

Comparison of social-emotional skills of secondary level students of public and private schools

Farhan Malik

iamfarhanawan@gmail.com

PhD scholar, Institute of Education, University of Sargodha, Pakistan

Mushtaq Ahmad

mushtaq.ahmad@uos.edu.pk

Associate Professor, Institute of Education, University of Sargodha, Pakistan

Ahmad Bilal Cheema

ahmad.bilal@uos.edu.pk

Assistant Professor, Institute of Education, University of Sargodha

Corresponding Author: * Farhan Malik iamfarhanawan@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

The present study focuses on the social-emotional skills of public and private sector secondary schools of the province of Punjab. The objectives of the study were i) to find out the social-emotional skills of male secondary schools in, province of Punjab. ii) To find out the social-emotional skills of female secondary schools province of Punjab. iii) To find out the level of social-emotional skills of secondary level students of public and private schools province of Punjab. iv) To compare the difference in key social-emotional skills between public and private secondary schools province of Punjab. The population of the study was all the private and public sector 10th grade students of the province of Punjab. 96 public and private schools from 4 districts and 1920 students were selected through a multistage random sampling technique. Descriptive and inferential statistics were applied to analyze the data. The major findings of the study were that students from both public and private secondary schools in Punjab have an average level of social-emotional skills (SEL), and no significant difference was found between the overall SEL of students from public and private schools. Recommendation is that teachers may be trained to use counseling services to provide emotional support to students for balanced personality development.

Keywords: social-emotional skills, secondary level students & public and private schools

INTRODUCTION

Social and emotional skills have become an essential part of modern education because they help students understand their feelings, manage stress, build positive relationships, and behave responsibly. These skills support students' academic success, psychological well-being, and classroom adjustment during adolescence, a stage marked by rapid physical and emotional changes (Jones et al., 2019). International organizations like the OECD emphasize that social emotional competencies are just as important as academic skills for students' lifelong success (OECD, 2021). In countries like Pakistan, where academic pressure is high, improving students' emotional and social abilities can play a major role in reducing behavioral problems and ultimately learning outcomes will enhance. Therefore, the development of social emotional learning (SEL) has gained increasing attention among educators and policymakers.

In the Punjab province, public and private secondary schools differ in several structural and instructional aspects, including teacher training, school culture, classroom environment, and availability of student

support systems. These differences may influence how effectively social emotional skills are taught and practiced in schools (Nasir & Ehsan, 2020). Research indicates that private schools often provide more interactive, student-centered classroom environments, while public schools focus more on curriculum coverage due to limited resources and large class sizes (Saeed & Farooq, 2018). Such variations may lead to differences in students' empathy, self-control, communication skills, and emotional regulation. Understanding these school-level differences can help educators identify which environments support stronger SEL development and where improvements are needed.

A comparative study of the social emotional skills of students in public and private secondary schools is important for identifying gaps, promoting equity, and guiding policy reforms in Punjab. Evidence-based comparisons allow school leaders and policymakers to understand which student groups may need additional SEL interventions and what type of support can improve their well-being (Mahmood & Gul, 2022). This type of research also helps educators design programs that strengthen positive behavior, reduce school-related stress, and promote healthy peer relationships. By examining differences in SEL across school types, the study contributes to improving the overall quality of education and offers guidance for creating safe, supportive, and emotionally healthy school environments. Therefore, this research aims to explore and compare the social emotional skills of secondary-level students in both public and private schools of the Punjab province.

Social and emotional skills are increasingly recognized as essential for students' academic success, emotional stability, and positive social behavior. However, in Pakistan, especially in Punjab, the focus of schools remains largely on academic achievement, while the development of students' social emotional competencies is often neglected (Mahmood & Gul, 2022). Public and private schools operate with different resources, teacher training levels, classroom environments, and school cultures, which may lead to significant differences in how students develop these skills (Nasir & Ehsan, 2020). Although international studies highlight the impact of school type on students' social emotional development, there is limited empirical evidence from Pakistan that compares SEL levels between students of public and private secondary schools (OECD, 2021). This lack of comparative research creates a gap in understanding how school contexts influence students' emotional regulation, communication, self-awareness, and interpersonal skills. Therefore, it is necessary to investigate whether meaningful differences exist in the social emotional skills of students studying in public and private schools in Punjab.

Objectives of the study

1. To find out the level of social emotional skills of secondary level students of public and private schools in Punjab province.
2. To find out the difference in social emotional skills of male and female secondary school students in public and private schools in Punjab province.
3. To find out the difference of social emotional skills between students of public and private secondary schools in Punjab province.

METHODOLOGY

The nature of the study was descriptive and a survey method was adopted to collect data.

Population and Sampling

Population of this study included all the students of 10th grade studying in private and public secondary schools of the Punjab province.

