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Mainstreaming social and emotional learning in Education Sector Plans

A methodology for policy and planning analysis

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Summary

The systematic integration of social and emotional learning (SEL) into national education policy remains insufficiently understood, despite growing global recognition of its importance.

This paper presents a replicable three-stage methodology for analysing how SEL is conceptualized, positioned, and operationalized within national education sector plans (ESPs), using the Explore SEL Taxonomy developed by Harvard University's EASEL Laboratory as a common analytical framework. The methodology enables analysts to identify which SEL competency domains are present, how coverage is distributed across education levels, and whether SEL commitments are coherently carried through the policy cycle from an ESP's Vision/Mission through to its Strategy/Programme and Monitoring & evaluation.

The methodological paper presents the SEL analysis methodology with an application to Rwanda's *Education Sector Strategic Plan (ESSP) 2024–2029*, demonstrating how the approach highlights structural patterns and gaps that would not be visible through a superficial reading of the document alone. It is offered as a practical analytical instrument for researchers, education planners, and policy-makers seeking to strengthen SEL policy coherence at the system level.

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1

Introduction

Despite growing recognition of SEL's importance, most national education plans lack the analytical tools to assess how systematically SEL is integrated across education levels and policy cycles. This paper offers a practical methodology to fill that gap.

1.1 Why systematic analysis of SEL in Education Sector Plans is needed

Social and emotional learning (SEL) is defined as a holistic process through which learners develop the competencies to manage emotions, build relationships, and make responsible decisions (UNESCO, 2024). It is increasingly recognized as foundational to education systems worldwide. Positive impacts of SEL on academic achievement, labour market outcomes, mental health, and social cohesion have been consistently demonstrated, although this evidence derives primarily from high-income country contexts (Durlak et al., 2011; OECD, 2015).

As societies confront rapid technological change, the climate crisis, rising conflict, and growing inequalities, education itself must be transformed. UNESCO's *Reimagining Our Futures Together* report (UNESCO, 2021) argues that this transformation will require a fundamental shift in how we conceive of learning: away from teacher-driven instruction centred on individual accomplishment and towards cooperation, collaboration, and the capacity to act together for shared futures. SEL lies at the heart of this transformation. In recognition of this, UNESCO published a dedicated policy guide, *Mainstreaming Social and Emotional Learning in Education Systems*, in 2024, providing concrete guidance to policymakers on integrating SEL across all facets of their education systems (UNESCO, 2024). The guide marked a significant step towards system-level mainstreaming of SEL.

Yet translating this policy ambition into coherent implementation remains difficult. SEL suffers from a 'jingle–jangle' fallacy/effect: that is, the same competency is described using multiple terms ('life skills', 'soft skills', 'twenty-first-century skills'), while different competencies are often labelled identically (Brush et al., 2022). This terminological fragmentation undermines alignment between policy goals, curricula, and assessment practices. At the planning level, SEL tends to be positioned as instrumentally aligned with labour market and economic priorities rather than recognized as an independent objective (Chatterjee Singh and Duraiappah, 2020). SEL also tends to be disproportionately concentrated in early childhood, despite evidence that social and emotional skills develop throughout adolescence and adulthood (Chatterjee Singh and Duraiappah, 2020; Kankaraš and Suarez-Alvarez, 2019).

An Education Sector Plan (ESP) is the most important policy document for examining the systematic integration of SEL at the system level. As the highest-level expression of a government's education priorities, an ESP signals which issues are treated as cross-cutting and strategic rather than supplementary or optional. When SEL is coherently embedded within an ESP across education levels and throughout the policy cycle from Vision to Monitoring & evaluation (M&E), it reflects institutional commitment and creates the enabling conditions for consistent implementation across curriculum design, teacher education, and assessment. Conversely, when SEL is absent from or weakly articulated in the sector plan, the systemic conditions for mainstreaming remain unfulfilled regardless of how well individual programmes are designed. Yet research on SEL integration at this planning level remains sparse, with most existing studies focusing on programme-level interventions and their measurable impacts rather than on system-wide policy design (Chatterjee Singh and Duraiappah, 2020). Without systematic analysis of how SEL is positioned within these governing documents, the conditions enabling or constraining effective integration remain poorly understood.

This analytical need is reinforced by UNESCO's normative agenda. The 2023 UNESCO Recommendation on Education for Peace, Human Rights and Sustainable Development, together with SDG 4.7, established explicit global commitments to integrating values and competencies closely aligned with SEL into education systems (UNESCO, 2023). Yet a persistent gap remains between these high-level global objectives and their translation into national policy, legal frameworks, curriculum design, and teacher training. ESPs represent one of the most direct policy instruments for bridging this gap. By providing a systematic methodology for analysing how SEL is positioned within ESPs, this paper contributes to the UNESCO International Institute for Educational Planning (IIEP)'s mandate to support member states in translating global normative frameworks into coherent national education planning and also to identifying where alignment between global commitments and national policy architecture remains incomplete.

Addressing this gap requires a methodology that goes beyond superficial reading and applies a definition-based analytical framework capable of resolving terminological ambiguity, revealing structural patterns, and assessing policy coherence across education levels and through all stages of the policy cycle. Conducting this type of analysis across multiple country contexts further serves a broader comparative purpose: by applying a common, replicable methodology to ESPs in diverse settings, it becomes possible to generate comparable evidence on the state of SEL mainstreaming at the planning level, to identify patterns that single-country studies cannot reveal, and to provide education planners and policymakers with a practical diagnostic instrument for strengthening SEL policy coherence. It is precisely to serve this function that the methodology presented in this paper is offered: not as a contribution to programme evaluation but as an analytical tool for making visible the structural logic through which SEL is embedded in national education systems and highlighting the structural gaps.

1.2 Why Rwanda was selected as a case study

In Sub-Saharan Africa, the importance of SEL has become increasingly significant, as many children and youth face socio-economic and psycho-social adversities, including poverty, displacement, gender-based violence, and under-resourced school environments (Osinaike et al., 2025). At the same time, SEL has been discussed as having the potential to improve learning and equity in learning, particularly for the most marginalized students in low- and middle-income countries (UNESCO Global Education Monitoring Report Team and RTI International, 2024, 2024). In this regard, Sub-Saharan Africa represents a particularly important region for examining the positioning of SEL in education planning documents.

Within the Sub-Saharan African context, Rwanda has actively advanced SEL-related initiatives across different areas of its education system. In 2015, Rwanda introduced a competence-based curriculum (CBC), marking a shift from knowledge-based instruction to competence-based learning. This reform aimed to make education more responsive to the needs of learners, society, and the labour market by emphasizing the application of knowledge and problem-solving. In 2020, Rwanda's Ministry of Education and the Rwanda Education Board introduced the *Curriculum Framework for Teacher Training Colleges* to ensure that pre-service teachers could effectively implement the CBC. In 2022, the *Social-Emotional Learning Framework for Pre-Primary and Lower Primary Levels in Rwandan Schools* was launched. Both these documents further incorporated SEL competencies into educational practice and teacher preparation. Furthermore, the 2022 framework was developed not by simply relying on imported SEL models but by considering alignment with Rwandan educational values and locally used terminology.

In this context, Rwanda is a suitable case for this study, as the Ministry of Education has introduced multiple SEL-related initiatives across its education system, reflecting an active effort to integrate SEL into education policy and practice. In particular, the 2022 SEL framework highlights the importance of positioning SEL in ways that align with national educational values and local terminology rather than directly adopting external models. In this context, Rwanda's *Education Sector Strategic Plan (ESSP) 2024–2029* (Rwanda, 2024) contains references to learner competencies, skills, values, and behaviours across its Vision, Strategy, and M&E. Therefore, the Rwandan case provides a useful opportunity to examine how SEL competencies are conceptualized, positioned, and operationalized within its ESSP.

1.3 Objectives of the study

This paper has two related objectives. The first is to present a systematic, replicable methodology for analysing how SEL is conceptualized and operationalized within national ESPs. The second is to illustrate this methodology through a concise application to Rwanda's ESSP 2024–2029, demonstrating what the approach can reveal and how it might be adapted to other country contexts.

The methodology assesses three dimensions of SEL integration: (1) the coverage and positioning of SEL within the ESP; (2) the continuity and progression of SEL across education levels, from pre-primary through to higher education; and (3) the coherence of SEL across the policy cycle, specifically whether SEL concepts articulated in the Vision/Mission are carried through into the Strategy and the M&E framework.

1.4 Structure of the paper

Chapter 2 provides a concise literature review covering the conceptual background on SEL, evidence of its impacts, challenges to system-level integration, and the rationale for using the Explore SEL Taxonomy as an analytical framework. Chapter 3 presents the methodological framework in detail, including the three-stage analytical approach, data collection guidance, and limitations. Chapter 4 illustrates the application of the methodology to Rwanda's ESSP 2024–2029, presenting selected findings through key tables. Chapter 5 concludes with implications for policy planners and directions for future application.

