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A matter of skills: a mixed-method study on the evaluation and implementation of an SEL program tailored to the skills adolescents need in educational settings and at home

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Chapter 1

General introduction

Social and emotional learning is the process in which young people acquire the skills they need to participate in and contribute positively to the settings in which they live and learn (Zins & Elias, 2007). This learning is associated with youngsters' future (psychosocial) health, education, and work prospects. To promote young people's prospects, around the world many people invest in projects that are designed to enhance youngsters' social and emotional skills, including persevering on tasks and establishing healthy relationships. Scholars worldwide put effort into developing the theory of social and emotional learning and the practice of promoting these skills on the basis of research-based knowledge (e.g., Durlak et al., 2015; Jones et al., 2019; Matson, 2018).

The studies in this thesis examine the evaluation and implementation of universal school-based Social Emotional Learning (SEL) programs for adolescents, and the Dutch Skills4Life (S4L) program, in particular. In theory and practice, various definitions are used for SEL and the social-emotional skills addressed in programs and measurement instruments (e.g., Duckworth & Yeager, 2015; Durlak et al., 2015). For most of the studies in this thesis, we used the domains comprised in the framework of the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) as a reference to identify the social-emotional skills taught in SEL programs and perceived relevant teaching by students and parents (Weissberg et al., 2015; CASEL, 2020). Examples of these domains and skills are: 1. Self-awareness (e.g., self-esteem and self-efficacy); 2. Social awareness (e.g., empathy and perspective-taking); 3. Self-management (e.g., self-regulation and goal setting); 4. Relationship skills (e.g., collaboration and social problem solving); 5. Responsible decision making (e.g., considering the consequences of and taking responsibility for actions). The CASEL framework is a frequently used framework in SEL program development and research all over the world (See, for more details on this framework, p. 21-22 in this Introduction).

In this introduction, we first discuss the background and problem statements of the thesis, starting with an introduction of the concept of social and emotional learning. Subsequently, we describe a number of crucial settings for social and emotional learning. As the studies in this thesis focus on adolescent students, the chapter then goes into developmental aspects regarding social and emotional learning in this particular life stage. Next, after a discussion of school-based SEL programs designed to enhance social-emotional skills, the Dutch universal secondary education Skills4Life program is introduced. To understand the population of students referred to in most of our studies, we give a brief description of the Dutch secondary education system, and its goals related to SEL. Following this, the CASEL framework for supporting SEL program implementation

is presented. Finally, the context, the methodology used, and the structure of the thesis are described.

Social and emotional learning

Social and emotional learning is part of the socialization process in which young people learn to participate in and contribute positively to the settings in which they live and learn, such as home, school, and the workplace. “Socialization” refers to the acquisition and transfer of social-emotional skills, behaviors, attitudes, beliefs, values, behavioral norms, and goals that are common in a social-cultural group or setting (Maccoby, 2015). These skills are socio-culturally rooted, and young people develop these in daily interactions with adults and peers across settings (e.g., Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006; Grusec, 2011; Osher et al., 2020; Thompson & Meyers, 2007). In these interactions, social-emotional skills, such as emotion regulation, empathy, and social problem solving are taught, modeled, and transferred. Ongoing communication and interactions, based in responsive and nurturing relationships, are necessary to provide opportunities for acquiring and practicing the social-emotional skills required in different settings (e.g., Cunha & Heckman, 2006; Sanders & Turner, 2018; Wentzel, 2015). Social and emotional learning and acquiring relevant skills enable young people to develop and maintain positive relations with others and to adapt to different tasks and demands within the groups and settings they live and learn in.

In all societies, young people live and learn across different groups and settings, e.g., at home, at school, and in the workplace. The social-emotional skills they develop vary depending on differences in individual and environmental features, such as age, sex, learning and emotional-behavioral abilities, family income, sociocultural background, and the context in which they are raised (e.g., Dawes et al., 2020; Goodman & Scott, 2012; Kagitibaci, 2012; West et al., 2020). As a result of such differences, significant disparities exist in young people’s social-emotional skills. Participating in and contributing successfully to various settings requires adaptive skills and understanding the underlying beliefs, values, behavioral norms, and goals (e.g., Jones et al., 2017; Zins & Elias, 2007). Therefore, social and emotional learning is a lifelong process distinct from cognitive, physical, and psychological learning. Young people and the adults guiding them at home, at school, and in the workplace are considered active participants in this process.

Social and emotional learning at home

Social and emotional learning starts from birth in interactions at home with parents, siblings, family, and community members. Throughout the lifespan, parents play a

core role in helping their children acquire the social-emotional skills appropriate for contributing and participating at home and in their sociocultural group (e.g., Sorkhabi-Middaugh, 2019; Steinberg & Silk, 2002; Zins & Elias, 2007). In socialization theory, dimensions and domains related to transferring and learning social-emotional skills are distinguished (e.g., Calders et al., 2020; Grusec, 2011; Smetena, 2017). Grusec (2011) describes skills in five socialization domains. The protection domain (1) refers to caring for children, providing safe and secure environments, helping them, and providing emotional support. In the (mutual) reciprocity domain (2), children learn to interact positively with others and develop egalitarian relationships. The control domain (3) refers to modifying, disciplining, and monitoring child behavior, providing structure, and supporting autonomy related to societal standards. The domain of group participation (4) refers to learning social customs and conventions that reflect the general group skills. Unlike the other four domains, in which social-emotional skills are modeled and transferred, social-emotional skills are taught intentionally in the guided learning domain (5). Although these domains refer to parent-child interactions, they are considered relevant in other socialization domains as well (Smetena, 2017).

