INPLASY

Cultural Adaptations of Social-Emotional Learning in Elementary Education: A Systematic Cross-Cultural Review - Protocol

Corresponding author:
Asma Aljazzaf

asma.aljazzaf@postgrad.manchester.ac.uk

Author Affiliation:
University of Manchester.

Aljazzaf, A; Wigelsworth, M; Stelma, J.

ADMINISTRATIVE INFORMATION

Support - None.

Review Stage at time of this submission - The review has not yet started.

Conflicts of interest - This review is a part of a PhD project conducted at the University of Manchester. The authors declare no conflict of interest.

INPLASY registration number: INPLASY202550018

Amendments - This protocol was registered with the International Platform of Registered Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis Protocols (INPLASY) on 9 May 2025 and was last updated on 9 May 2025.

INTRODUCTION

*R*eview question / Objective This systematic Literature review aims to address the following questions:

1- What type of cultural adaptations are made to SEL interventions in mainstream elementary education across different cultural contexts?
2- What is the relationship between Hofstede's cultural dimensions and the strategies used to adapt SEL interventions across different countries?

The objective of this review is to synthesise research on the cultural adaptation of social-emotional learning (SEL) interventions, focusing on elementary education outside the Anglo cultural cluster, and to identify patterns linking cultural values with adaptation strategies.

Rationale Social-emotional learning (SEL) is widely recognised for promoting students' social, emotional and academic development. However, most SEL frameworks and interventions have been developed in Western, high-income contexts, particularly the United States, where cultural values emphasise individualism, emotional expression, and autonomy. When applied in culturally diverse contexts, these frameworks may not fully align with local cultural norms, potentially reducing their effectiveness or acceptance.

Although some studies have explored the cultural adaptation of SEL programs, most focus on individual program modifications rather than systematically analysing broader patterns of adaptation across different cultural settings. There is also no clear method of examining how cultural values shape these adaptations, which makes it difficult to compare different approaches or create culturally responsive SLE programs.

This review addresses these gaps by synthesising research on how SEL interventions are culturally adapted in mainstream elementary education outside the Anglo cultural cluster, where cultural

differences often necessitate modification of programs. Using Hofstede's cultural dimensions as a theoretical framework, this review will explore how cultural factors shape adaptation strategies across different countries. By identifying patterns and relationships between cultural values and adaptation practices, this review aims to deepen understanding of how SEL interventions can be more effectively designed and implemented in culturally diverse educational contexts.

The findings aim to support researchers, educators, and policymakers in understanding how SEL can be adapted to fit different cultural contexts, therefore contributing to the development of more inclusive and meaningful educational practices worldwide.

Condition being studied Social-emotional learning (SEL) helps students develop the skills to understand and manage emotions, build healthy relationships, show empathy, and make responsible decisions. It is widely recognised as an essential part of education that supports both personal and academic development. This review examines how SEL interventions are adapted to fit different cultural contexts in mainstream elementary schools.

METHODS

Search strategy The search strategy will target studies related to the cultural adaptation of social-emotional learning (SEL) interventions in mainstream elementary education. Five electronic databases will be searched: Scopus, Web of Science, ERIC, PsycINFO, and PubMed.

Search terms will include variations of SEL terminology combined with elementary education terminology. SEL-related terms will include: "social-emotional," "SEL," "social emotional," "social and emotional," and "social & emotional." Education-related terms will include: "primary education," "elementary education," "primary school," "elementary school," "early years education," "primary level," and "elementary level."

Boolean operators (AND/OR) will be used appropriately to combine terms. In addition, citation tracking (both backward and forward) will be conducted to identify relevant studies not captured through the database searches.

Participant or population This review focuses on students in mainstream elementary education, generally between the ages of 5 and 12. It includes studies where SEL interventions are delivered as a part of standard school settings during regular schooling hours. The review does not include research involving early childhood, secondary, higher, special, or alternative education settings. To maintain a focus on culturally distinct contexts, only studies from countries outside the Anglo cultural cluster—comprising the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Ireland, and South Africa (White population)—will be included.

Intervention This review focuses on structured, school-based SEL interventions designed for mainstream elementary schools, targeting students aged 5 to 12. To be included, interventions must be delivered during regular school hours as part of the formal curriculum. Although the content and delivery of these programs may vary, they should address at least two of the five core competencies identified by the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL): self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making.

Comparator This review does not use a formal comparator, as it does not evaluate intervention outcomes against control groups. Instead, it explores descriptive differences in how SEL interventions are adapted across cultural and contextual settings.

Study designs to be included This review will include primary empirical studies that use qualitative, quantitative, or mixed methods to explore the cultural adaptation of SEL interventions in mainstream elementary education. Studies based on secondary analysis, including all forms of reviews, theoretical works, or non-empirical publications, will be excluded.

Eligibility criteria This review will include primary empirical studies published in peer-reviewed journals that use qualitative, quantitative, or mixed-methods designs. Eligible studies must examine the cultural adaptation of structured social-emotional learning (SEL) interventions implemented in mainstream elementary education settings for students aged 5 to 12. To be included, interventions must address at least two of the five core competencies defined by the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL): self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. They must also be delivered during regular school hours as a part of the formal school curriculum. Studies must be conducted in cultural contexts outside the Anglo cultural cluster,

comprising the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Ireland, and South Africa (White population). Studies will be excluded if they are not published in peer-reviewed journals; if they focus on early childhood, secondary, higher, special, or alternative education settings; if they do not examine cultural adaptation; if they are based on secondary research such as systematic reviews, meta-analyses, theoretical papers, or opinion pieces; or if they are published in languages other than English.