2

Literature review

SEL is well evidenced and widely endorsed, but terminological fragmentation and the absence of shared analytical frameworks continue to hinder its systematic integration into national policy. The Explore SEL Taxonomy offers a practical solution by enabling policy texts to be analysed against a common definition-based structure.

2.1 Conceptual background: The challenge of defining SEL

UNESCO defines SEL as 'a process of acquiring the competencies to recognize and manage emotions, develop care and concern for others, establish positive relationships, make responsible decisions and handle challenging situations effectively' (UNESCO, 2024: 16). This definition emphasizes SEL as relational, ethical, and action oriented: not merely a set of discrete skills but a holistic developmental process embedded in social and cultural contexts.

In practice, however, SEL is discussed under a wide range of overlapping labels – for example, 'life skills', 'soft skills', 'non-cognitive skills', 'twenty-first-century skills' – which do not map onto one another consistently. Brush et al. (2022) describe this as the jingle–jangle fallacy/effect: different competencies are labelled with the same term, while the same competency may be described using multiple terms. For policy planners, this creates real difficulties in aligning goals across curricula, teacher training, and assessment.

Existing frameworks differ substantially in scope, purpose, and structure. *Table 1* summarizes five internationally recognized selected approaches, illustrating the diversity of frameworks that planners must navigate.

Table 1. Comparative overview of major SEL-related frameworks

Framework	Age Range / Setting	Core Skill Focus	Key Feature
Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL)	Pre-K–12 / School, home, community	Self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, responsible decision-making	Widely adopted; provides guidance on systemic SEL and evidence-based assessment
OECD Survey on Social and Emotional Skills (SSES)	Primary & secondary level (at 10 years and 15 years old)	Task performance, emotional regulation, collaboration, open-mindedness, engagement with others, compound skills	Cross-national assessment tool; examines school, peer, and family factors
Big Five Personality Traits	All ages	Conscientiousness, openness to experience, neuroticism/ emotional stability, extraversion, agreeableness	Widely validated model; strong predictor of labour market and life outcomes
P21 / 21st Century Learning	Pre-K–12 / School, home, community	Learning & innovation skills, information & technology skills, life & career skills	Integrates twenty-first-century skills into teaching; prepares diverse learners for work, life, and citizenship
Ikiru Chikara (zest for living) (Japan)	Kindergarten through to upper secondary / School, home, community	Academic ability, humanity, overall physical health	Culturally grounded national approach; whole-person education emphasizing intellectual, moral, and physical balance (*Chi-Toku-Tai*)

Note: Pre-K-12 spans of schooling from pre-kindergarten (early childhood education roughly children aged 3 to 5 years) through the end of secondary school (12th grade).
Source: Based on Explore SEL and framework documentation.

These frameworks diverge in the developmental stages that they target, the terminology they use, and the measurement tools they propose. A common analytical structure is needed to map these differences systematically: one that classifies competencies by definition rather than by label.

2.2 Selected evidence of the impact of SEL

Evidence from school-based intervention research demonstrates that SEL competencies are associated with positive effects across four key domains: academic performance, labour market outcomes, well-being, and social cohesion. Although this body of evidence is drawn predominantly from high-income-country contexts, particularly the United States (US) and Europe, a growing body of research from diverse contexts points in a consistent direction:

— On academic performance, a landmark meta-analysis of over 200 school-based SEL programmes from kindergarten through to high school, using data mainly from the US and other high-income countries, found that participating students outperformed peers by 11 percentage points on standardized tests (Durlak et al., 2011). A more recent meta-analysis covering 424 studies across 53 countries confirmed that universal school-based SEL interventions produce consistent improvements in academic achievement across diverse contexts (Cipriano et al., 2023). SEL skills such as perseverance, self-control, and growth mindset are consistently associated with attendance, engagement, and test-score gains (OECD, 2015; West et al., 2016). Consistent with these findings, a study

from Indonesia has shown that social skills and emotional intelligence are positively associated with learning outcomes among primary school students (Khoirunikmah, Marmoah, and Indriayu, 2022).

— On labour market outcomes, skills such as collaboration, adaptability, and problem-solving are among the most valued by employers globally (World Economic Forum, 2015; World Bank, 2021). Cross-national evidence from the OECD Survey on Social and Emotional Skills (SSES) shows that curiosity, creativity, self-control, and achievement motivation are strongly correlated with professional aspirations and employment quality (Steponavičius, Gress-Wright, and Linzarini, 2023). In low- and middle-income settings, soft skills training among garment workers in India increased productivity by 13.5 per cent (Adhvaryu, Kala, and Nyshadham, 2023), and a randomized evaluation in Colombia found that vocational trainees who received soft skills training caught up with technical-track peers in employment and earnings within 6–12 months (Barrera-Osorio, Kugler, and Silliman, 2021).
— On well-being and resilience, SEL interventions have been shown to strengthen emotional regulation and coping capacities, particularly in crisis and post-conflict settings (UNESCO, 2020; Durlak, Mahoney, and Boyle, 2022). Evidence from Peru further shows that SEL-focused interventions improve self-awareness, self-regulation, and empathy among students in basic education (Ramos Vera et al., 2024).
— On social cohesion, studies have shown that SEL programmes consistently reduce antisocial behaviour and improve prosocial skills such as cooperation and empathy (Durlak et al., 2011; Sklad et al., 2012). A randomized intervention in Turkey targeting perspective-taking in ethnically mixed primary schools significantly reduced peer violence and social exclusion while increasing interethnic trust and prosocial behaviour (Alan et al., 2021).

While experimental evidence from schools in low- and middle-income-country settings remains more limited than that from high-income contexts, and questions about the cross-cultural transferability of measurement instruments persist (Laajaj and Macours, 2021), the overall direction of findings across contexts supports the relevance of SEL for learner development and social outcomes.

2.3 SEL across education levels

Evidence consistently shows that SEL competencies develop cumulatively over the life course, where ‘skill begets skill’ (Cunha and Heckman, 2007). However, policy attention and implementation do not reflect this developmental continuum: investment and support for SEL vary substantially across education levels, with earlier education cycles receiving considerably more attention than later ones.

At the pre-primary level, investment in SEL yields the highest long-term returns. Foundational competencies developed in early childhood shape educational trajectories, labour market outcomes, and adult wellbeing (Heckman, Pinto, and Savelyev, 2013). At the primary level, SEL interventions consistently improve both academic and socio-behavioural outcomes (Durlak et al., 2011). Research evidence covers a wide range of education levels, policy attention tends to be concentrated at earlier levels, leaving later levels comparatively under-served. At the secondary level, SEL support is paradoxically weakest, despite adolescence being a critical

developmental period: structural barriers (e.g. subject-based teaching, academic performance pressures, and limited teacher training) make whole-school SEL implementation particularly difficult (Lendrum and Wigelsworth, 2013; UNESCO, 2024). In technical and vocational education and training (TVET), SEL is highly valued by employers, yet Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) data suggest that TVET students tend to have lower SEL levels than peers in general education (World Bank et al., 2023). Research on SEL in higher education remains very limited (Conley, 2015).

This uneven distribution of policy attention, concentrated at the earlier education levels while diminishing progressively across secondary, TVET, and higher education, underscores the importance of examining whether national education plans treat SEL as a developmental continuum or focus it at selected education levels.

2.4 System-level integration of SEL

The effective integration of SEL requires coherence across all components of the education system: planning, curriculum design, teacher education, and M&E (UNESCO, 2024). In education planning practice, SEL is frequently positioned instrumentally rather than as an independent educational objective (Chatterjee Singh and Duraiappah, 2020). Curriculum design faces competing pressures, with SEL often marginalized where examination performance dominates (Ercikan, Roth, and Asil, 2015). Teacher education remains a critical bottleneck, and most SEL assessment tools have been validated in Anglo–American contexts, raising concerns about cross-cultural applicability (UNESCO, 2024).

These challenges are compounded by terminological fragmentation. Without a shared analytical framework, it is difficult to determine whether education systems are genuinely pursuing SEL as a strategic priority or simply using the language of SEL to describe narrower objectives. While adapting SEL to local cultural contexts is essential, some degree of shared conceptual grounding is still needed.

2.5 Justification for the Explore SEL Taxonomy framework

The Explore SEL Taxonomy uses a definition-based coding system organized around six broad domains and 23 subdomains, with a total of 177 behavioural indicators, as summarized in *Table 2*. The taxonomy was developed to map SEL-related constructs across frameworks based on their definitions rather than their labels by Harvard University's Ecological Approaches to Social Emotional Learning (EASEL) Laboratory, thereby improving comparability and transparency. By focusing on how skills are defined rather than on the labels used, the Taxonomy functions as a 'Rosetta stone', enabling systematic comparison across frameworks, programmes, and policy documents regardless of terminology (Jones et al., 2019; Brush et al., 2022).