It is assumed that, in families all over the world, social and emotional learning is geared at regulating interactions, social expectations, and standards; however, researchers identify differences between families worldwide (e.g., Grusec et al., 2011; Malti & Cheah, 2021; Patterson et al., 2015). Skills socialization at home is rooted in parents' beliefs, values, behavioral norms, and goals regarding child development, which vary according to their sociocultural and -economic background (e.g., Dinallo, 2016; Oberle et al., 2016; Smetena, 2017). Researchers often distinguish two approaches to teaching skills, an individualistic and a collectivistic approach (e.g., Chen et al., 2015; Fu & Markus, 2014; Kağıtçıbaşı, 2012; Matsumoto et al., 2006; Oyserman & Lee, 2008). An individualistic approach focuses more on independence, autonomy, and self-oriented skills, such as self-assertion and emotional expression. In comparison, a collectivistic approach is focused on interdependence, relatedness, and other-oriented skills, such as group confirmation and emotional inhibition. However, these are general distinctions.

Social and emotional learning is not only determined by individual features. Social, cultural, economic, and ecological factors that impact the families, neighborhoods, and societies where young people are raised determine the skills they develop (e.g., Chang et al., 2022; Duchesneau, 2020; Powell et al., 2019; Wang et al., 2020). Besides the home, educational settings such as school and during adolescence workplace settings are crucial for social and emotional learning.

Social and emotional learning at school and at work

The school and workplace setting provide opportunities for acquiring social-emotional skills that promote youngsters' academic and work prospects (e.g., Eccles & Roeser, 2011; Wentzel, 2015; Zigler & Bishop-Josef, 2006). Students learn the social-emotional skills required at school in daily interactions with peers and adults from diverse backgrounds. Learning these skills at school is associated with providing equal opportunities for all students to participate in those systems (Onderwijsraad, 2017; Jagers et al., 2019a). Besides, schools are considered gateways for learning the skills necessary to navigate the dominant society's social, medical, digital, legal, and economic systems. Studies show that many teachers, principals, parents, and adolescents believe that schools can add to learning the social-emotional skills young people need (e.g., Atwell & Bridgeland, 2019; Bridgeland et al., 2013; DePaoli et al., 2019; Hubbard et al., 2019; Jones & Cater, 2019; Wentzel et al., 2017). A safe and supportive classroom atmosphere, clear social-emotional and academic expectations, and support from teachers and classmates are crucial for acquiring the skills necessary for success in education and work (Wentzel, 2015). However, meeting the skills needs of students from families unfamiliar with dominant societal systems and navigating them can be challenging for schools (e.g., Elias, 2019; Jagers et al., 2018).

As young people grow older, interactions with peers and adults, in sports-, leisure-, and online activities also become crucial for acquiring the social-emotional skills common in those settings (e.g., Bukowski et al., 2015; Pratt et al., 2015; Paus-Hasebrink et al., 2019). Most young people start as paid employees and/or internship trainees in a workplace setting during adolescence. When entering a new workplace, they enter a process of socialization and becoming acquainted with the vocational- and social-emotional skills that are common and expected. This socialization is associated with organizational knowledge and (social-emotional) skills, such as job clarity and expectations regarding, for example, communication and cooperation (Ellis et al., 2015). However, perceived differences between themselves and their colleagues can limit the socialization of new employees (Kammeyer-Mueller et al., 2011). Therefore, it is not surprising that governments require schools to take on the task of teaching social-emotional skills (e.g., National Research Council, 2012; Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), 2015). Secondary and, particularly, (pre)vocational schools are supposed to prepare their students for work and their interactions with colleagues, as they learn at school and the workplace simultaneously (e.g., Elksnin & Elksnin, 2001; National Research Council, 2012; OECD, 2015).

School and the workplace are crucial settings for adolescent social and emotional learning. Positive interactions between youngsters and adults contribute to their social and emotional learning in these settings. As the number of settings for living and learning expands, adolescents need an increasing variety of social-emotional skills and need to learn to balance the skills required at school, at work, and at home.

Adolescent social and emotional learning

Adolescence is considered a sensitive period for social and emotional learning. Adolescents must accomplish central developmental tasks such as forming an integrated self-identity, becoming independent from their parents, establishing (intimate) relationships with peers, and making important choices in education and work (e.g., Lerner & Steinberg, 2009; Crone & Fuligni, 2020; Jones et al., 2018; Napolitano et al., 2021). An integrated self-identity indicates a sense of internal consistency across multiple social identities, such as race/ethnicity, profession, culture, sex, and religion, through which adolescents know who they are across time and settings (e.g., Galliher et al., 2017; Umaña-Taylor et al., 2014; Wang et al., 2020). For accomplishing their developmental tasks, they need advanced and complex social-emotional skills, such as self-knowledge, emotion regulation, and balancing multiple perspectives and interests in decision making. The development of such skills is associated with enhanced resilience and the prevention of psychosocial health problems that increase or emerge during adolescence, such as depression, aggression, and substance use (e.g., Calear & Christensen, 2010; Laible et al., 2014; Ma et al., 2020; National Research Council, 2012; Wright et al., 2021).

