

UNDERSTANDING HOW TEACHER-CENTERED INSTRUCTIONAL METHODS SHAPE UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS' SOCIO-EMOTIONAL LEARNING COMPETENCE: EVIDENCE FROM HIGHER EDUCATION IN PAKISTAN

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Abstract

The present study investigates the relationship between teacher-centered instructional methods and socio-emotional learning competence of undergraduate students in higher education institutions of Pakistan. The quantitative cross sectional survey design was used and data were collected from 494 undergraduate students of four public sector universities of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Teacher centered instructional methods and socio-emotional learning competence were measured using a structured questionnaire. Data analysis was done using descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation and simple linear regression. The results showed that there was a significant positive correlation between teacher-centered instructional methods and SEL competence. The regression analysis also showed that teacher-centered teaching methods had a significant predictive effect on students' socio-emotional competence, but the predictive effect was not very strong. The study emphasizes the importance of teacher scaffolding, classroom structure, and positive classroom practices in supporting students' social-emotional learning. Results contribute to the existing body of higher education literature by highlighting the importance of instructional practices in supporting outcomes other than academic.

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, higher education institutions have been called upon to produce students with disciplinary knowledge as well as social, emotional, and interpersonal skills to thrive in complex academic, professional, and social settings. Educational effectiveness has been traditionally measured in terms of cognitive outcomes like examination performance, academic achievement, and subject knowledge.

Recent views on education, however, have shifted to emphasize that students' future success is shaped by their broader developmental skills, such as emotional regulation, self-awareness, collaboration, empathy, interpersonal communication, and responsible decision-making (OECD, 2021; World Economic Forum, 2023). In higher education, these skills are crucial as university students face several developmental issues in the areas of independent learning,

career preparation, social relations and psychological adaptation. As a result, socio-emotional learning (SEL) has become an important aspect of the quality of education, and universities are no longer just institutions for the transmission of knowledge, but also places for the cultivation of students' personalities.

SEL is the process of learning to understand and manage emotions, build positive relationships, be socially aware, and make responsible choices. The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL, 2020) lists five areas of socio-emotional competence: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision making. While the early research on SEL focused on school-based learning, more recent research has pointed to the relevance of SEL in higher education as students in the undergraduate system need these competencies to cope with the demands of academic life, work with diverse peers, navigate changing contexts, and successfully transition to the workplace (Elmi, 2020; Wang et al., 2025). There is recent evidence that university students' socio-emotional skills are related to academic engagement, psychological well-being, interpersonal effectiveness, and future employability (Zhang et al., 2022; Shengyao et al., 2024). Although there has been growing awareness of the importance of socio-emotional competence as a desired graduate outcome, very little research has focused on how daily classroom practices can foster the development of SE competencies in university students.

Teaching practices are one of the most critical factors that affect students' learning experiences because they influence the ways in which knowledge is transmitted, how classroom interactions take place and how students interact with learning activities. Teacher-centered instructional methods are still prevalent in higher education systems among various instructional methods. Teacher centered instruction means instruction that is dominated by the teacher who organizes the content of the course, explains the concepts, directs the activities in the classroom,

controls the pace of learning, and evaluates the students' learning. While the focus on student-centered, collaborative, and active learning has grown over the years, teacher-centered instruction is still prevalent due to its perceived efficiency, clarity, and capacity to manage large classes and broad curricula (Kirschner et al., 2020).

The theory and empirical research on the role of teacher-centered instruction in student development is still controversial. Some critics believe that too much teacher control can interfere with student autonomy, diminish opportunities for interaction, and diminish active involvement in learning processes. Socio-emotionally, highly controlling classrooms can limit students' opportunities to learn how to communicate, how to interact with others, and how to work cooperatively. But, teacher-centred instruction does not necessarily mean it is ineffective, as structured explanations, explicit guidance, modelling, and systematic feedback can help students' confidence, self-regulation, and academic learning, especially when teaching complex concepts (Kirschner et al., 2020; Hattie, 2023). Thus, teacher-centered instruction might rely on the teacher's use of authority, communication, feedback and interpersonal support in classroom settings.