Table 2. Core domains and subdomains of the Explore SEL Taxonomy

Domain	Description	Key Subdomains
1. Cognitive	Skills required to successfully and efficiently direct behaviour towards the attainment of a goal. Skills in this domain are involved in tasks that require you to concentrate and focus, remember instructions, prioritize tasks, control impulses, set and achieve goals, interpret and use information to make decisions, and more.	Attention Control; Working Memory & Planning; Inhibitory Control; Cognitive Flexibility; Critical Thinking
2. Emotion	Skills that help you recognize, express, and control your emotions as well as understand and empathize with others. Skills in this domain are important not only for managing your own feelings and behaviour, but also for interacting with and responding to others in prosocial ways.	Emotional Knowledge & Expression; Emotional & Behavioural Regulation; Empathy/Perspective-Taking
3. Social	Skills that help you accurately interpret other people's behaviour, effectively navigate social situations, and interact positively with others. Skills in this domain are required to work collaboratively, solve social problems, build positive relationships, and coexist peacefully with others.	Understanding Social Cues; Conflict Resolution/Social Problem Solving; Prosocial/ Cooperative Behaviour
4. Values	Skills, character traits/virtues, and habits that support you to be a prosocial and productive member of a particular community. This includes values like understanding, caring about, and acting upon core ethical values; the desire to perform to one's highest potential; an eager and thoughtful approach to knowledge and learning; and the habits required to live and work together with others as a friend, family member, and citizen.	Ethical Values; Performance Values; Civic Values; Intellectual Values
5. Perspectives	A person's perspective is how they view and approach the world. It impacts how they see themselves, others, and their own circumstances and influences how they interpret and approach challenges in their daily life. A positive perspective can help children and youth protect against and manage negative feelings to successfully accomplish tasks and get along with others.	Gratitude; Optimism; Openness; Enthusiasm/Zest
6. Identity	Identity encompasses how people understand and perceive themselves and their abilities. It includes knowledge and beliefs about themselves, including their ability to learn and grow. When a person feels good about themselves; sure of their place in the world; and confident in their ability to learn, grow, and overcome obstacles, it becomes easier to cope with challenges and build positive relationships.	Self-Knowledge; Purpose; Self-Efficacy/Growth Mindset; Self-Esteem

Source: Brush et al. (2022): 52.

For the purposes of this study, the Explore SEL Taxonomy offers three specific advantages: (1) it is applicable across cultural contexts without imposing a single definition of SEL; (2) it is analytically granular, organizing competencies across 23 subdomains and 177 behavioural indicators; and (3) it is publicly accessible, with existing SEL frameworks comprehensively documented and visualized through the Explore SEL online platform.

3

Methodological framework
Analysing SEL policy coherence and alignment

This chapter presents a three-stage methodology for assessing how SEL is integrated within a national ESP. The approach is designed to respect the conceptual logic of national policy texts before translating them into an internationally comparable framework and also to be replicable by researchers and planners working in diverse country contexts.

3.1 Overview and rationale

The methodology is designed to answer three questions about any given ESP: (1) Which SEL competencies does the plan articulate, and how are they conceptually framed? (2) Are these competencies addressed consistently across all education levels, from pre-primary through to higher education? (3) Are they coherently integrated across the policy cycle, from Vision and Strategic priorities through to M&E indicators?

We initially considered a direct sentence-level mapping of ESP text onto the Explore SEL Taxonomy but found this to be analytically unsuitable for two reasons. First, national policy documents tend to describe the same underlying concepts using different terms across sections, making sentence-by-sentence coding inconsistent. Second, SEL-related ideas in ESPs are rarely contained within single self-contained statements; they emerge from the cumulative reading of multiple passages.

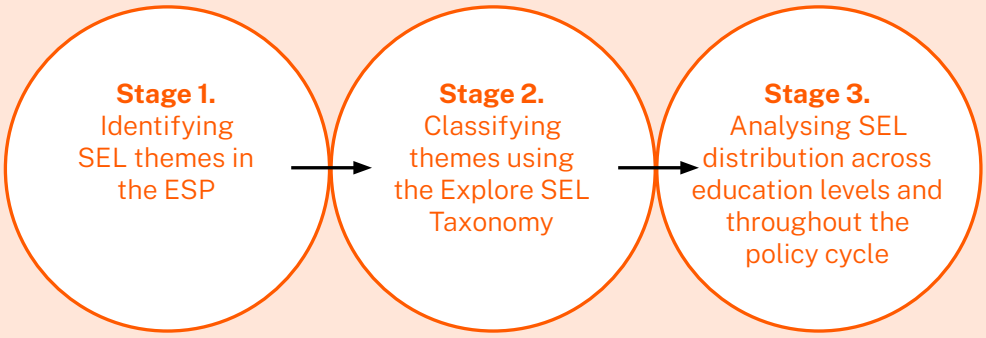
To address these limitations, our methodology takes a three-stage approach that first grounds analysis in the document's own conceptual logic before applying the external Explore SEL framework. *Table 3* provides an overview. Finally, tools that can be used in Stages 1–3 are presented in *Appendix 2*.

Table 3. Overview of the three-stage methodology

Stage	Purpose	Key Task	Output
Stage 1	Identify SEL themes as articulated in the policy document	Reflexive thematic analysis of ESP text; extract and code SEL-relevant statements	Set of SEL themes grounded in national policy language
Stage 2	Classify themes using the Explore SEL Taxonomy	Map each theme onto Explore SEL domains using three-level presence coding (◎ / ○ / △)	Domain alignment matrix for each SEL theme
Stage 3	Analyse distribution across education levels and policy cycle	Examine horizontal continuity across levels and vertical alignment across policy layers	Assessment of SEL coverage, continuity, and policy coherence

Source: Authors.

Three-stage method for assessing SEL integration in a national ESP



Stage 1
Stage 2
Stage 3

Stage 1: Identifying SEL themes in the ESP

The purpose of Stage 1 is to identify the SEL themes and concepts as they are articulated within the ESP: that is, mapping how the national document frames learner competencies in its own terms before any external classification is applied. This stage follows the reflexive thematic analysis approach proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006), adapted for policy document analysis.

Which sections of the ESP to analyse

The methodology focuses on three components: (1) the Vision/Mission sections that articulate overall goals and the kind of learner that the system aims to produce; (2) Strategy/Programme sections that describe strategic priorities, interventions, and outcomes; and (3) the M&E framework, where policy intentions should be translated into measurable indicators. Administrative and financial sections are excluded, as they focus on operational aspects rather than learner skill development.

Inclusion and exclusion criteria for texts and statements

Texts and statements are included when they describe learner-level attributes: skills, competencies, values, attitudes, behaviours, or mindsets. Texts and statements are excluded when they address only academic proficiency (literacy and numeracy) or refer exclusively to system-level or administrative matters (e.g. system resilience against climate change). M&E indicators are included only when they operationalize SEL-related themes and concepts already identified in the Vision/Mission or Strategy/Programme sections.

Coding and theme development

Eligible texts and statements are extracted and assigned initial interpretive codes that capture their meaning in relation to learner development. Codes are grouped into themes and concepts through iterative review, then named and described in language that reflects how the ESP itself frames learner development. *Table 4* provides illustrative examples from the Rwanda ESSP application.

Three-stage method for assessing SEL integration in a national ESP (continued)

Stage 1
Stage 2
Stage 3

Table 4. Illustrative examples: From extracted statements to SEL themes (Stage 1)

ESSP Section	Extracted Texts and Statement	Initial Code	Theme (Stage 1 Output)
Vision/Mission	'... the competencies, skills, and values required to contribute meaningfully to Rwanda's social and economic transformation'	National development competencies	National economic and social transformation
Strategy/ Programme	'Additionally, greater emphasis will be placed on life skills education within secondary schools, equipping students with competencies such as critical thinking, communication, problem-solving, and adaptability'	Life skills / multi-domain competencies	Life skills as a broad catch-all category
Strategy/ Programme	'The ESSP will direct investments toward developing future-ready graduates equipped with top skills — including complex problem-solving, critical thinking, creativity, innovation, and data-driven insight generation'	Top skills / higher education competencies	Top skills as strategic capacities for national transformation

Source: Illustrative examples from the application to Rwanda's ESSP 2024–2029.

Practical guidance for analysts: Stage 1 steps

Step 1: Read the entire ESP to familiarize yourself with its structure and overall policy logic.
Step 2: Extract all statements in the selected sections that describe learner-level SEL competencies.
Step 3: Assign an initial interpretive code to each extracted statement.
Step 4: Group codes into initial themes by examining how they relate to one another.
Step 5: Review themes against the full document; merge, split, or refine as needed.
Step 6: Finalize theme labels and write a brief description of each theme in the document's own terms.