Adolescents' social-emotional skills are "under construction". Skills such as empathy, perspective-taking, and self-regulation diminish in early adolescence (11 to 15 years) to develop to sophisticated levels later (e.g., Crone, 2017; Grođlu et al., 2013; Ross et al., 2019; West et al., 2020; Soto et al., 2023; Young et al., 2019). Social interactions with peers and others are inevitable for social and emotional learning, practicing social-emotional skills, and accomplishing adolescents' developmental tasks (e.g., Crone, 2017; Dalen, 2014; Smetena et al., 2015). Adolescents are highly occupied with and put much effort into figuring out what is going on inside themselves and others, which motivates them to practice alternative skills in their interactions with peers (e.g., Crone & Fuligni, 2020; Schraube & Hjholt, 2016; Yeager, 2017). Their occupation with others and their increasing cognitive, social, and emotional capacities enable them to develop complex and advanced social-emotional skills (e.g., Blakemore & Mills, 2015; Crone, 2017; Liebermann, 2012). However, peer relationships can also challenge the development of social-emotional skills, as adolescents fear being excluded or feeling lonely in a group.

Adolescents' social-emotional skills vary depending on individual and environmental features. Recent studies, for instance, point to differences in skills between male and female adolescents (e.g., Gaspar et al., 2018; Gordon et al., 2022; Van der Graaff et al., 2014). For example, male adolescents gave themselves higher scores on self-esteem and self-regulation, whereas females scored higher on social problem solving. Young people in marginalized positions related to, for instance, cognitive, emotional-behavioral, and learning difficulties, and/or a low-income and minority family background, reported lower scores on these skills compared to their counterparts in more privileged positions (e.g., Elias, 2007; Cook & Gresham, 2008; West et al., 2020; Wiley & Siperstein, 2015; Hecht & Shin, 2015).

Adolescents are active participants in giving meaning to and co-constructing the skills they develop, guided by their growing capacities and developmental tasks (e.g., Smetena, 2015; Steinberg, 2015; Yeager, 2017). They are crucial partners in their own social and emotional learning process. As such, they are responsible for enhancing their social-emotional skills and promoting their prospects in education and work, as well as their psychosocial health. Therefore, they are valuable resources regarding the skills they perceive to have and need to learn.

Adolescent social and emotional learning across settings

Since social-emotional skills are still developing during adolescence, adult guidance and support remain necessary (e.g., Crone & Dahl, 2012; Ross et al., 2019; Sanders & Turner, 2018). Depending on young people's socioeconomic- and/or sociocultural family background, the social-emotional skills required at home, at school, and at work, including the beliefs, values, behavioral norms, and goals rooting them, may differ (Grusec & Hastings, 2015). Therefore, parent-school collaboration on social and emotional learning is indicated (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). However, such collaboration seems to focus on parental support concerning the social-emotional skills required at school; little attention is paid to parents' perspectives on social and emotional learning at home, school and work (Bjorklund et al., 2014; Meyers et al., 2019; Oberle et al., 2016). Taking account of these perspectives is particularly important, as the social-emotional skills learned at school and home do not necessarily match up. Such a mismatch can harm young people by confusing them regarding the skills they have and need and pressures parent-school collaboration (e.g., Dinallo, 2016; Duchesneau, 2020; Evans, 2017; Gresham, 2015; Jagers et al., 2019b; McCallops et al., 2019). Research shows that adolescents' social-emotional skills are malleable and teachable at school and that collaboration between schools and parents improve student outcomes (e.g., Clarke et al.,

2021; Durlak et al., 2015; Goldberg et al., 2019; Mahoney et al. 2018). The decreasing involvement of parents in secondary education challenges parent-school collaboration (e.g., Epstein et al., 2009; Park & Hollaway, 2018; Tan et al., 2020).

Parents do not only guide adolescents' social and emotional learning but are also important informants and role models regarding the career choices of their children (e.g., Diemer, 2007; Ginevra et al., 2015). However, not all parents may be familiar with the social-emotional skills required at work. Skills in all CASEL's competency domains are associated with socialization in the workplace (e.g., Kammeyer-Mueller et al., 2011; Napolitano et al., 2021; Oliveira et al., 2023). For example, self-awareness is associated with the promotion of role expectations, information seeking, and optimism in the workplace setting. Social awareness and relationship skills are associated with asking and receiving feedback from supervisors and colleagues. Employers experience that students from minority groups, such as those identified with learning difficulties and/or from migrant and low-income family backgrounds, applying for an internship often lack such skills (e.g., Andriessen et al., 2020; Bisschop et al., 2021; OECD, 2021). Prevocational education schools are responsible for teaching social-emotional skills to prepare students for future education and the workplace. As the skills students learn and need at home, at school, and at work may vary, collaboration with parents on social and emotional learning at school seems necessary.