There are theories in education that can explain the possible connection between teacher-centered learning instructional methods and socio-emotional learning competence. Bandura's (1986) Social Learning Theory states that people learn behaviours, attitudes, and skills by observing, interacting with, and being reinforced for others. In the classroom setting of the university, teachers serve as significant role models whose communication styles, emotional expressions, and interpersonal behaviors can impact students' social and emotional growth. Students watch teachers engage in classroom interactions, give feedback, respond to challenges and build relationships, and may develop their own emotional regulation and interpersonal skills based on what they see. Likewise, Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory focuses on the ongoing interaction

between the person and the environment in which he or she lives. The classroom is a first-hand developmental environment in which teaching practices shape students' sense of belonging, engagement, psychological safety, and social interactions. Taking this view, teacher-centered instructional practices can have an impact on socio-emotional competence, not only through direct teaching behaviours, but also by the classroom experiences that teachers create.

Recent empirical evidence supports the importance of teaching environments in developing students' socio-emotional competencies. Wang et al. (2025) studied university students and found that teacher autonomy, competence, and relatedness support were positively correlated with socio-emotional skills, such as self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. Likewise, Wang et al. (2025) found that active learning opportunities, good teaching practices, and clear academic expectations in the teaching and learning environment were linked to higher socio-emotional skills in university students. The results suggest that classroom practices are significant predictors of SEL, but previous studies have tended to focus on positive classroom environments rather than specifically on teacher-centered instructional practices.

This is especially relevant in the context of higher education like Pakistan where the need to explore teacher-centered instruction and socio-emotional competence has become a necessity. In Pakistan, the number of students in universities has increased significantly and the size of these institutions has also grown, which has led to an increased demand for enhancing the quality of education beyond the results of exams. Undergraduate education reforms put by the Higher Education Commission (HEC) focus on competency development, meaningful learning experiences and graduate attributes (HEC, 2023). However, in many classrooms of higher education institutes in Pakistan, the traditional learning and teaching environment is still in place with the teacher having authority, lecture

style teaching, exam-oriented learning and little scope for interactive learning. In this context, teacher-centred teaching is still the main teaching method as it offers practical benefits for the management of large classes and the completion of long syllabus. There is, however, little empirical evidence to support the claim that such teaching methods help students develop in other areas, such as socio-emotional competence. It is not possible to make generalizations across the higher education systems in the West and East Asia to the Pakistani universities, as the educational culture, teacher-student relationship, classroom norms, and institutional conditions are different. Hence, the study of this relationship in the context of higher education in Pakistan can be a significant contribution to the context.

There are some gaps in the literature that warrant the present study. First, previous studies on instructional methods have mainly concentrated on academic achievement, motivation and engagement, and comparatively limited attention has been paid to the competence of socio-emotional learning in higher education settings (Wang et al., 2025). Second, previous research has primarily focused on student-centered learning, teacher support, and positive classroom environments, with little research exploring teacher-centered instruction as a stand-alone instructional model. Third, while the research base on SEL has grown significantly, the majority of empirical studies have focused on populations of students in schools and not on undergraduate students, who are key environments for socio-emotional learning (CASEL, 2020; Elmi, 2020). Fourth, there is a lack of evidence from developing country higher education systems, especially Pakistan, about the impact of instructional practices on students' socio-emotional competencies.

This study investigates the relationship between teacher-centred instructional methods and socio-emotional learning competence of undergraduate students in Pakistani Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) to address these gaps. The study makes a theoretical contribution by extending the research on instructional

effectiveness from academic outcomes to other aspects of student development. Empirically, it offers evidence from an underrepresented educational setting, and deepens the understanding of the relationship between classroom teaching practices and socio-emotional competence. In practice, the results can help university teachers, academic administration, and policy makers to develop instructional practices that promote knowledge acquisition and holistic student development.

1.2 Objectives of the Study

- 1.To examine the relationship between teacher-centered instructional methods and undergraduate students' socio-emotional learning competence.
- 2.To determine the effect of teacher-centered instructional methods on undergraduate students' socio-emotional learning competence.

1.3 Hypotheses of the Study

H1: Teacher-centered instructional methods are significantly related to undergraduate students' socio-emotional learning competence.