Three-stage method for assessing SEL integration in a national ESP (continued)

Stage 1
Stage 2
Stage 3

Stage 2: Classifying themes using the Explore SEL Taxonomy

Whereas Stage 1 operates at the level of individual statements and codes, Stage 2 takes the finalized themes as its unit of analysis: each theme, understood as a coherent cluster of related policy statements, is assessed as a whole against the Explore SEL Taxonomy subdomain definitions (*Appendix 1*). This translation is structured around a three-level presence coding system defined in *Table 5*.

Table 5. Three-level presence coding for Explore SEL subdomain alignment (Stage 2)

Code	Symbol	Definition	Application Criterion	Example from Rwanda's ESSP
Explicit presence	◎	The theme description clearly matches the definitions of a specific Explore SEL subdomain, allowing a direct and unambiguous assignment.	SEL-related terms (e.g. socio-emotional learning, critical thinking, communication) are explicitly stated in the ESP text and map clearly onto Explore SEL subdomain descriptors.	*'Critical thinking, communication, problem-solving, and adaptability'* (Life skills (broad catch-all category) theme) map directly onto the 'Critical Thinking' subdomain.
Implicit presence	○	The theme description does not directly correspond to the definitions of a specific Explore SEL subdomain, but based on the context or the learner expectations implied in the text, the theme can reasonably be interpreted as referring to abilities associated with a specific subdomain.	The connection emerges from policy intent rather than explicit SEL constructs.	*'Preparing learners for meaningful participation in society and the workforce'* (School-to-work transition theme) implies the 'Performance Values' and 'Civic Values' subdomains, although these terms are not used.
Prerequisite presence	△	The theme description shows no explicit SEL wording and provides insufficient detail to determine domain alignment, but the context described inherently requires certain SEL competencies for learners to participate or benefit.	Competencies are inferred as conceptual prerequisites from the nature of the theme rather than from the theme description itself.	*'Discourage teenage pregnancies and drug abuse'* (Social awareness & values theme) requires 'Self-Esteem' as a prerequisite for learners to act on these expectations, although no such competency is described.

Source: Authors.

Three-stage method for assessing SEL integration in a national ESP (continued)

Stage 1
Stage 2
Stage 3

Two principles guide the classification:

1. Assessing alignment based on the behavioural definitions of Explore SEL sub-domains, not on the labels or terms used in the policy text: the key question is whether the competency described matches the behavioural definition of a specific Explore SEL subdomain; and
2. Distinguishing between what is described and what is implied: explicit presence (◎) requires that SEL-related terms are explicitly described in the text itself, not merely inferable from context. The output is a domain alignment matrix showing which Explore SEL domains are present in each SEL theme and at what level. A single theme may align with more than one Explore SEL domain simultaneously; in such cases, all applicable domains should be recorded at their respective level of presence.

Practical guidance for analysts: Stage 2 steps

Step 1: For each theme from Stage 1, review the Explore SEL subdomain descriptions.
Step 2: Assess alignment using the three-level coding system (◎ / ○ / △).
Step 3: Record the domain alignment for each theme in a matrix.
Step 4: Write a brief justification for each domain assignment.
Step 5: Review the full matrix for consistency.

Three-stage method for assessing SEL integration in a national ESP (continued)

Stage 1
Stage 2
Stage 3

Stage 3: Analysing SEL distribution across education levels and throughout the policy cycle

Stage 3 uses the domain alignment matrix from Stage 2 to analyse two dimensions of SEL integration in ESPs.

Dimension 1: Horizontal continuity across education levels

This dimension examines whether SEL is articulated as a developmental continuum across the education life course (from pre-primary through to TVET and higher education) or is concentrated at selected levels. Analysts identify which SEL themes and Explore SEL domains are referenced at each education level and construct a distribution matrix showing coverage and gaps.

Dimension 2: Vertical coherence across the policy cycle

This dimension examines whether SEL themes introduced at the Vision level are carried through consistently into the Strategy/Programme sections and the M&E indicators. Analysts track each SEL theme through the three policy layers (Vision/Mission, Strategy, M&E), identifying coherence gaps where commitments fail to translate into strategic action or measurable accountability.

Practical guidance for analysts: Stage 3 steps

Step 1: For each education level, record which SEL themes and Explore SEL domains are referenced.
Step 2: Construct a distribution matrix showing domain coverage by education level.
Step 3: Identify continuity and coverage gaps: which levels have limited SEL coverage?
Step 4: Track each SEL theme from Vision/Mission through Strategy/Programme to M&E indicators.
Step 5: Identify coherence gaps: themes present in the Vision but absent from M&E indicators.
Step 6: Synthesize findings into a summary assessment of horizontal continuity and vertical coherence.

3.2 Data collection and sources

The primary data source is the national ESP itself, which is typically a publicly available document from the ministry of education. The analysis focuses on the Vision/Mission, Strategy/Programme, and M&E sections. Supplementary documents (curriculum frameworks, teacher competency standards, dedicated SEL policies) may be consulted during Stage 1 to clarify contextual meaning but are not coded as primary data.

3.3 Limitations

Five methodological limitations should be noted. First, the assignment of themes to Explore SEL domains and sub-domains involves interpretive judgement, particularly at implicit and prerequisite levels where the connection between policy text and SEL constructs is not explicit. Although the classification criteria outlined in *Section 3.1* are designed to guide and standardize this process, some degree of subjectivity remains unavoidable. Inter-rater reliability checks are therefore recommended where resources permit.

Second, the analysis is limited to policy intent as expressed in the ESP and does not speak to implementation outcomes. The presence of SEL-related language in a planning document does not necessarily indicate that corresponding competencies are being developed in classrooms.

Third, ESPs typically do not define SEL constructs explicitly, and the same term may be used differently across sections or education levels. Interpretation is therefore context dependent, and analysts should consult supplementary sources (e.g. curriculum frameworks, teacher competency standards) to clarify meaning in ambiguous passages.

Fourth, the analysis is confined to the ESP and does not capture the full scope of how SEL is addressed across a country's education policy landscape. In practice, SEL competencies may be more extensively or differently articulated in complementary documents (e.g. teacher education and professional development frameworks, curriculum guidelines), and tensions or inconsistencies between these documents and the ESP may exist. The findings should therefore be understood as reflecting SEL integration at the sector planning level only, not as a comprehensive assessment of how SEL is embedded across the education system as a whole.

Finally, the methodology has been applied exclusively to English-language ESPs. Its applicability to documents in other languages has not been tested and may require additional procedural steps.

4

Illustrative application: Rwanda's ESSP 2024–2029

This chapter illustrates what the methodology reveals when applied to Rwanda's ESSP 2024–2029. The findings are presented as a demonstration of the approach, not as a comprehensive analysis.

4.1 Country context

Rwanda is an instructive case for illustrating this methodology. Unlike many low- and middle-income countries where SEL has been introduced through fragmented donor-driven programmes, Rwanda has taken a more comprehensive approach, linking curriculum reform, teacher education, and national frameworks. The 2015 CBC explicitly introduced generic competencies – critical thinking, problem-solving, communication, and cooperation – across all subjects. The 2022 SEL framework for early grades further institutionalized SEL practices, aligning terminology with national cultural values and educational priorities.

Despite this institutional investment, it is not self-evident whether SEL commitments are embedded coherently within the ESSP as the sector's overarching planning document. Rwanda therefore provides an ideal test case: a country with visible SEL engagement, where the question of policy coherence and alignment is analytically meaningful. The primary data source is Rwanda's ESSP 2024–2029 (Rwanda, 2024).

4.2 Stage 1 results: SEL themes identified in the ESSP

Applying the Stage 1 procedure to Rwanda's ESSP yielded 41 extracted statements (36 sentences and five M&E indicators), which generated 25 initial codes. Through iterative review and consolidation, these codes were refined into eight SEL themes:

1. **National economic and social transformation.** A macro-level framing in which SEL competencies such as discipline, responsibility, and cognitive capacities are articulated primarily as human capital for workforce participation and national development. Applies across education levels in the Vision/Mission and at secondary and TVET levels in the Strategy.
2. **School-to-work transition.** SEL is positioned in relation to learners' transition from school to the labour market and is linked to career guidance, counselling, and life skills provision. Most prominent at secondary and TVET levels.

3. **Life skills as a broad catch-all category.** An umbrella framing that groups conceptually distinct competencies – including critical thinking, communication, problem-solving, adaptability, gender equity, and health – under a single term. Concentrated at the secondary level.
4. **Lifelong learning as economic re-engagement.** SEL is framed as a mechanism for reintegrating out-of-school youth and adults into education and productive economic participation rather than as a holistic or well-being-oriented concept. Appears in non-formal education contexts.
5. **Foundational learning for academic performance.** Basic cognitive competencies such as attention, working memory, and self-regulation are positioned as prerequisites for academic success rather than as SEL goals in their own right. Concentrated at pre-primary and primary levels.
6. **Employability skills as transferable attributes for employment.** Competencies including critical thinking, communication, and cooperative behaviour are framed as transferable skills for labour market entry. Concentrated at TVET and higher education levels.
7. **Top skills as strategic capacities for national transformation.** Advanced competencies including complex problem-solving, critical thinking, creativity, and innovation are framed as strategic capacities for economic competitiveness and innovation-led growth. Specific to higher education.
8. **Social awareness and values as behavioural and normative expectations.** Socially responsible conduct and environmentally sustainable practices are framed as normative expectations rather than developmental competencies. Spans pre-primary, primary, and secondary levels.