School-Based SEL programs

As the development of social-emotional skills is associated with students' psychosocial health, education, and life prospects, it is unsurprising that SEL programs aiming to enhance these skills are implemented in schools worldwide. Around the world, various types of SEL programs exist, including stand-alone and whole-school SEL programs, as well as those that are integrated into academic curricula. In some countries, governments have generated educational standards for SEL (e.g., Durlak et al., 2015; Cipriano et al., 2023 Dusenbury et al., 2020; Jones et al., 2019). Universal SEL programs aim to promote positive outcomes for all students. Selective and indicated programs target subgroups of and/or individual students with severe social, emotional-behavioral, and/or learning difficulties (Wiley & Siperstein, 2015). Programs and standards vary in their conceptualizations of SEL and the definitions of the social-emotional skills taught. Differences in conceptualizations and definitions are related to a particular focus on health, educational, and/or life goals, such as prevention of depression, aggression, or substance use, and the promotion of academic achievements, citizenship, and work

prospects (e.g., John & De Fruyt, 2015; Jones et al., 2019; National Research Council, 2012; OECD, 2021).

Teachers implementing SEL programs are supposed to adapt them to their students' needs associated with individual and environmental features (e.g., Bernal et al., 2006; Biesta, 2007; Gutman et al., 2015). To support program implementation providing teacher manuals and training is recommended (Durlak, 2016). Students facing multiple disadvantages, such as learning difficulties and/or growing up in low-income and minority families, face challenges in developing the social-emotional skills necessary at school and work (e.g., Cipriano et al., 2022; Daley et al., 2021; Duchesneau, 2020; Elias et al., 2019). Therefore, these students are expected to profit most from SEL programs (e.g., Diekstra, 2008; Gresham, 2015; McCormick et al., 2015).

Meta-analysis studies on universal school-based SEL programs show positive effects on social-emotional skills, psychosocial health outcomes, and academic achievement in students with varying background characteristics (e.g., Durlak et al., 2011; Sklad et al., 2012; Taylor et al., 2017; Wiglesworth et al., 2016). However, these studies did not distinguish effects in children and adolescents, and they used a composite measure of several social-emotional skills in analyzing summary effects. Therefore, insight into the effects of SEL programs on the individual social-emotional skills of adolescents is limited. Taylor et al. (2017) identified positive effects of SEL programs on students, independent of their sociocultural and socioeconomic family background. In analyzing effects at the school population level and not on the individual student level, they did not provide insight into effects in subgroups of students from varying backgrounds. Such insight is necessary as today's diverse and inclusive schools serve students with varying social-emotional skills and needs (Armstrong & Armstrong, 2019; Aronson & Laughter, 2016).

Another factor to consider in relation to the effects of SEL programs is the interrelation between skills and psychosocial health outcomes. Although social-emotional skills are interrelated, knowledge of these interrelations and the relationships between these skills and health outcomes is limited (e.g., Durlak et al., 2011; Weissberg et al., 2015). Such knowledge, however, is crucial for understanding which skills to target in order to establish SEL programs' intended effects.

Students with learning difficulties and those from low-income and minority families show lower scores on individual social-emotional skills outcomes than their more affluent peers

(Gresham, 2015; West et al., 2020). Focusing SEL programs on these students in particular is addressed in the literature (e.g., Bailey & Jones, 2019; Evans & English, 2002; Halfon et al., 2018; Raver, 2012). However, recent reviews and meta-analyses identified that students facing individual and environmental adversities are hardly identified as subgroups in universal SEL program evaluation studies (e.g., Cipriano et al., 2022; Daley et al., 2021; Hassani & Schwab, 2021). Therefore, insight into such programs' effects related to students' varying background characteristics, such as cognitive, social-behavioral, and learning abilities, as well as family income and sociocultural background, is limited. More knowledge is needed about the effects of SEL programs on the social-emotional skills of students facing disadvantages related to (multiple) background factors.

Scholars emphasize the importance of engaging students facing disadvantages and their parents in SEL program implementation, as this will provide equal opportunities for acquiring the skills that promote their future health, education, and work prospects (e.g., Cipriano et al., 2023; Elias, 2019; Jagers et al., 2018). However, knowledge of *how* to engage these students and their parents is hardly provided in SEL research. Besides, little is known about these students' and their parents' perspectives on SEL and enhancing social-emotional skills at school. To contribute to the knowledge on adolescent SEL program evaluation and implementation we conducted six studies. Two of these studies evaluate the Dutch secondary education Skills4Life program.

The Skills4Life program

Skills4Life (S4L) is a Dutch universal classroom-based program for secondary schools. The program aims to enhance social-emotional skills in all CASEL's domains, such as self-efficacy, self-regulation, empathy, and social problem solving. The program was developed based on more than twenty years of ongoing evaluation and implementation research involving students, teachers, principals, and other relevant school staff (Gravesteyn, 2010). This research also informed the development of student workbooks and manuals as well as teacher training. Evaluation studies on S4L reported significant positive short- and long-term effects on adolescents' social-emotional skills and psychosocial health outcomes (e.g., Gravesteyn et al., 2004; Gravesteyn, 2010). However, insight into differences in effects related to varying individual and environmental features is limited. Teachers and students indicated that the program asked too much of the intellectual and language needs of students in preparatory vocational secondary education (PVSE, *vmbo* in Dutch) (Kocken et al., 2011). Students in the Practical Education (PrE) track (*Praktijkschool* in Dutch), moreover, were not included in the earlier evaluation studies.