Sample of the study was selected through multistage random sampling. At first, four administrative divisions of the Punjab from 9 divisions were selected randomly; and from each division, one district was randomly selected. From each district, twenty four (24) secondary schools (12 public and 12 private) were selected from the list taken from the relevant District Education Officer which made the sample of 96 secondary schools (48 public and 48 private). From each selected school, 20 students of 10th grade were selected randomly; which were total 960 students from public and 960 from private schools and grand total was 1920 students.

Research Instruments

A self-developed questionnaire based on a five-point Likert-type scale consisting of items related to the social emotional skills was validated through the opinion of five experts with Ph. D. qualification and then pilot tested on 100 students not included in the actual sample. Cronbach's Alpha calculated value of the instrument was .83 which shows good reliability.

DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

Data were analyzed through mean scores, standard deviation, and Pearson r correlation.

Table 1: Comparison of social emotional skills of students of public and private male schools

Level	Public school (M)	Percentage	Private school (M)	Percentage	Total	Percentage
Low (25 - 41)	150	18%	75	17%	225	18%
Average (42 - 58)	631	77%	337	79%	968	78%
High (59 - 75)	42	5%	14	3.2%	56	4.1%
Total	823	100%	426	34.3%	1249	100%

Table 1 shows the comparison of social emotional skills of male students of public and private schools. Three levels of social emotional skills were considered i.e. low, average and high. For low level scores of social emotional skills ranges from (25 - 41); for average scores ranges from (42 - 58) and for high level range scores were (59 - 75). There were 18% (150) male students of public schools and 17% (75) male students of private schools who have low level of social emotional skills. Whereas 77.1% (631) male students of public schools and 79% (968) male students of private sector have average level of social emotional skills. The remaining 5% (42) male students of public schools and 4% (56) male students of private schools showed high level of social emotional skills. The majority of male students (78%) from both private and public schools have average level of social emotional skills. `

Table 2: Comparison of sub factors of social emotional skills of students of public and private sector male schools.

S#	Factor	Sector	N	Mean	SD	t	df	Sig. (p- value)
1	Emotional symptom	public private	378 189	10.24 10.24	2.18 2.33	-.026	565	.334
2	Conduct problems	Public Private	378 189	10.34 10.45	1.84 2.14	-.609	565	.015
3	Hyper activity	Public Private	378 189	9.82 10.21	1.68 1.63	-2.632.	565	.009

4	<i>Fear Problems</i>	Public	378	9.43	1.82	-.958.	565	.003
		Private	189	9.91	1.73			
5	<i>Peer problems</i>	Public	378	8.92	2.11	-2.292	565	.022
		Private	189	9.93	2.22			

Table 2 shows the factor wise comparison of social emotional skills of male students studying in public and private schools. There was no significant difference in the emotional symptom between male students of public schools (M=10.24, SD=2.183) and male students of private schools (M=10.24, SD=2.33) as reflected by $t=-.026$, $df = 565$ and $p=.334 > 0.05$. the comparison of factor conduct problem; there was a significant difference found in male students of public (M=10.34, SD= 1.840) and students of private schools (M= 10.45, SD = 2.14) as the $t = -.609$, $df = 565$ and $p = .015 < 0.05$. the mean value shows that the conduct problem of students of private male schools were better as compared to male students of public schools. The comparison of hyper activity factor; there was a significant difference between male students of private and public schools as $t = -2.632$, $df = 565$ and $p = .009$. The mean score of male students of private school was (M = 10.21, SD = 1.63) was higher as compared to male students of public schools was (M = 9.82 , SD = 1.68). The comparison of fear problem shows that there was a significant difference of fear problems between male students of private schools and male students of public schools as reflected by t -value = $-.958$, $df = 565$ and $.003 < 0.05$. Greater mean score shows that male students of private schools (M = 9.91 & SD =1.73) have more fear problem than the male student of public schools (M = 9.43 & SD = 1.82). The comparison of peer problems shows that there was a significant difference of peer problem between male students of private and public schools as $t = -2.92$ $df = 565$ and $p = .022$. The greater mean score shows that male students of private schools (M = 9.93 & SD = 2.22) have more peer problems than male students of public schools (M= 8.92 , SD= 2.11).

Table 3: Comparison of overall social emotional skills of male students of both private and public schools

S#	Sector	N	Mean	SD	t	df	Sig. (p- value)
1	Public	378	48.76	5.59	-2.899	565	.004
2	Private	189	50.18	5.54			

Table 3 shows the comparison of overall social emotional skills of male students of both public and private schools. There was a significant difference of the social emotional skills between male students of public schools and male students of private schools as indicated by $t=-2.899$, $df = 565$ and $p=.004 < 0.05$. The greater mean value (M=50.18, SD=5.54) shows that male students of private schools have better social emotional skills as compared to male students of public schools (M=48.76, SD=5.59).