Six of the eight themes are directly linked to workforce development or national economic transformation. Only two themes – Life skills as a broad catch-all category and Social awareness and values as behavioural and normative expectations – extend beyond economic framing, although even these retain instrumental dimensions.

▶ Key finding

Eight SEL themes were identified from Rwanda's ESSP, most of which are linked to workforce development and national economic transformation, suggesting an instrumental framing of SEL focused on economic outcomes.

4.3 Stage 2 results: Domain alignment matrix

Table 6 presents the SEL domain alignment matrix: the central analytical output of Stage 2. Each cell indicates whether a given Explore SEL domain is present at the explicit (◎), implicit (○), or prerequisite (△) level.

Table 6. SEL domain alignment matrix: SEL themes in ESSP mapped onto Explore SEL domains (Rwanda's ESSP 2024–2029)

SEL Theme	Cognitive	Emotion	Social	Values	Perspectives	Identity
National economic & social transformation	○			○		
School-to-work transition				○	○	○
Life skills (broad catch-all category)	◎	◎	◎	○		
Lifelong learning as economic re-engagement	○			○	△	△
Foundational learning for academic performance	○					
Employability skills	○		○	○		
Top skills for national transformation	◎			◎		
Social awareness & values			○	○		△

Note: ◎ Explicit presence ○ Implicit presence △ Prerequisite presence
Source: Authors.

Three patterns stand out from the domain alignment matrix. First, the Cognitive and Values domains are widely activated, appearing across six of the eight themes, while the Social, Perspectives, and Identity domains appear in only two to three themes each. Second, the Emotion domain is activated by only one theme – Life skills – and entirely absent from the remaining seven themes at any level of presence. Third, explicit presence (◎) is rare: only two themes – Life skills and Top skills for national transformation – achieve explicit alignment in any domain. The remaining activations are implicit (○) or at the prerequisite level (△), indicating that SEL competencies are rarely described in behavioural terms in the ESSP.

▶ Key finding

The Cognitive and Values domains dominate the ESSP, while the Emotion domain is almost entirely absent, reflecting an instrumentalized conception of SEL oriented towards economic productivity rather than holistic learner development.

4.4 Stage 3 results: Horizontal continuity across education levels

Table 7 maps the distribution of SEL themes across education levels. Each of the six education levels covered in the ESSP activates a distinct subset of themes, with no single theme spanning all levels. Secondary education has the broadest coverage, with four themes present, while non-formal education has the narrowest coverage, with two themes and one theme. Pre-primary and primary levels share an identical set of two themes, suggesting that SEL is conceptualized similarly across these two stages. Two themes – National economic and social transformation and School-to-work transition – are shared between secondary and TVET levels, reflecting their common orientation towards labour market preparation. Employability skills is the only theme shared between TVET and higher education.

Only one theme appears across three or more consecutive education levels, indicating that SEL is not articulated as a developmental continuum but rather as a set of stage-specific policy instruments. This pattern is unlikely to be accidental. In core academic subjects such as mathematics, curricular continuity across levels is treated as a basic design requirement. The fact that similar continuity is not observed for SEL suggests that it is implicitly conceived as a supplementary addition to the curriculum rather than a foundational competency. Seen in this light, the fragmentation observed here is not simply a planning gap but a reflection of how SEL is fundamentally positioned within these education systems.

Table 7. Distribution of SEL themes by education level (Rwanda's ESSP 2024–2029)

SEL Theme	Pre-primary	Primary	Secondary	TVET	Higher Education	Non-formal
National economic & social transformation			✓	✓		
School-to-work transition			✓	✓		
Life skills (broad catch-all category)			✓			
Lifelong learning as economic re-engagement						✓
Foundational learning for academic performance	✓	✓				
Employability skills				✓	✓	
Top skills for national transformation					✓	
Social awareness & values	✓	✓	✓			

Note: ✓ = theme present at this education level
Source: Authors.

▶ Key finding

Thematic SEL coverage varies substantially across education levels, with secondary education activating the broadest range of themes. Pre-primary and primary levels are limited to two themes each, focused narrowly on cognitive foundations. Most themes are confined to one or two education levels, with only Social awareness & values spanning three consecutive levels.

4.5 Stage 3 results: Vertical coherence across the policy cycle

Table 8 tracks the distribution of SEL themes across the three policy layers of the ESSP. Three SEL themes from Vision/Mission disappear at the M&E stage. Five of the eight themes identified in the Strategy also fail to appear in the M&E framework. Of the 71 indicators in the M&E framework, only a small subset relate to SEL, and these measure proxy activities, such as the number of schools with career guidance corners, rather than learner-level SEL competencies.

Table 8. Distribution of SEL themes across ESSP policy layers (Rwanda's ESSP 2024–2029)

SEL Theme	Vision/Mission	Strategy	M&E
National economic & social transformation	✓	✓	
School-to-work transition		✓	✓
Life skills (broad catch-all category)		✓	
Lifelong learning as economic re-engagement	✓	✓	
Foundational learning for academic performance	✓	✓	
Employability skills		✓	
Top skills for national transformation		✓	✓
Social awareness & values		✓	✓

Note: ✓ = theme present in this policy layer
Source: Authors.

▶ Key finding

There is a marked misalignment between the ESSP's strategic ambitions for SEL and the mechanisms established to monitor progress. Most SEL themes present in Vision/Mission and Strategy are absent from the M&E framework, and no indicators directly measure learner-level SEL competencies.

Finally, *Table 9* illustrates the full analytical output of the methodology when applied to Rwanda's ESSP. It maps all eight SEL themes against the six Explore SEL domains across three layers of the policy cycle: Vision/Mission, Strategy, and M&E. This table demonstrates what the methodology makes possible: a structured, cross-cutting view of how SEL competencies are distributed across the policy cycle as a whole. By applying the same procedure to any national ESP, analysts can generate a comparable matrix that reveals which domains are present and at what level of articulation and also where gaps or misalignments exist between policy intent and measurable outcomes.

Table 9. SEL domain alignment matrix: SEL themes in ESSP mapped onto Explore SEL domains across ESSP policy layers (Rwanda's ESSP 2024–2029)

	SEL Theme	Cognitive	Emotion	Social	Values	Perspectives	Identity
Vision/ Mission	National economic & social transformation	○			○		
	Lifelong learning as economic re-engagement	○			○	△	△
	Foundational learning for academic performance	○					
Strategy	National economic & social transformation	○			○		
	School-to-work transition				○	○	○
	Life skills (broad catch-all category)	◎	◎	◎	○		
	Lifelong learning as economic re-engagement	○			○	△	△
	Foundational learning for academic performance	○					
	Employability skills	○		○	○		
	Top skills for national transformation	◎			◎		
	Social awareness & values			○	○		△
M & E	School-to-work transition				○	○	○
	Top skills for national transformation	◎			◎		
	Social awareness & values			○	○		△

Note: ◎ Explicit presence ○ Implicit presence △ Prerequisite presence
Source: Authors.

4.6 Adapting the methodology to other national contexts

While this illustration draws on Rwanda, the methodology is designed to be transferable to any country with a national ESP. The Explore SEL Taxonomy provides the analytical foundation for this transferability: as a definition-based coding system organized around six domains, it can be applied across diverse cultural and institutional contexts without imposing a single normative model of SEL.

However, four points should be noted when applying the methodology elsewhere. First, ESP structures vary across countries: analysts should identify the policy layers in their context that are functionally equivalent to the Vision/Mission, Strategy, and M&E layers used here. Second, terminological landscapes vary: the jingle–jangle problem (whereby the same term refers to different competencies or the same competency is described using multiple terms) takes different forms in different contexts. Stage 1 is specifically designed to capture these variations through inductive thematic analysis before any external classification is applied. Third, scope may vary: in countries where the ESP is supplemented by a curriculum framework, teacher competency standards, or a dedicated SEL policy, analysts may

wish to extend the Stage 1 analysis to include these documents as primary sources, particularly where the ESP itself contains limited SEL-related language. Lastly, the methodology has been developed and tested using English-language ESPs. Analysts working with documents in other languages should be aware that the conceptual mapping in Stage 2 relies on the behavioural definitions of the Explore SEL Taxonomy, which are formulated in English. When applying the methodology to non-English ESPs, a careful translation of the Explore SEL Taxonomy is recommended, and analysts should exercise additional caution in assessing alignment, as nuanced differences in meaning may affect coding judgements.