To meet the needs of students in the preparatory vocational secondary education basic track (PVSE-b in Dutch) and the PrE track the S4L program was adapted. As these students learn simultaneously at school and the workplace, an additional module was developed to prepare them for workplace learning. The *adapted* S4L program consists of a basic and an internship module (see **Chapter 4** for more details on program content and adaptations). Additional teacher training and manuals were developed for the *adapted* S4L program. To provide insight into the population of students in these tracks, the highly stratified Dutch secondary education system and the SEL requirements Dutch schools need to meet are described in the next section.

SEL and the Dutch secondary education context

Students in the Netherlands enter secondary education at the age of eleven or twelve. The mainstream educational system consists of two levels of general secondary education (known in Dutch as HAVO and VWO) and five qualitatively different prevocational secondary education tracks (PVSE), i.e., the theoretical, combined, advanced and basic vocational track (Dutch Organization for Internationalization in Education (NUFFIC), 2015). The PVSE-basic (PVSE-b) track is the least selective of these four tracks. The PrE track is for students with additional educational needs (European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training, 2013). Eight percent of adolescents (aged 12-19) are in the PVSE-b track, and two percent are in the PrE track. In grades 9 and 10 students in PVSE-b and PrE tracks learn at school and workplace internships for several days a week. Besides these mainstream education tracks, the Dutch system has separate schools for students with special educational needs related to severe intellectual, social, and/or emotional-behavioral problems.

PVSE-b and PrE students have learning difficulties related to mild intellectual, emotional-behavioral and/or learning problems. Students on both tracks have I.Q.s varying from 55-90 (based on I.Q. tests). PVSE-b students have two years' delay in reading and mathematics, and PrE students have three years' delay in those subjects. Additionally, they have difficulties regarding, for instance, attention span, working memory, and processing of (new) knowledge and skills. However, differences in educational performance levels between students in these tracks appear to be large (Fazekas & Litjens, 2014; NUFFIC, 2015). These differences seem to be associated with students' varying background characteristics. The proportion of students from low-income and/or migrant families in these tracks is high compared to students from Dutch/Western-European families (Korpershoek et al., 2016). Due to their family backgrounds and learning difficulties, and because they live in deprived neighborhoods, many students in the PVSE-b and PrE tracks and their parents are

in marginalized social positions. As a result, students do not necessarily acquire the social-emotional skills they need for success in education and work. Therefore, these students are particularly in need of learning relevant skills at school.

The Netherlands is an immigration country. More than 25% of the population, and 28% of young people, are from migrant family backgrounds (Statistics Netherlands, 2022¹). Most of these citizens have family roots in Turkey, Morocco, Surinam, Netherlands Antilles, or other countries of origin such as Syria, Somalia, and Afghanistan. In large cities in the western Netherlands, more than 66% of young people have roots in such countries. Schools in these cities have an elevated level of inequality regarding the incomes and sociocultural backgrounds of the families in which students grow up (Oppers & Zevenbergen, 2022).

Based on the Appropriate Education Act of 2014, schools have a legal “duty of care” (zorgplicht) to all students and are required to offer them education at a school that suits their qualities and abilities (Staatscourant 20 juni, 2014). Secondary schools have the task of providing equal opportunities and appropriate education in order to prepare students for their future (Oppers & Zevenbergen, 2022). Regarding this task, the Dutch Education Council distinguishes three domains of education: qualification, socialization, and character-building or citizenship education (Onderwijsraad, 2016). Teaching relevant social-emotional skills, such as knowledge of strengths and weaknesses, collaboration, social problem solving, and managing diversity, is part of both the socialization and citizenship education tasks schools are required to take on (Nieuwelink et al., 2016). The increasing complexity of society demands that individuals possess these skills in order to be able to participate at all levels in future education, work, and life (Dolman et al., 2015).

Implementing an SEL program to equip students with the social-emotional skills they need is particularly indicated in socio-culturally diverse and inclusive schools with students in marginalized positions. It is evident that universal SEL programs, such as S4L, cannot compensate for the skills needs of all PrE and PVSE-b students. However, all students in Dutch secondary education are entitled to acquire the social-emotional skills that promote their education and work prospects. Therefore, implementing S4L in all educational tracks is relevant.

¹ Statistics Netherlands switched recently to a new classification of the population by origin. The categorizations of Western vs. non-Western are no longer used. To indicate people’s background, the country of people born abroad (the first generation) and those born in the Netherlands and of whom at least one of their parents was born outside Europe (the second generation) are used. These students’ families often have their origin in Morocco, Netherlands-Antilles, Turkey, Surinam, and increasingly also in unsafe countries such as Iran and Afghanistan. In this thesis, the classification ‘migrant students’ refers to these students as a group, compared to their Dutch/Western-European counterparts. However, some studies in this thesis, which were submitted before the recent switch of Statistics Netherlands, use the former classification of Western vs. non-Western.