Information sources The following electronic databases will be searched to identify eligible studies: Scopus, Web of Science, ERIC, PsychINFO, and PubMed. Citation tracking will also be conducted, including backward citation searching (reviewing reference lists of included studies) and forward citation searching (using Google Scholar to identify newer studies that have cited the included articles). Only peer-reviewed journal articles will be considered. No grey literature sources, trial registries, or direct author contracts are planned as information sources for this review.

Main outcome(s) This review will classify SEL interventions based on the type of cultural adaptation—none, surface-level, deep-level, or mixed—and identify the specific adaptation strategies reported in each study. These strategies will be grouped into procedural, content, and delivery domains. This review will also analyse how frequently different adaptation types and strategies occur across cultural settings and explore potential links between these patterns and Hofstede's cultural dimensions.

Additional outcome(s) This review will also examine patterns in how adaptation strategies differ across world regions and cultural clusters. It will consider variations depending on whether SEL interventions were developed locally or adapted from other contexts, alongside implementation details such as who delivered the intervention, how it was executed, and the setting. These additional insights will contribute to a clearer understanding of how cultural and contextual factors influence the adaptation of SEL interventions.

Data management All records gathered from database searches will be transferred to Covidence. This platform will assist in managing the screening process, eliminating duplicates, and monitoring inclusion and exclusion decisions. Full-text reviews and data extraction will also be carried out in Covidence using a custom form based on the review's coding frameworks. To ensure

consistency, supervisors will independently review a sample of the included studies. All data will be securely stored and backed up regularly.

Quality assessment / Risk of bias analysis The quality of included studies will be assessed using the Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool (MMAT), which is designed to evaluate qualitative, quantitative, and mixed-methods research. Each study will be assessed against five criteria based on its methodological design. To be included in the review, studies must meet at least three of the five criteria (60%). A subset of assessments will be independently reviewed by supervisors to ensure consistency and reduce the risk of bias in the appraisal process.

Strategy of data synthesis A descriptive synthesis will be conducted to examine how SEL interventions have been culturally adapted in mainstream elementary education. Each study will be coded using the 19-item framework developed by Albritton et al. (2024), which captures procedural, content, and delivery-related adaptation strategies. Studies will also be classified by adaptation type using the framework by Li et al. (2024) with one modification: an additional category, "none," will be included to identify studies that report no adaptation. Consequently, adaptation types will be categorised as none, surface-level, deep-level, or mixed.

Cultural context will be analysed using Hofstede's six cultural dimensions. Countries were grouped into five cultural clusters based on similarities in these dimensions through hierarchical cluster analysis in SPSS. This analysis included 67 countries and regional groupings with complete data across all six dimensions. Ward's method and squared Euclidean distance were used to generate the clusters. All cultural scores were obtained from Hofstede, Hofstede, and Minkov (2010), *Cultures and Organizations: Software of the Mind* (3rd edition).

For regional groupings that lacked data on Long-Term Orientation or Indulgence, such as the Arab region, East Africa, and West Africa, regional averages were calculated from available country-level data from the same source. Countries with incomplete data that could not be supplemented were excluded from the cluster analysis but will still be included in the review and analysed individually in the synthesis.

Adaptation types and strategies will be analysed across cultural clusters, with further attention to specific Hofstede dimensions and the cultural

distance between the country of intervention development and the country of implementation. Findings will be summarised in tables and described narratively. No statistical synthesis or effect size analysis will be conducted.

Subgroup analysis Subgroup analyses will explore whether certain types of adaptation or strategies are more common in certain contexts. In addition to exploring variation across the five clusters, the review will also examine patterns within clusters, for example, whether surface-level or deep-level adaptations are more frequently reported, or whether particular types of strategies appear more often in one cluster than another. The analysis will also consider differences by country or region, and by program origin. Where possible, details such as how the intervention was delivered, who delivered it, and the setting in which it took place will also be considered. These comparisons aim to offer a deeper understanding of how cultural and contextual factors shape the adaptation of SEL interventions. All subgroup analyses will be descriptive and based on patterns observed in the data.

Sensitivity analysis To test the strength of the findings, the review will examine whether key patterns in the data, such as how adaptation types appear across different cultural clusters, are consistent across the included studies or influenced by just a few. This will involve revisiting the trends identified during the synthesis to see if they hold up when focusing on studies that scored higher on quality. While this is not a formal sensitivity analysis, it offers a way to check the reliability of the review's descriptive patterns and cultural interpretations.

Language restriction Only studies published in English will be included. Other languages are excluded due to limited translation resources and to ensure consistency in the quality assessment process.

Country(ies) involved This study is based in the United Kingdom. All authors are affiliated with UK institutions, and the lead author is originally from Bahrain.

Other relevant information This review is a part of a PhD project at the University of Manchester and will contribute to a thesis by publication. The study is supervised by two academic advisors.

Keywords social-emotional learning; SEL; cultural adaptation; primary education; elementary education; Hofstede; non-Anglo countries; cultural clusters; systematic review; adaptation strategies.

Contributions of each author
Author 1 - Asma Aljazzaf - Developed the protocol, designed the search strategy and coding framework, and drafted the manuscript.
Email: asma.aljazzaf@postgrad.manchester.ac.uk
Author 2 - Michael Wigelsworth - Provided supervision and expertise in social-emotional learning, supported the development of the coding framework, and contributed to revising the protocol.
Email: michael.wigelsworth@manchester.ac.uk
Author 3 - Juup Stelma - Provided supervison and expertise in cross-cultural research, contributed to the conceptual framework, and advised on the use of Hofstede's cultural dimensions and cluster analysis.
Email: juup.stelma@manchester.ac.uk