5

Conclusion and implications for policy

5.1 Summary of the methodology

This paper has presented a three-stage methodology for assessing the integration of SEL within national education sector strategic plans. The approach addresses a persistent gap in the SEL research and policy literature: while considerable evidence documents the impacts of SEL interventions and the challenges of system-level implementation, analytical tools for examining how SEL is framed, prioritized, and institutionalized within national education policy documents have been lacking.

We make three methodological contributions. First, this methodology grounds the analysis in the national document's own conceptual logic through reflexive thematic analysis, preserving the cultural and policy specificity of national planning documents. Second, it uses the Explore SEL Taxonomy as a common analytical structure, enabling definition-based comparison regardless of terminology. Third, it examines SEL integration along two analytically distinct dimensions: horizontal continuity across education levels and vertical coherence across the policy cycle.

When applied to Rwanda's ESSP 2024–2029, the methodology reveals four substantive findings. First, eight SEL themes are identified in the ESSP, the majority of which are associated with workforce development and national economic transformation. This indicates that SEL is framed largely in instrumental terms, with an emphasis on economic outcomes. Second, SEL is dominated by the Cognitive and Values domains, whereas the Emotion domain is activated by only one theme, reflecting an instrumentalized conception of SEL oriented primarily towards economic productivity. Third, SEL coverage is heavily concentrated at secondary level and varies substantially across education levels, with no theme spanning more than three consecutive levels. Last, there is a structural misalignment across the policy cycle: SEL commitments present in the Vision/Mission and Strategy are not carried through into M&E indicators.

These findings would not be visible through a superficial reading of the ESP alone. **The methodology makes them legible by providing a structured analytical lens that reveals not only what is present in the document but what is absent, where coverage is uneven, and where policy coherence breaks down**. This is precisely

the kind of diagnostic information that ministries of education and development partners need, to enable them to move from broad rhetorical commitments to SEL towards more balanced, measurable, and system-wide integration.

5.2 Implications for policy planners

The methodology offers four practical uses for policy planners and education system analysts. First, it can serve as a diagnostic tool at the ESP review and development stage, identifying which SEL domains are well represented, which are absent, and where gaps in policy coherence exist across education levels and the policy cycle. This kind of structured diagnosis is not possible through a superficial reading of the ESP document alone. Second, it can support cross-national comparison and benchmarking by providing a common analytical structure that enables findings from different national contexts to be compared systematically, even where countries use different terminology or frameworks. Third, the vertical coherence analysis in Stage 3 has direct implications for M&E system design: by identifying precisely which SEL themes lack indicator coverage, it enables planners to develop measures that capture learner-level competency outcomes rather than process or activity proxies. Fourth, the methodology can be embedded into the ESP development cycle itself, as a coherence check at drafting and revision stages to ensure that SEL commitments introduced at the Vision/Mission stage are consistently operationalized through Strategy and reflected in measurable indicators at the M&E stage.

Together, these applications position the methodology as a practical planning instrument that ministries of education and development partners can deploy to strengthen the integration of SEL across education systems.

5.3 Directions for further application and development

Three directions for further development warrant consideration. First, the methodology could be extended to complementary policy documents (e.g. curriculum frameworks, teacher competency standards, dedicated SEL policies), to build a more comprehensive picture of SEL institutionalization across the system. Second, the methodology could serve as a bridge between policy analysis and implementation by enabling planners to identify intervention programmes and frameworks that address the specific SEL domains found to be under-represented in their ESP. An international database linking Explore SEL Taxonomy domain profiles to evidence-based programmes and frameworks would further support this translation from policy diagnosis to practical action. Third, applying the methodology to existing assessment instruments, including PISA and national-level assessments, would enable a systematic mapping of which SEL domains are currently measured and where significant measurement gaps remain. This would complement the policy-level analysis with an understanding of what is and is not visible in accountability systems.

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Appendices

Appendix 1. Explore SEL Taxonomy: Domains, subdomains, and behavioural indicators

The Explore SEL Taxonomy, developed by the EASEL Laboratory at Harvard University, organizes social and emotional learning competencies into six broad domains and 23 subdomains comprising 177 behavioural indicators. The Taxonomy uses a definition-based coding system: competencies are classified according to their behavioural descriptions, not according to the labels or terms used by any particular framework or policy document. Analysts applying the Stage 2 classification procedure should refer to the behavioural indicators in this table when assessing alignment between ESP themes and Explore SEL subdomains.

Domain	Subdomain	Behavioural Indicators
1. Cognitive	1.1 Attention Control	**1.1.1.** Sustains attention by focusing on task at hand **1.1.2.** Uses strategies to maintain attention (e.g. uses self-talk to keep focused) **1.1.3.** Uses listening skills to focus (e.g. looks at speaker, sits still, puts hands in lap, doesn't talk) **1.1.4.** Ignores distractions when doing a task
	1.2 Working Memory and Planning Skills	**1.2.1.** Uses strategies to make a plan (independently or under the direction of a teacher) **1.2.2.** Carries out complex tasks (e.g. completing multi-step tasks, thinking through options and choosing one) **1.2.3.** Engages in goal-directed behaviour independently and when instructed (i.e. acting to achieve a goal) **1.2.4.** Remembers and follows complex (e.g. two-and three-part) commands **1.2.5.** Uses strategies to remember and follow complex commands (e.g. repeating directions out loud or in head, making a list, periodically consulting the directions) **1.2.6.** Remembers and recalls information (e.g. recalls multiple rules during a game, remembers key points from reading, recalls a plan and if it was followed) **1.2.7.** Uses strategies to remember and recall information (e.g. self-talk) **1.2.8.** Sets goals (differs from acting to achieve a goal)
	1.3 Inhibitory Control	**1.3.1.** Inhibits inappropriate responses (e.g. raising hand instead of shouting out answer) **1.3.2.** Uses strategies to inhibit inappropriate responses (e.g. taking a deep breath, counting to 10, sitting on hands, covering mouth, self-talk) **1.3.3.** Waits (e.g. waits turn to play game or talk, waits for teacher to finish giving instructions, stays in seat until time to leave) **1.3.4.** Uses strategies to wait (e.g. playing a game or singing a song while in line, engaging in other tasks such as reading while waiting for others to finish, self-talk)

APPENDIX 1. EXPLORE SEL TAXONOMY: DOMAINS, SUBDOMAINS, AND BEHAVIOURAL INDICATORS

Domain	Subdomain	Behavioural Indicators
1. Cognitive (continued)	1.4 Cognitive Flexibility	**1.4.1.** Easily transitions to new tasks **1.4.2.** Compares and contrasts ideas **1.4.3.** Generates and updates hypotheses (e.g. consequential thinking: 'if X, then Y') **1.4.4.** Downplays less relevant information when solving problems **1.4.5.** Approaches problems in flexible ways (e.g. brainstorms multiple solutions to a problem) **1.4.6.** Uses strategies to transition to new tasks or activities (e.g. song, two-minute warning) **1.4.7.** Shifts attention from one task, aspect, or perspective to another
	1.5 Critical Thinking	**1.5.1.** Utilizes reason to understand, predict, and/or deduce **1.5.2.** Asks and answers questions for clarification **1.5.3.** Defines, interprets, and explains terms and/or ideas **1.5.4.** Plans processes needed to solve a problem **1.5.5.** Evaluates options for solving a problem **1.5.6.** Carries out a solution to solve a problem **1.5.7.** Monitors progress in solving a problem **1.5.8.** Evaluates progress in solving a problem **1.5.9.** Systems thinking; understands the complexity of systems and actors (including how parts interact with the whole) **1.5.10.** Interprets and draws conclusions **1.5.11.** Monitors the quality of their thought (e.g. reflection or metacognition) **1.5.12.** Employs strategies to analyse information, evidence, and/or arguments (including assessing assumptions, separating fact from opinion, questioning validity, verifying information, and/or listening and observing) **1.5.13.** Recognizes multiple sides of an issue and/or understands multiple perspectives **1.5.14.** Processes information efficiently **1.5.15.** Identifies and understands the existence and nature of problems **1.5.16.** Demonstrates motivation and/or dispositions conducive to critical thinking (including open-mindedness, fair-mindedness, inquisitiveness, flexibility, and/or respect for others' viewpoints) **1.5.17.** Employs problem-solving process to make a decision (code if stress is on selecting a solution) **1.5.18.** Reflects on past thoughts and actions