The CASEL framework

To foster SEL program implementation, various professional frameworks have been designed. These frameworks aim to provide a common language and to support collaboration on SEL, including roles and tasks for different stakeholders involved across settings (e.g., Berg et al., 2017; Denham, 2006; John & DeFruyt, 2015; Jones et al., 2019; Soto et al., 2021). These frameworks comprise social-emotional skills in various domains and have a wide range of theoretical foundations, e.g., social learning theory, cognitive-behavioral theory, systems theory, and theories on development (Brackett et al., 2015; Humphrey, 2013). The definitions used for skills and the domains in which skills are collected vary widely across these frameworks. As a result, issues concerning clarity and interpretation are articulated in SEL literature (Denham, 2015; Duckworth & Yeager, 2015).

The framework frequently referred to in (international) SEL literature is developed by the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) (Weissberg et al., 2015) (see Figure 1).

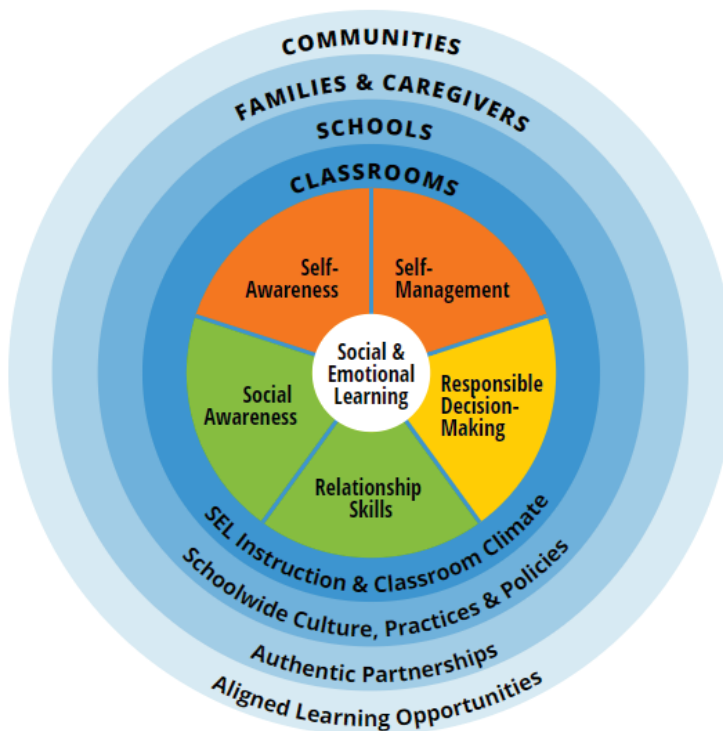


Figure 1 CASEL's framework for SEL (CASEL, 2020).

As illustrated in Figure 1 and described above, the CASEL framework for SEL focuses on enhancing social-emotional skills in five interrelated SEL competency domains, i.e., self-awareness, social awareness, self-management, relationship skills, responsible decision making.

The five competency domains are at the center of the framework and social-emotional skills in these domains are taught in SEL programs at the classroom level. The framework seems to assume that social-emotional skills in all five domains are relevant to learn for all students independent of their background characteristics (Durlak et al., 2015). However, the notion of teaching several skills simultaneously, and independent of students' learning abilities and sociocultural and family income backgrounds, is a matter of debate in SEL literature (Chorpita et al., 2005a; Jones et al., 2017; Ross & Tolan, 2018; Weisz et al., 2012).

The skills in the CASEL domains are assumed to be interrelated and associated with psychosocial health outcomes. However, much is unknown about the relationships between individual skills and between those skills and psychosocial health outcomes (Durlak et al., 2011/2022). Research shows that teachers, principals, employers, students, and their parents recognize and view the skills comprised in the CASEL framework as relevant for children and adolescents to learn (e.g., Bridgeland et al., 2013; DePaoli et al., 2018; Hubbard et al., 2019; National Commission on Social, Emotional, and Academic Development, 2018).

SEL program implementation

In addition to the five competency domains, the CASEL framework contains other components considered contributive to SEL program implementation at the classroom and school levels. Beside quality instruction of social-emotional skills, a supportive climate and schoolwide positive culture, and practices and policies for integrating SEL in student support services are required in program implementation. Additionally, authentic partnerships for collaboration with parents, families, and communities are recommended. For strengthening students' social-emotional skills, such partnerships require mutually equal relationships, common and aligned goals, and clear and supportive roles for parents, teachers, and students. These conditions are necessary to align learning opportunities at home and at school. As the studies in this thesis focus on classroom-based programs, we focus on collaboration with students and their parents in particular.

Despite the emphasis on establishing parent-school collaboration, knowledge on how to engage parents and students in SEL school programs is limited (Durlak et al., 2015).

This knowledge is required, however, as parents and students are active agents in social and emotional learning and in the development of social-emotional skills. CASEL's framework addresses the alignment of goals and parents' support regarding the skills taught at school. However, neither the social-emotional skills students learn at home nor the alignment of these skills and those taught at schools seem articulated in the framework.