Table 4: Comparison of social emotional skills of female students of public and private schools

Level	Public school (f)	Percentage	Private school (f)	Percentage	Total	Percentage
Low (25 - 41)	46	5.6%	25	5.9%	71	5.7%
Average (42 - 58)	731	89.7%	387	90.8%	1118	90%
High (59 - 75)	38	4.7%	14	3.3%	52	4.1%
Total	815	100%	426	34.3#	1241	100%

Table 4 shows the comparison of social emotional skills of female students of public and private schools. Three levels of social emotional skills were considered i.e. low, average and high. For low level scores of social emotional skills score ranges from (25 - 41); for average level, scores ranges from (42 - 58) and for

high level, scores range from (59 - 75). There were 5.6% (46) female students of public schools and 4.5% (19) female students of private schools have low level of social emotional skills. Whereas 89.7% (731) female students of public schools and 90.8% (387) female students of private schools have average level of social emotional skills. The remaining 4.7% (38) female students of public schools and 3.3% (14) female students of private schools showed high level of social emotional skills. The finding shows that majority of female students of private and public schools have average level of social emotional skills. `

Table 5: Factor wise comparison of social emotional skills of female private and public schools

S#	Factor	Sector	N	Mean	SD	t	df	Sig. (p- value)
1	<i>Emotional symptom</i>	public private	447 237	10.07 8.60	2.19 1.77	-2.116	483	.035
2	<i>Conduct problems</i>	Public Private	447 237	10.06 9.50	1.85 1.95	-.959	483	.035
3	<i>Hyper activity</i>	Public Private	447 237	10.12 10.01	1.71 2.02	-.043	483	.966
4	<i>Fear problems</i>	Public Private	447 237	9.63 9.60	1.60 2.01	-.066	483	.948
5	<i>Peer problems</i>	Public Private	447 237	9.56 10.10	1.99 2.18	-.833	483	.405

Table 5 shows the comparison of subfactor of social emotional skills of female students of both public and private schools. There was a significant difference of the factor emotional symptoms between female students of public schools and female students of private schools as reflected by $t=-2.116$, $df = 483$ and $p=.035<0.05$. The greater mean value ($M=10.07$, $SD=2.19$) shows that female students of public schools have more emotional symptoms as compared to female students of private schools ($M=8.60$, & $SD=1.77$).

There was also a significant difference of factor conduct problems of social emotional skills of female students of both public and private schools as reflected by $t=-9.59$, $df = 483$ and $p=.035<0.05$. The greater mean value ($M=10.06$, & $SD=1.85$) shows that female students of public schools have more conduct problems as compared to female students of private schools ($M=9.50$, $SD=1.95$). There was no significant difference of factor hyper activity of female students of both public and private schools as reflected by $t=-.043$, $df = 483$ and $p=.996>0.05$. There was also no significant difference of fear problems of female students of both public and private schools as reflected by $t=-.066$, $df = 483$ and $p=.998>0.05$. Moreover, There was no significant difference found in the comparison of factor peer problems between female students of public and private schools as reflected by $t=-.833$, $df = 483$ and $p=.405>0.05$. The female students of public and private schools have equivalent hyper activity, fear problem and peer problems.

Table 6: Comparison of overall social emotional skills of female students of private and public schools

S#	Sector	N	Mean	S.D	t	d.f	Sig. (p-value)
1	Public	447	49.47	5.46	-.895	483	.371
2	private	237	47.90	6.85			

Table 6 shows that there no significant difference of overall social emotional skills was found between female students of public and private schools as reflected by $t=-.895$, $df = 483$ and $p=.371>0.05$. The social emotional skills of the female students of public and private school were equivalent.

Table 7: Overall comparison of factors of social emotional skills of students of private and public schools

S #	Factor	Sector	N	Mean	SD	t	df	Sig. (p- value)
1	Emotional symptom	public private	815 426	10.15 9.95	2.187 2.252	-1.507	1239	.132
2	conduct problems	Public Private	815 426	10.19 10.23	1.853 2.037	-.293	1239	.009
3	Hyper activity	Public Private	815 426	9.982 10.02	1.709 1.688	-.192	1239	.848
4	Fear problems	Public Private	815 426	9.542 9.823	1.712 1.814	-2.694	1239	.007
5	Peer problems	Public Private	815 426	9.267 9.511	2.076 2.710	-1.937	1239	.053