H2: Teacher-centered instructional methods significantly predict undergraduate students' socio-emotional learning competence.

2. Research Methodology

2.1 Research Design

The study was conducted using quantitative cross sectional survey research design to explore the relationship between teacher centered instructional methods and socio emotional learning competence of undergraduate students in higher education institutions of Pakistan. A quantitative approach was suitable as the study was intended to measure the study variables and to statistically analyze the relationship and predictive effect of the study variables. The cross-sectional design enabled the researcher to gather data from the respondents at one time in their natural environment of learning (Creswell & Creswell, 2023). The teacher-centered instructional methods were regarded as independent variable, and socio-emotional

learning competence was regarded as dependent variable in this study.

2.2 Participants

In total, 26,394 undergraduate students from four public sector universities of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan, namely Gomal University, Dera Ismail Khan; Kohat University of Science and Technology; Khushal Khan Khattak University, Karak; and University of Science and Technology Bannu were studied. To ensure an adequate representation of students from each participating university a proportionate stratified sampling technique was used. A sample of 394 undergraduate students was drawn based on the number of students in the population. Stratified sampling was suitable as the population comprised students from various institutional settings and needed proportional representation (Creswell & Creswell, 2023). The individual undergraduate student was the unit of analysis because it was a study of students' perceptions of classroom instructional practices and their socio-emotional competencies.

2.3 Research Instruments

The data were gathered using a structured questionnaire which had two main scales: Teacher-Centered Instructional Method and Socio-Emotional Learning Competence. The teacher-centered instructional methods were adapted from Yoshida et al. (2014)'s Teaching Style Assessment Scale (TSAS) consisting of 30 items. The scale evaluated students' perceptions of teacher directed instructional practices such as instructional control, classroom interaction, teaching methods, learning activities, personalization of learning, assessment practices, and teachers' involvement in the learning process. The items were rated on a five-point Likert scale from 1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree, with higher scores reflecting more of the teacher-centered instructional practices.

Students' Socio-Emotional Learning Competence was assessed with the Socio-Emotional Learning Competencies Scale adapted

from the scale developed by Ülvey and Özkul (2018) which consists of 26 items. Five dimensions of socio-emotional competence were evaluated in the scale: social awareness, social isolation, self-control, social anxiety and establishing relationships. This instrument was given on a 5-point Likert scale from 1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree. Social isolation and social anxiety were reverse coded to allow higher composite scores to indicate greater overall socio-emotional learning competence, as were negatively worded dimensions. The choice of these instruments allowed the study to measure the students' perceptions of instructional practices and their socio-emotional competencies in higher education in Pakistan quantitatively.

2.4 Validity and Reliability of Instruments

In order to determine the validity and reliability of the research instruments, statistical analysis was done prior to the main statistical analysis. To ensure that the items were representative of the constructs of teacher-centered instructional methods and socio-emotional learning competence in the context of higher education in Pakistan, content validity was established through expert review. The instruments selected were modified from existing instruments and checked for conceptual appropriateness, clarity and context for undergraduate students.

Cronbach's alpha coefficient was used to check the internal consistency of the instruments. The reliability analysis showed high consistency for both study constructs. The Teacher-Centered Instructional Method Scale, comprising of 30 items, had a very good internal consistency ($\alpha = .912$). Likewise, the Social-Emotional Learning Competencies Scale (SEL) showed good internal consistency (Cronbach's $\alpha = .833$) for the 26 items. Both instruments yielded scores that were above the commonly accepted value of .70, suggesting that both instruments were reliable in measuring the teacher-centered instructional practices and students' socio-emotional learning competence (Hair et al., 2022). The reliability results thus confirmed the use of these measures

in the subsequent correlation and regression analyses.

2.5 Data Collection and Data Analysis

Data collection was done after getting permission from the relevant university authorities. The purpose of the study, voluntary participation, confidentiality and the right to withdraw at any time were explained to the respondents. The principles of ethics were adhered to in the research process, such as informed consent, anonymity of responses and confidentiality of responses. The data gathered were only for scholarly research.