Besides the engagement of teachers, students, and their parents, other factors are associated with quality implementation, e.g., program dosage, fidelity to the “working elements” responsible for effects on outcomes, differentiation for meeting varying students' needs, quality of delivery, and program reach across contexts (e.g., Dowling & Barry, 2020; Durlak et al., 2015; Shoesmith et al., 2021). Dosage and adherence are most often included in SEL program evaluation studies. Teacher engagement appears to be a highly influential factor in an intervention's effects (Wanless & Domitrovich, 2015). However, knowledge on the working elements of SEL programs associated with student outcomes is limited (e.g., Embry & Biglan, 2008; Durlak et al., 2011/2015; Rotheram-Borus et al., 2012).

Other factors associated with quality implementation also remain underexposed in SEL literature. SEL program differentiation is supposed to be significant for making programs valuable for students with varying background characteristics (Barnes & McCallops, 2019; Wigelsworth et al., 2022; Vroom et al., 2020). Various studies stress the importance of balancing adherence and differentiation for meeting students' needs in SEL program implementation (Durlak et al., 2015; Humphrey et al., 2018; Low et al., 2016; Sundell et al., 2016). However, insight into how teachers balance adherence and differentiation is limited. Therefore, more knowledge is necessary concerning what works and what does not work in universal school-based SEL programs for secondary education, and, importantly, for whom these programs work.

SEL programs adapted to the needs of students from particular sociocultural family backgrounds or with additional educational needs demonstrate promising results (e.g., Clarke et al., 2021; Castro-Olivio, 2014; Hecht & Shin, 2015; Wiley & Siperstein, 2015). Nevertheless, such programs do not provide insight into how to engage students and parents in program differentiation to meet varying students' needs. To inform SEL program implementation in diverse and inclusive tracks in Dutch prevocational secondary education, therefore, more insight is required into the perspectives of these students and their parents.

Problem statement

In this study, social and emotional learning is defined as the process of acquiring the social-emotional skills necessary to contribute to and participate successfully in settings such as home, school, and the workplace. Both individual and environmental features, such as age, sex, learning abilities, family background, and neighborhood features determine the skills acquired across settings. During the lifespan, parents play a core role in social and emotional learning and developing the skills necessary at home. Besides parents, adolescents are active participants in co-constructing this learning process and the skills developed. Schools are considered crucial settings for teaching and learning the social-emotional skills necessary for success in education and work.

During adolescence, social and emotional learning is associated with psychosocial health outcomes and future life prospects. Adolescents' skills learned at home depend on parental developmental beliefs, values, goals, behavioral norms, and goals. These beliefs, values, norms and goals vary according to sociocultural and socioeconomic background characteristics, such as family income and social position. Based on such differences, the social-emotional skills students learn and need at home do not necessarily match those required for success in education and work and that are taught in SEL programs. Therefore, parent-school collaboration is indicated to support social and emotional learning. For establishing such collaboration, parents and adolescents are valuable resources for information on the social-emotional skills they need in different settings.

Universal SEL programs designed to enhance students' social-emotional skills are developed and implemented in schools worldwide to promote positive student outcomes. Such programs show positive effects on adolescents' skills and psychosocial health outcomes. However, more needs to be known about SEL programs' effects on individual social-emotional skills within subgroups of students, varying in terms of individual and environmental features. SEL program implementation in diverse and inclusive schools is associated with engaging students and their parents to provide equal opportunities for them to acquire the skills they need. Therefore, gaining insight into their perspectives on SEL and the skills they believe should be enhanced at school is crucial, both to engage students and parents and to adapt programs to students' needs. To understand which skills need to be enhanced, additional research needs to be done on the interrelations between students' different social-emotional skills and between these skills and psychosocial health outcomes.

The studies in this thesis aim to add to the existing knowledge on the evaluation and implementation of SEL programs for adolescents. We were particularly interested in

adolescent students in prevocational secondary education tracks, who vary broadly in terms of their learning abilities and regarding the incomes and sociocultural backgrounds of their families. These background characteristics are associated with the skills developed; students in these tracks do not necessarily have the skills they need for success in education and work. Teaching skills that are relevant for education and work is important, as most students in prevocational secondary education learn at school and the internship workplace simultaneously.

The aims, methodology and structure of the studies

To better understand the factors that impact the evaluation and implementation of SEL programs implemented in diverse and inclusive schools, this thesis builds on a mixed-method approach (Hesse-Biber et al., 2015). The studies included in this thesis aim to provide insight into: 1. The effects of universal SEL programs on the individual social-emotional skills and psychosocial health outcomes of adolescents; 2. The interrelations between social-emotional skills as well as between those skills and the psychosocial health outcomes of students in the PrE and PVSE-b tracks; 3. The effects of the Dutch S4L program on the social-emotional skills and psychosocial health outcomes of students in marginalized positions; 4. The perspectives of students in the PrE and PVSE-b tracks on social-emotional skills for managing interactions with classmates; 5. Parents' perspectives on SEL and strengthening social emotional learning at schools; particularly of parents of students in the PrE track. To achieve these goals, a review and meta-analysis study, three quantitative and two qualitative studies were conducted. Using a sequential approach, the findings of the review study reported on in **Chapter 2** and the evaluation study of the *original* S4L program for preparatory vocational education and the general secondary education tracks described in **Chapter 3** drove the designs and analyses of the other studies (see Figure 2). The findings in this latter study indicated adaptations to S4L were necessary, to tailor the program to the intellectual and learning abilities of PVSE-b and PrE students. To better understand the pre-test data of the social-emotional skills reported by students in the evaluation study of the *adapted* S4L program, we conducted cross-sectional and mediation analyses, which are delineated in **Chapter 4**. The evaluation study of the adapted S4L program, including students from the PVSE-b and PrE tracks (N = 739), is described in **Chapter 5**. The findings of these studies revealed the need for a better understanding of PVSE-b and PrE students' social-emotional skills and for exploring their and their parents' perspectives on SEL at school to inform program implementation tailored to their needs. Therefore, we applied additional and more in-depth data analyses from interviews with PVSE-b

