 children in **Jamaica** to ~700 children in **Colombia** and to ~70,000 children in **Peru**.

### [Socio-Emotional Drivers of Youth Unemployment: The Case of Higher Educated Youth in Sudan](#)

De Martino et al. | Working paper | 2022 | South Sudan

A **survey in Sudan** shows that important perceived **constraints for jobless highly educated youth** are low socioemotional skills and aspirations.

### [The Demand for Digital and Complementary Skills in Southeast Asia](#)

Cunningham et al. | Working paper | 2022 | Cambodia, Malaysia, Thailand, Vietnam

Data from **online job vacancies in Southeast Asia** show that, regardless of the digital intensity of the job, virtually all occupations **require not only digital skills, but also cognitive and socioemotional skills**, suggesting that these skill sets are **complementary**.

### [Are Growth Mindset, Mastery Orientation, and Grit Promising for Promoting Achievement in the Global South? Psychometric Evaluations among Indonesian Adolescents](#)

Napolitano et al. | Working paper | 2021 | Indonesia

**Measures of growth mindset, mastery orientation, and grit for adolescents** had no gender bias and **translated well from the U.S. to the Indonesian context**, implying they can be used in academic achievement interventions.

## SKILLS GSG - HELP DESK



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- > [March 2023 | Career Guidance](#)
- > [February 2023 | EdTech for TVET](#)



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Do you have any collaboration opportunities, want to share your recent publication, or have a skills-related question? Kindly contact Judith Perez ([jperezgarza@worldbank.org](mailto:jperezgarza@worldbank.org)), *Skills4Dev* Knowledge Digest coordinator.

## Key resources to support the skills-related work within the WB community (World Bank staff only)



[Skills GSG intranet site](#) (FURL: skills/)



[Thematic Knowledge Digest Archive](#)



[Office Hours](#) with Skills Global Leads



[Events](#) material and recordings



[Consultant Roster](#)



[Questions & Answers](#)

## CONTRIBUTORS

This knowledge digest is a product of the Skills Global Solutions Group, co-led by Education Global Practice and Social Protection & Jobs Global Practice. Other contributors to this edition are Judith Perez (Skills4Dev Knowledge Digest Coordinator) and Gemma Rodon (Education Analyst).

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