The **table 7** shows the overall comparison of factor of social emotional skills of the students of public and private schools. There was no significant difference found in the emotional symptom of public schools (M=10.15, SD=2.187) and private schools (M=9.95, SD=2.252) schools as reflected by $t=-1.507$, $df = 1239$ and $p=.132 > 0.005$. But there was a significant difference of conduct problems between students of public and private schools as reflected by $t=-.293$, $df = 1239$ and $p=.009 < 0.05$. The greater mean score (M=10.23, SD=2.037) shows that the students of private schools have more conduct problems as compared to public schools (M=10.19 SD=1.853). While no significant difference of hyper activity was found between the students of public schools (M=9.982, SD= 1.709) and the private schools (M=10.02, SD=1.688) as reflected by $t=-.192$, $df = 1239$ and $p=.848 > 0.05$. Again a significant difference of fear problem was found between the students of public and private schools as reflected by $t=-2.694$, $df = 1239$ and $p=.007 < 0.05$. The greater mean score (M=9.823, SD=1.814) shows that the students of private schools have more fear problems as compared to the students of public schools (M = 9.54 & SD = 1.84). There was no significant difference of peer problems between the students of public schools (M=9.267, SD= 2.076) and private schools (M=9.511, SD=2.710) as reflected by $t=-1.937$, $df = 1239$ and $p=.053 > 0.05$.

Table 8: Comparison of overall social emotional skills of private and public schools' students

S#	Sector	N	Mean	S.D	t	d.f	Sig. (p-value)
1	Public	815	49.146	5.531	-1.155	1239	.248
2	private	426	49.525	5.445			

The **table 8** shows that no significant difference of social emotional skills was found between the students of public (M=49.146, SD=5.531) and private (M=49.525, SD=5.445) schools as reflected by $t=-1.155$, $df = 1239$ and $p=.248 > 0.05$. Overall social emotional skills of public and private school were equivalent.

CONCLUSION

The results of this study show that secondary school students from both public and private schools in Punjab generally have an average level of social emotional skills. It means neither public nor private schools are fully successful in developing high-level social emotional skills among students. This means most students are able to understand their emotions, interact with peers, and manage daily school challenges, but there is still room for improvement. Emotional growth appears to be moderate across both school types. This shows that social emotional learning is not yet a strong focus in schools. Students need more structured support to

improve these skills. Overall, the emotional development of students remains at a satisfactory but not ideal level.

The study also concludes that some differences exist between public and private school students, especially among male students.

For female students, the results indicate that social emotional skills were almost the same in both public and private schools. No major differences were found in most emotional and behavioral areas. This suggests that girls may manage emotions more consistently regardless of school type. When all students were analyzed together, no significant overall difference was found between public and private schools. This leads to the conclusion that school type alone does not determine students' social emotional development. Instead, emotional growth depends on support systems, teacher behavior, and school climate. Therefore, schools need focused programs to strengthen social emotional skills.

CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

Majority of the students including male and female students of both private and public schools have average level of social emotional skills. This result was similar to the findings of Jones et al. (2019) who conducted a research for both national and international levels and reported that without structured social emotional learning programs, students usually remain at an average level of emotional development. Whereas male students of private schools have better overall social emotional skills as compared to male students of public schools. The result is similar to the result of the study conducted by Rashid, Shehzadi, & Yousaf, (2021), they found that male students have better in social skill than females.

Factor wise comparison revealed that male students of private schools had more problems of conduct, hyper activity, fear, and peer problems than male students of private schools. Similar results were found by Kabakçi. & Korkut, (2008) that conduct problems in male students were found more as compared to female students and fear problems were found more in female students as compared to male students of public and private school. But Emotional symptoms of male students of public and private schools was equivalent. While female students of public schools have more emotional symptoms as compared to female students of private schools. The possible reason is that female students studying private schools are of well to do families and compare them more with other students.

Gender based comparison revealed that female students of public schools have more conduct problems as compared to female students of private schools. But they were equivalent with respect to problems of hyper activity, fear and peer problems. Whereas overall social emotional skills of female students of both public and private schools were equivalent. This result is different to the findings of the study by Rashid, Shehzadi, & Yousaf, (2021) that male students were more developed in social skill than their female counterparts.

Overall social emotional skills of public and private school were equivalent. This result is different to the findings of study of Saleem, & Nasreen, (2021); they found that social skills and life satisfaction of the private secondary school students were statistically high than the public secondary school students. Possible reason may be the farmer back ground of the children of this study as Sargodha is based on the farming culture. While factor wise comparison revealed that students of Private schools face more problems of fear and peers as compared to students of public schools. Possible reason of this result is that students studying in private schools face more stress of achievement from the parents for paying high fees.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Both public and private school head teachers may include regular SEL activities to improve students' emotional and social competencies.
2. School administration of both public and private school may arrange training for the teachers to identify and support students with behavioral and emotional difficulties.
3. Private schools should reduce academic pressure and increase emotional support for students.

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