and PrE students (N = 22), using CASEL's skills as sensitizing concepts (**Chapter 6**). These interviews were initially conducted and used to inform the *adapted* S4L program concerning relevant themes. To gain insight into which social-emotional skills parents considered crucial for their children to learn, and which skills they believed to be required at home, we explored the perspectives of PrE students' parents (N = 31) on SEL and teaching these skills at school. Insights resulting from these explorations that will benefit the further development of the (*already adapted*) S4L and other SEL programs are reported on in **Chapter 7**. Lastly, **Chapter 8** discusses the main findings of the studies, their strengths and limitations, and the implications for research and practice resulting from the implementation and evaluation of the adapted S4L program, and adolescent SEL programs in general. The studies in this thesis add to the knowledge on SEL program evaluation and implementation and focus, particularly, on students in marginalized positions, such as those in the PVSE-b and PrE tracks, as was called for recently in SEL literature (e.g., Cipriano & McCarthy, 2023; Dailey et al., 2021).

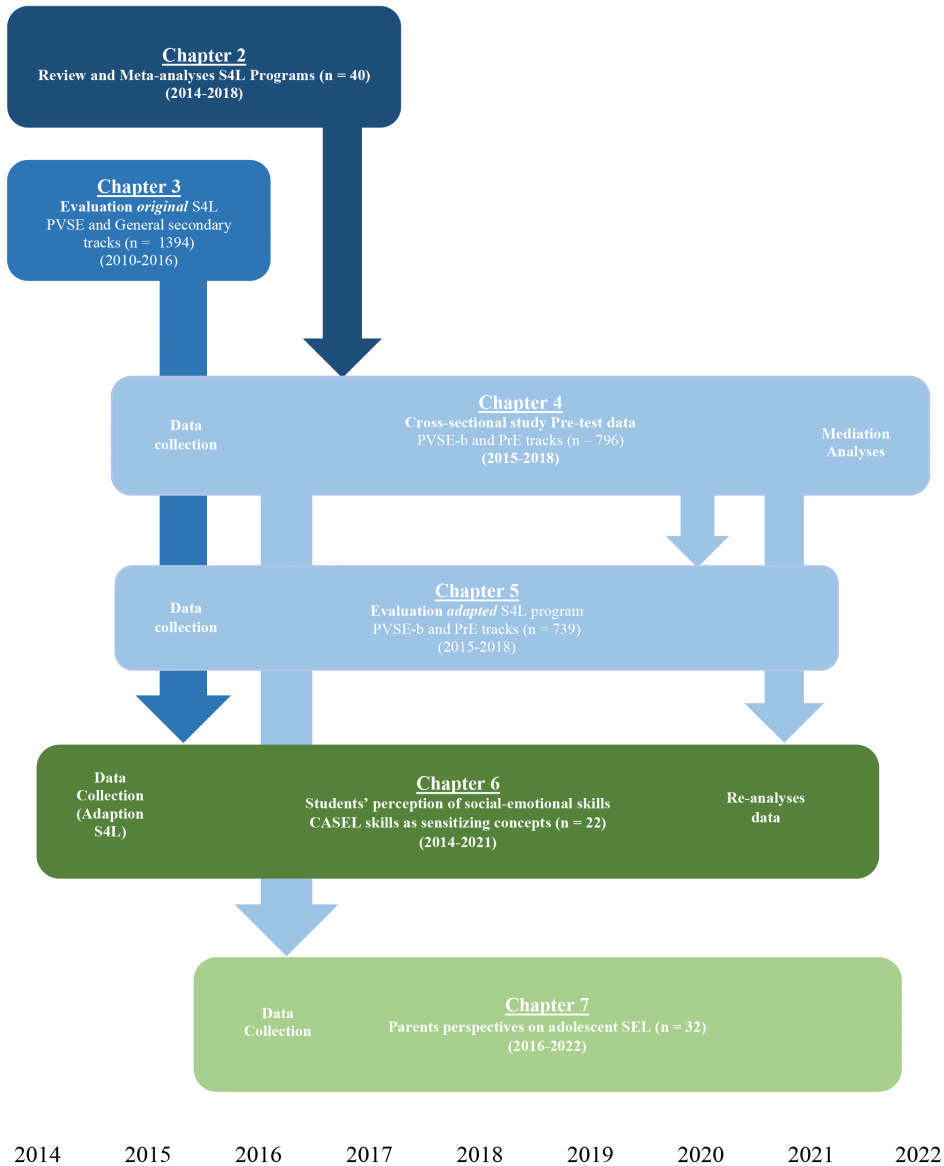


Figure 2 Sequence of quantitative (blue) and qualitative (green) studies driving the study designs.