APPENDIX 1. EXPLORE SEL TAXONOMY: DOMAINS, SUBDOMAINS, AND BEHAVIOURAL INDICATORS

Domain	Subdomain	Behavioural Indicators
2. Emotion	2.1 Emotional Knowledge and Expression	**2.1.1.** Uses feeling words appropriate to the situation **2.1.2.** Appropriately uses a range of feeling words of varying intensity (e.g. I felt angry vs. I felt furious) **2.1.3.** Expresses emotions to others in effective ways (e.g. uses 'I messages') **2.1.4.** Identifies emotions in self or others **2.1.5.** Identifies intensity of emotions/feelings in self and others **2.1.6.** Differentiates between feelings and behaviours (e.g. I feel angry vs. I feel like hitting you) **2.1.7.** Understands relationships between situation and emotion (e.g. accurately identifies the emotion a particular situation would elicit) **2.1.8.** Understands complex/simultaneous feelings (e.g. being nervous and excited at the same time) **2.1.9.** Is able to monitor and predict emotions
	2.2 Emotional and Behavioural Regulation	**2.2.1.** Uses effective regulatory strategies when upset (e.g. self-talk, taking deep breaths, walking away, Stop and Stay Cool) **2.2.2.** Uses feeling words to explain one's behaviour **2.2.3.** Identifies and communicates how a problem or challenge makes one feel **2.2.4.** Can regulate one's emotions (including anxiety, anger, and other emotions) **2.2.5.** Utilizes effective strategies to cope with disappointment and failure **2.2.6.** Understands what constitutes appropriate vs. inappropriate expressions of emotion and expresses oneself appropriately
	2.3 Empathy / Perspective-Taking	**2.3.1.** Identifies and acknowledges the experiences, feelings, and viewpoints of others (including characters) **2.3.2.** Offers examples of times when one had similar emotions or experiences (including characters) **2.3.3.** Uses active interpersonal listening strategies to elicit and understand the feelings and opinions of others (e.g. asking probing questions, making eye contact, paraphrasing and reflecting, nodding, and leaning forward) **2.3.4.** Identifies and acknowledges how another's feelings differ from one's own (including characters) **2.3.5.** Acknowledges how another's point of view and thoughts differ from one's own (including characters) **2.3.6.** Makes connections (compare and contrast) between self and other (including characters) **2.3.7.** Demonstrates active role-taking (considering oneself in another's situation) **2.3.8.** Identifies the relationship between the behaviours/emotions/situation of one individual and the feelings of another **2.3.9.** Recognizes/lists potential ways to respond to empathic concern (e.g. asking for help, laughing at a victim, giving verbal reassurance) **2.3.10.** Identifies which responses to empathic concern are most appropriate and effective **2.3.11.** Seeks help or comfort from others to deal with distress caused by empathy (verbal and physical) **2.3.12.** Uses effective self-control strategies to cope with distress caused by empathy (e.g. self-talk, deep breaths) **2.3.13.** Uses physical gestures or verbal expressions to comfort or provide relief to another person in distress (e.g. hugs, pats, expressing concern, verbal sympathy)

APPENDIX 1. EXPLORE SEL TAXONOMY: DOMAINS, SUBDOMAINS, AND BEHAVIOURAL INDICATORS

Domain	Subdomain	Behavioural Indicators
3. Social	3.1 Understanding Social Cues	**3.1.1.** Uses social cues such as body language and tone of voice in standard and appropriate ways (refers to self) **3.1.2.** Accurately interpreting and appropriately responding to others' social cues such as body language and tone of voice (refers to others, including characters) **3.1.3.** Identifies motivations and intentions of others (including when others' actions are accidental or purposeful/hostile)
	3.2 Conflict Resolution / Social Problem-Solving	**3.2.1.** Faces conflicts and deals with them in constructive ways (e.g. win-win, compromising) (including situations involving characters) **3.2.2.** After conflict, reflects appropriately on its outcome(s) (including situations involving characters) **3.2.3.** Uses strategies to effectively address or solve social dilemmas and conflicts (e.g. talking to an adult, seeking out mediation, peace path, using 'I messages') **3.2.4.** Identifies the problem or its antecedents **3.2.5.** Uses strategies to think about/see the bigger picture **3.2.6.** Uses strategies to avoid interpersonal conflicts (e.g. jumping to conclusions, not waiting, interrupting) **3.2.7.** Understands that conflict and disagreement are normal parts of life but how one handles them is important **3.2.8.** Generates and evaluates potential responses and their consequences **3.2.9.** Identifies effective and ineffective outcomes to conflict **3.2.10.** Asserts oneself in an appropriate manner during a conflict (e.g. uses 'I messages', calmly and diplomatically states values and preferences)
	3.3 Prosocial / Cooperative Behaviour	**3.3.1.** Effectively enters and engages in a variety of social situations **3.3.2.** Is inclusive of other children **3.3.3.** Stands up for other children when they are teased, insulted, or left out **3.3.4.** Stands one's ground when another child tries to pressure him or her **3.3.5.** Calmly and diplomatically states values and preferences (e.g. is assertive in ways appropriate to situation) **3.3.6.** Listens attentively to others (e.g. listening to group members, not talking over others) **3.3.7.** Acts respectfully and kindly towards others **3.3.8.** Encourages/supports others / team members **3.3.9.** Follows classroom/institution/society rules and expectations (norms, directions) and exhibits appropriate behaviour for context **3.3.10.** Participates as an active and successful member of a team/community **3.3.11.** Completes one's responsibilities within a team in a timely manner **3.3.12.** Demonstrates leadership in team tasks **3.3.13.** Allows others to lead in team tasks **3.3.14.** Helps others to resolve conflicts/disputes **3.3.15.** Identifies and takes action to correct hurtful situations (e.g. apologizes) **3.3.16.** Gives compliments to others **3.3.17.** Works as a team to achieve a goal (doing something together) **3.3.18.** Works as a team to remember and summarize information (thinking together) **3.3.19.** Takes turns with peers **3.3.20.** Effectively communicates ideas, stories, and information to others **3.3.21.** Shares with others (toys, belongings, objects, etc.) **3.3.22.** Understands the actions and behaviours that foster friendship (e.g. understands what a friend is and how to make and sustain them) **3.3.23.** Knows how, when, and/or who to ask for help/assistance **3.3.24.** Seeks help when needed **3.3.25.** Builds and maintains positive relationships **3.3.26.** Understands how one's actions affect others/the community **3.3.27.** Manages/copes with unfair situations or situations one perceives to be unfair

APPENDIX 1. EXPLORE SEL TAXONOMY: DOMAINS, SUBDOMAINS, AND BEHAVIOURAL INDICATORS

Domain	Subdomain	Behavioural Indicators
4. Values	4.1 Ethical Values	**4.1.1.** Expresses care/shows consideration for the feelings of others (e.g. sympathy, compassion) **4.1.2.** Selflessly offers, gives to, or shares with others (e.g. is generous) **4.1.3.** Understands the importance of accepting and/or forgiving the shortcomings of others (e.g. is patient, forgiving) **4.1.4.** Demonstrates a willingness to sacrifice personal gain or comfort for the sake of others (e.g. is altruistic) **4.1.5.** Believes it is important to be tolerant and accepting of differences in others; or celebrates/appreciates diversity **4.1.6.** Understands and avoids acting on stereotypes and preconceived notions **4.1.7.** Understands the importance of treating others with courtesy (e.g. polite, respectful, demonstrates good sportsmanship) **4.1.8.** Takes care of and treats property with respect (e.g. school facilities, classroom materials, family/friends' belongings) **4.1.9.** Accepts responsibility for one's words, actions, and attitudes **4.1.10.** Conducts self with honesty and integrity (e.g. tells the truth, admits wrongdoing, doesn't cheat or steal) **4.1.11.** Does the right thing in the face of difficulty (e.g. follows conscience instead of the crowd, stands up for one's beliefs, demonstrates courage) **4.1.12.** Constructs and/or expresses opinions about right and wrong (e.g. makes ethical judgements) **4.1.13.** Weighs options and considers consequences to make ethical decisions **4.1.14.** Resists temptation (e.g. recognizes and avoids unsafe, unhealthy, dangerous, or undesirable situations) **4.1.15.** Understanding and respecting the intrinsic worth and rights of all people (e.g. belief in human rights/human dignity, equality)
	4.2 Performance Values	**4.2.1.** Follows through on commitments **4.2.2.** Tries one's best in challenging situations or in spite of difficulty, delay, or boredom (e.g. perseveres, does not easily give up) **4.2.3.** Strives for excellence and takes pride in one's work (e.g. does not do things halfway or half-heartedly) **4.2.4.** Remains on task and committed to goals in the face of distractions or temptations; is disciplined in the face of temptation **4.2.5.** Sets one or more tasks/goals and shows motivation or passion to complete them; is determined **4.2.6.** Demonstrates good organizational skills (e.g. plans ahead, manages time wisely, arrives to class prepared) **4.2.7.** Identifies and takes advantage of available resources in order to accomplish a goal, sometimes in the context of limited resources **4.2.8.** Shows a willingness to learn from one's mistakes
	4.3 Civic Values	**4.3.1.** Is aware of and works to correct unfairness/promote social justice in school, community, and the world **4.3.2.** Understands one's connection and responsibility to family, classroom, school community, neighbourhood, country, and world; understands the value of civic responsibility **4.3.3.** Understands and actively participates in democratic process (e.g. votes, stays informed, involved in community affairs) **4.3.4.** Strives to help others to make their community and/or world a better place (e.g. through community service) **4.3.5.** Expresses love of and loyalty to the things that are good about one's country (e.g. patriotic) **4.3.6.** Values and works towards consensus (e.g. strives to find common ground as opposed to debating or convincing) **4.3.7.** Is willing to make personal sacrifices for friends, family, and country **4.3.8.** Volunteers to help when needed **4.3.9.** Understands the importance of setting a good example for others and acting as a positive influence **4.3.10.** Understands the need for rules/laws and makes reasoned decisions about when and how to advocate for their change
	4.4 Intellectual Values	**4.4.1.** Displays a love of learning (e.g. is enthusiastic about and actively engaged in learning) **4.4.2.** Expresses an eagerness to know and learn new things (e.g. is curious) **4.4.3.** Seeks out new information and learns new skills on one's own **4.4.4.** Demonstrates a willingness to admit error and change one's mind when confronted with new evidence **4.4.5.** Investigates the truth (e.g. does not simply accept information and evidence at face value) **4.4.6.** Thinks outside the box; approaches tasks and problems in novel ways (e.g. is creative) **4.4.7.** Thinks things through from all sides; avoids jumping to conclusions (e.g. about people, circumstances, situations)