Data collected were analyzed descriptively and inferentially. The levels of teacher-centered instructional methods and socio-emotional learning competence of undergraduate students were determined using descriptive statistics such as mean and standard deviation. Pearson product-moment correlation was used to test the correlation between the two variables. Moreover, simple linear regression analysis was used to find out the predictive effect of teacher-centered instructional methods in socio-emotional learning competence. The statistical results were analyzed based on the objectives of the study and the hypothesis.

3. Results

3.1 Descriptive Analysis of Study Variables

Descriptive statistics were used to investigate the levels of teacher-centered instructional methods and socio-emotional learning competence of undergraduate students. The mean and standard deviation values for the overall constructs and the dimensions of the socio-emotional learning competence were analyzed. The Teacher-Centered Instructional Method scale was composed of 30 items which were measured using a five-point Likert scale, while Socio-Emotional Learning Competence was measured using a 26-item scale with five dimensions: Social Awareness, Social Isolation, Self-Control, Social Anxiety, and Establishing Relationships.

The results showed that the overall score for the Teacher-Centered Instructional Method was 3.01

(SD = 0.65), which was considered as moderate level of teacher-centered instructional practices in undergraduate students. The outcome indicates that students had some teacher-directed practices, such as delivery of structured knowledge, teacher control over the instructional activities, and traditional assessment practices, but to different degrees depending on the classroom experiences. The overall mean score for Socio-Emotional Learning Competence was 3.13 (SD = 0.66), which suggests that respondents' level of socio-emotional competence was moderate. At the dimension level, Self-Control had the highest mean score (M = 3.45, SD = 0.85), followed by

Social Awareness (M = 3.42, SD = 0.89), suggesting that students had higher mean scores in the areas of behavioural regulation, patience, respect, and supportive interactions with others. Establishing Relationships had the lowest mean (M = 2.66, SD = 0.80), indicating less involvement in leadership, coordination, and group organization activities. Social Isolation (M = 2.82, SD = 0.83) and Social Anxiety (M = 3.28, SD = 0.90) are dimensions with negatively worded items, and were reverse coded when computing the overall SEL competence score, so they require careful interpretation.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of Study Variables

Variable	Dimension	Mean	SD
Teacher-Centered Instructional Method	Overall TCIM	3.01	0.65
Socio-Emotional Learning Competence	Social Awareness	3.42	0.89
	Social Isolation*	2.82	0.83
	Self-Control	3.45	0.85
	Social Anxiety*	3.28	0.90
	Establishing Relationships	2.66	0.80
	Overall SEL Competence	3.13	0.66

***Note:** Social Isolation and Social Anxiety contained negatively worded items and were reverse-coded for calculating the overall socio-emotional learning competence score.

3.2 Inferential Analysis and Hypothesis Testing

3.2.1 Relationship between Teacher-Centered Instructional Methods and Socio-Emotional Learning Competence

The first hypothesis was tested to determine if there was a significant association between teacher-centered instructional methods and undergraduate students' socio-emotional learning competence. Pearson product-moment correlation analysis was used to identify the direction and strength of the correlation between the two variables. The findings showed that there was a positive and statistically significant

correlation between teacher-centered teaching strategies and SEL competence ($r = .156$, $p = .002$). This means that perceived teacher centered instructional practices were slightly positively correlated with students' socio-emotional learning competence. The weak magnitude of the relationship, but significant correlation, indicates that there may be some association between socio-emotional development and instructional practices that involve structured teaching, teacher guidance, and organized classroom processes. So, H1 was supported.

Table 2. Pearson Product Moment Correlation between Teacher-Centered Instructional Methods and Socio-Emotional Learning Competence

Variables	1	2
1. Teacher-Centered Instructional Method	1	
2. Socio-Emotional Learning Competence	.156**	1