APPENDIX 1. EXPLORE SEL TAXONOMY: DOMAINS, SUBDOMAINS, AND BEHAVIOURAL INDICATORS

Domain	Subdomain	Behavioural Indicators
5. Perspectives	5.1 Optimism	**5.1.1.** Expresses optimism and/or maintains optimistic outlook **5.1.2.** Expects good things to happen **5.1.3.** Approaches and reflects on challenging situations with a positive attitude
	5.2 Gratitude	**5.2.1.** Expresses gratitude and appreciation for good and/or everyday things
	5.3 Openness	**5.3.1.** Adapts willingly and easily to change, both positive and negative **5.3.2.** Notices and appreciates beauty and excellence **5.3.3.** Accepts both past and present circumstances or feelings in life (e.g. is able to consider them without opinion or judgement) **5.3.4.** Receptive to new and unfamiliar ideas, feelings, and experiences **5.3.5.** Interested in and open to whatever is in the present moment
	5.4 Enthusiasm/ Zest	**5.4.1.** Approaches activities with enthusiasm and excitement
6. Identity	6.1 Self-Knowledge	**6.1.1.** Identifies and understands personality/character traits **6.1.2.** Recognizes and understands one's own strengths and weaknesses **6.1.3.** Honest about what you know and don't know **6.1.4.** Develops and maintains a coherent sense of self and roles over time **6.1.5.** Identifies and understands one's interests and preferences
	6.2 Purpose	**6.2.1.** Considers existential questions (e.g. what is the purpose of my life, what is my life passion, what is happiness, what is my place in the world) **6.2.2.** Imagines the future; formulates life goals and ways to pursue them **6.2.3.** Expresses and derives comfort from a belief in something greater than self
	6.3 Self-Efficacy / Growth Mindset	**6.3.1.** Believes that intellectual abilities and personality traits are qualities that can be developed and improved **6.3.2.** Expresses confidence in oneself and one's ability to improve or succeed **6.3.3.** Sees challenges as things that one can take on and overcome with time and effort **6.3.4.** Belief that one has a choice (agency)
	6.4 Self-Esteem	**6.4.1.** Feels a sense of belonging; feels valued by others in the community **6.4.2.** Extends kindness and understanding to oneself (e.g. has self-compassion, emotional self-respect) **6.4.3.** Forgives oneself for errors and mistakes (e.g. accepts and moves on from past actions) **6.4.4.** Demonstrates physical self-respect by maintaining good hygiene **6.4.5.** Understands the effects of risk behaviours (e.g. drugs, alcohol, tobacco, sex) on their body and uses that information to make responsible choices **6.4.6.** Believes that one is not defined by one's thoughts, emotions, or circumstances

Source: Explore SEL.

Appendix 2: Analyst worksheets: Stages 1–3

These worksheets provide blank templates for applying the three-stage methodology to any national Education Sector Plan (ESP). Complete one set of worksheets per ESP analysed.

Worksheet 1 – Stage 1: Extracting SEL statements and developing themes

Instructions: Read the Vision/Mission, Strategy, and M&E sections of the ESP. Extract all statements describing learner-level competencies (skills, values, attitudes, behaviours, mindsets). Assign an initial code to each statement. Group related codes into themes and record the consolidated themes in the second table.

Country/ESP: _____ **Analyst:** _____ **Date:** _____

Part 1A: Statement extraction and initial coding

#	ESP Section	Extracted Statement	Initial Code	Theme (Stage 1 output)
1				
2				
3				
4				
5				
6				
7				
8				
9				
10				

Note: Add rows as needed. Exclude statements addressing only academic proficiency (literacy/numeracy) or system-level/administrative matters.

APPENDIX 2: ANALYST WORKSHEETS: STAGES 1–3

Part 1B: Theme consolidation

Theme Label	Brief Description (in document's own terms)	Relevant Codes (list)

Note: Review themes against the full document. Merge, split, or refine as needed before proceeding to Stage 2.

APPENDIX 2: ANALYST WORKSHEETS: STAGES 1–3

Worksheet 2A – Stage 2: Domain alignment matrix

Instructions: For each SEL theme identified in Stage 1, list all potentially relevant SEL domains and subdomains based on its key feature. Then, assess each candidate using the four-level coding system here. A single theme may align with more than one domain simultaneously. Base your assessment on the behavioural definitions in *Appendix 1*, not on labels or terms used in the ESP text.

Coding legend:			
◎	Explicit presence: SEL terms directly stated and unambiguously aligned with subdomain definition	○	Implicit presence: alignment inferred from policy intent, not explicit SEL language
△	Prerequisite presence: competency inferred as conceptual prerequisite; insufficient detail for direct alignment	×	Not applicable: considered but no meaningful alignment with the SEL subdomain based on the behavioural definitions

SEL Theme (from Stage 1)	Key Feature	Domain	Subdomain	Decision (△/○/△/×)	Rationale

APPENDIX 2: ANALYST WORKSHEETS: STAGES 1–3

Worksheet 2B – Stage 2: Domain alignment matrix

Instructions: Based on the results from Worksheet 2A, summarize the final domain alignment for each SEL theme. Record all domains where alignment is identified (◎ / ○ / △), excluding those marked as not applicable (×). Write a brief justification for each coding decision in a separate note (in the space provided overleaf or on a separate sheet).

Coding legend:			
◎	Explicit presence: SEL terms directly stated and unambiguously aligned with subdomain definition	○	Implicit presence: alignment inferred from policy intent, not explicit SEL language
△	Prerequisite presence: competency inferred as conceptual prerequisite; insufficient detail for direct alignment		

SEL Theme (from Stage 1)	Cognitive	Emotion	Social	Values	Perspectives	Identity

APPENDIX 2: ANALYST WORKSHEETS: STAGES 1–3

Coding justifications (briefly note reasoning for each domain assignment):

SEL Theme	Justification Notes

APPENDIX 2: ANALYST WORKSHEETS: STAGES 1–3

Worksheet 3A – Stage 3: Horizontal continuity across education levels

Instructions: For each SEL theme, mark (✓) the education levels at which it is referenced in the ESP. Adapt column labels if the ESP uses different level designations. Once complete, identify: (a) which levels have limited or no SEL coverage; (b) which themes span three or more consecutive levels; (c) whether SEL is articulated as a developmental continuum or concentrated at selected levels.

SEL Theme	Pre-primary	Primary	Secondary	TVET	Higher Ed.	Non-formal

Summary observations on horizontal continuity:

Levels with broadest SEL coverage:
Levels with limited or no SEL coverage:
Themes spanning 3+ consecutive levels:
Key gaps identified:

APPENDIX 2: ANALYST WORKSHEETS: STAGES 1–3

Worksheet 3B – Stage 3: Vertical coherence across the policy cycle

Instructions: For each SEL theme, mark (✓) the policy layers in which it appears. In the Coherence Notes column, flag any theme present in Vision/Mission or Strategy but absent from the M&E framework. Note whether M&E indicators measure learner-level SEL competencies or only process/activity proxies to develop learners' SEL (e.g. number of schools with guidance corners).

SEL Theme	Vision/Mission	Strategy/Programme	M&E Indicators	Coherence Notes

Summary observations on vertical coherence:

Themes present across all three layers:
Themes absent from M&E:
M&E indicators measuring learner-level SEL outcomes (if any):
Key coherence gaps identified:

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