Note: $p < .01$

3.2.2 Predictive Effect of Teacher-Centered Instructional Methods on Socio-Emotional Learning Competence

To test the second hypothesis, a simple linear regression analysis was performed to see whether teacher-centered instructional methods significantly predicted the students' socio-emotional learning competence as undergraduate students. The independent variable was the teacher-centred instructional method and the dependent variable was the overall socio-emotional learning competence. The regression results showed that teacher-centred teaching was significantly related to students' socio-emotional learning competence ($B = 0.159$, $\beta = 0.156$, $t = 3.135$, $p = 0.002$). The model accounted for

about 2.4% of the variance in socio-emotional learning competence ($R^2 = 0.024$), suggesting that the predictive effect was statistically significant, but the instructional methods used by teachers accounted for only a small proportion of the variance in students' socio-emotional competence. The results indicate teacher-centered teaching methods have a positive but limited effect on students' socio-emotional learning competence. This suggests that socio-emotional development can be facilitated with structured teacher guidance, classroom organization, and direction; but other factors related to the education and personal lives of students can also be important in accounting for differences in students' socio-emotional competencies.

Table 3. Regression Analysis of Teacher-Centered Instructional Method Predicting Socio-Emotional Learning Competence

Predictor Variable	Dependent Variable	B	β	t-value	p-value	R^2
Teacher-Centered Instructional Method	Overall Socio-Emotional Learning Competence	0.159	0.156	3.135	0.002	0.024

4. Discussion

The present study aimed to investigate the correlation between teacher-centered instructional techniques and socio-emotional learning competence of the undergraduate students in Pakistani higher education institutions. The results showed that teacher-centered teaching methods were positively and statistically significant related to socio-emotional learning competence ($r = .156$, $p = .002$) and were significantly predicted the students' socio-emotional competence ($\beta = .156$, $p = .002$). The explanatory power was relatively low ($R^2 = .024$), however, indicating that teacher-centered instructional practices play a role in the socio-

emotional development of students but are just one of many academic, social, and psychological factors that impact students' socio-emotional competencies.

Teacher directed approaches have been found to be positively related to SEL competence, which offers a more complex understanding of the relationship between teacher directed and SEL competence. While there is a growing emphasis in modern education literature on the importance of student-centered learning, the results of the present study suggest that, in addition to student-centered learning, structured teacher-led instruction can be used to foster socio-emotional development if combined with

guidance, feedback, and supportive teacher-student interactions. Teacher-led instruction can be helpful in giving students clarity, organization, predictable classroom routines, and academic direction, which can improve students' confidence and emotional regulation. This is in line with Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1986) which states that students learn behaviours, attitudes and interpersonal skills by observing, modelling and being reinforced. Teachers, as a result, are not only knowledge transferers but also social models whose communication patterns and classroom behaviours impact students' emotional and interpersonal growth.

The results are consistent with the recent study that showed the role of teaching environments in university students' socio-emotional skills. Wang et al. (2024) investigated the socio-emotional skills of 1,136 university students in 21 universities, and concluded that the teaching and learning environment, such as good teaching, active learning opportunities, and clear academic expectations, positively influenced students' socio-emotional skills. They conclude that classroom experiences play an important role in the formation of socio-emotional competence. The same, Wang et al. (2025) found that teacher support for students' psychological needs (autonomy, competence, and relatedness) was positively correlated with the socio-emotional skills of university students. The findings of the present study are supported by these findings as they indicate that teacher practices have a wider impact on students than just academic achievement and that they have an impact on students' emotional and social competencies. The results also align with studies that highlight teacher support and emotional experiences in the classroom in higher education. Jia and Cheng (2024) revealed that teacher social support played a positive role in enhancing the positive classroom experiences and teacher-student relationships, which in turn affected the emotions and learning engagement of university students. Likewise, studies on teacher emotional leadership have found that teachers' emotional behaviors affect students' engagement and

learning experiences in the classroom by affecting classroom emotional climates (Zhang et al., 2024). The research presented here indicates that there are conditions that can be established in relatively teacher-directed classrooms that can support students' emotional regulation, social interaction, and psychological adjustment through supportive teacher behaviours.

The small predictive effect that was found in this study is also significant, however. Socio-emotional learning competence is a multidimensional competence which is formed continuously through the interaction between the individuals and their educational, social and personal environment. Thus, differences in students' socio-emotional competencies cannot be completely attributed to instructional practices. The results from previous research have also shown that a range of factors, such as classroom climate, peer relationships, institutional support, and collaborative learning opportunities, are also found to impact socio-emotional development in higher education (OECD, 2021; Mahoney et al., 2021). The small effect size in the current study indicates that teacher-led teaching might serve as a basis for the development of SE skills, but other supportive learning conditions are needed to support the development of these skills.

The results also help to advance the discussion on teacher-centred versus student-centred pedagogies. Teacher-centered methods do not necessarily conflict with socio-emotional learning, but over-involving teachers can result in a lack of student autonomy and opportunities for participation. Structured teacher-led approaches can offer valuable academic organization and learning support in contexts, like Pakistan, where universities are frequently equipped with large classrooms, examination pressures and limited instructional resources. It is not about teacher-centred or student-centred teaching, but how teachers practice the teaching. A teacher-led, respectful communication, constructive feedback, encouragement of student expression and emotional support approach may support academic and socio-emotional outcomes. This balanced view is supported by recent research on

the pedagogy of higher education. In higher education settings, Mujallid (2024) discovered that instructional approaches that engaged students with appropriate instructor presence had a significant impact on students' social-emotional learning skills. Likewise, research on positive pedagogy indicates that incorporating socio-emotional teaching into the classroom supports the wellbeing, agency and emotional engagement of students with learning spaces. The results suggest that a combination of cognitive and emotional/social aspects of learning is necessary for effective teaching.

The study also contributes to the socio-emotional learning research by offering some empirical evidence from the context of higher education in Pakistan which has not been explored in the international literature. There is a wealth of SEL research that has been conducted in the context of school-based populations and in Western educational environments, so it is important to gain insight from other developing higher education systems. The present results show that socio-emotional competence of undergraduate students can be impacted by routine classroom instructional practices, thus underscoring the need to take into account teaching practices as part of a larger student development strategy.

Based on the practical aspects, the results indicate that universities need to promote faculty development programmes to improve teaching effectiveness and interpersonal teaching skills. Faculty members should be encouraged to use a blend of structured teaching and supportive classroom behaviours, opportunities for interaction and recognition of students' emotional needs. This could enable teacher-led teaching to be a part of the teaching process that helps students rather than just a means of imparting knowledge. In general, the findings of this study show that the teacher-centered instruction has a significant effect on the competence of socio-emotional learning of undergraduate students, but the effect is limited. The results indicate that teacher scaffolding can be a factor for socio-emotional development within a supportive classroom environment.

Further studies are needed to explore other possible mechanisms of socio-emotional competence development, including classroom climate, teacher support and peer interaction, to gain a more complete picture of how socio-emotional competencies develop in university students.

5. Conclusion

This study investigated the relationship between teacher centered teaching strategies and socio-emotional learning competence of undergraduate students in higher education institutions of Pakistan. The results showed that teacher-centered instructional methods were significantly positively associated with socio-emotional learning competence and significantly predicted students' socio-emotional development with a moderate effect size. Findings indicate that when provided in a supportive learning environment, structured teacher guidance, clear instructional practices, and organized classroom processes can help students develop socio-emotional competencies. The study emphasizes that teacher-centered teaching does not have to be in conflict with holistic education of students. Instead, its effectiveness relies on the link teachers make between the structure of instruction and supportive communication, feedback and meaningful classroom interactions. The study offers empirical evidence to the readers from the Pakistani higher education system and brings to light the significance of socio-emotional learning as an integral component of university education.

6. Recommendations

This study suggests that higher education institutions need to create faculty development programs to help teachers integrate structured teacher-centered teaching with supportive and interactive teaching strategies. While maintaining the advantages of teacher-centered learning (explicit explanations, structured learning activities, and academic guidance), faculty should also provide opportunities for students to participate, reflect, work together, and feel supported, thereby enhancing students' socio-

emotional skills. In addition, the importance of socio-emotional learning in graduate development should be acknowledged by policymakers and university administrators, and policies that encourage teaching practices that foster both academic and personal growth should be developed. Future studies are invited to explore other factors such as classroom environment, teacher support, peer interaction, and institutional environment using longitudinal and mixed-methods designs to gain a deeper understanding of the development of socio-emotional competence among university students.

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