



# **EDUCATION OF THE HEAD THE HEART AND THE HANDS; A CASE FOR SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING IN NIGERIA**

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## **ABSTRACT:**

Educate the head only, you are likely to end up with characters who will preoccupy their minds with the annihilation of the entire human race. Educate the heart only and you will end up with individuals who cannot take decisions dispassionately or without sentiments and who may be lacking in critical thinking abilities. Educate the hands only and there is no telling what it could be up to. We would be creating robots, who as is the current fear with robots, may decide to exterminate the human race because they consider humans unnecessary for their existence. Education has got to be holistic. All three dimensions of the individual, the head, the heart and the hands must be functionally educated. That is why the ancient Philosopher Aristotle noted that "Educating the mind without Educating the heart is no education at all." This paper makes a case for the education of the head, the heart and the hands, proposing an adoption of Social and emotional learning theory in the Nigerian educational system, drawing from the position of neuroscience and applying the tool of psychology. Some tips for the application of social emotional learning in the classroom are given and suggestions for learning outlined at the end of the paper.

**KEYWORDS: Socioemotional, neuroscience, psychology, Social Emotional Learning**

## **INTRODUCTION**

The notion of education of the head, the heart and the hands come from the age where the head was thought to be the store for intellectual knowledge, the heart represented the emotional centre of the body and the hands represented the motor apparatus of the individual. It is synonymous with the three domains of education, the cognitive domain for the head, the affective domain for the heart and the psychomotor domain for the hands. This ideology has come to be widely accepted to represent holistic education of the individual, which is the bane of education.

Neuroscience has however, led us to know that the heart is not the emotional centre of the body as was previously believed but the limbic system; made up of the hypothalamus, the hippocampus and the amygdala. The limbic system controls emotions and mood as well as functions such as accelerated heart rates and sweating associated with our emotion, (Rayner, 2016). The hypothalamus releases the neurotransmitters serotonin and dopamine and these are responsible for controlling our moods.

Irrespective of the discovery that the heart does not control our emotions but is rather controlled by the limbic system, the idea behind the education of the head the heart and the hands

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still remain. Ntamu (2019) noted that the head must be taught to work with the heart and the hands for learning to be effective and to meet societal needs. For education to meet its goals, it has to cover the three domains of education; the cognitive, the affective and the psychomotor domain.

It is important to note that our nervous system controls all of our bodies activities and hence controls education of the three domains. Our nervous system is made up of the central nervous system, which is made up of the brain and the spinal cord, the peripheral nervous system is made up of the somatic and autonomic nervous system. Since we now know that all learning takes place in the head. How then can we ensure that the three domains of learning are taken care of and learning is maximized?

Education must be targeted at the three domains, the cognitive, the affective. These three domains cover the entire gamut of the organism. While the cognitive aspect of education is the focus of every educational institution, the affective and psychomotor domains seem to be over looked in some educational institutions. The cognitive, affective and psychomotor domains of education, must be given equal priority.

The affective domain of education centres around values and character education. It centres on developing the beliefs, attitude, and emotional well-being of learners. In this global age, the world stands in need of "Social systems change renewal" and one of the foremost institutions that can shape new generations of young people to be drivers of positive change in the world is the educational institution, (Roeser, n. d.). Not only must learning include value education it must also deal with value re-orientation, that is providing opportunities for learners to unlearn values that are damaging to themselves and the society and adopt reliable values.

With the current global trend in gun violence, with mass shootings in schools becoming quite common. One of the most recent ones being the shooting of two individuals at the Chisinau International Airport in Moldova on the 30<sup>th</sup> of June 2023, (Ogar, 2023) and the terrorist situation in our country, Nigeria, it has become evident that the affective domain of the individual needs more attention. An analysis of the statistics of death by Gun Violence in the United States for the year 2020 (the most recent year for which data is available) has revealed that out of the 45,222 deaths from related gun injuries 54% of deaths were by suicide. This amounts to 24,300 deaths by suicide, (United States Centre for Disease control in [www.bbcnews.com](http://www.bbcnews.com) ). Pro stricter gun laws people and organizations have urged the government to devote more resources to promoting the mental health of her citizens, ([www.bbcnews.com](http://www.bbcnews.com)).

The above illustration goes to show the value of emotional stability and the consequence of a people not prioritizing the mental health and socioemotional learning of its citizens. The same goes for schools. In other to maintain a society that is conducive and safe for all to live in, schools must not only prioritize intellectual learning but must seek to train and develop the socio emotional sides of the learner, which is the affective side. Recent research has shown that Emotional Intelligence Quotient (EQ) is a higher predictor of career success and success in life generally than Intelligence Quotient (IQ) (Khan, 2019, Yahaya, Bachok, Yahaya, Boon, Hashim, Lee, 2012).

Education of the hands, that is leading learners to acquire psychomotor skills that could be deployed to proffer solutions to national and global problems and can also promote self-reliance in the learners cannot be overemphasized.

With the current global economic crises, schools must ensure that learners are adequately equipped with a range of skills, cognitive, psychomotor and entrepreneurial skills to take on the world of work. In addition to skills in reading, writing and arithmetic and other cognitive skills, upon graduation from secondary school, the foundation for skills in plumbing, carpentry, tailoring, shoe-making, bead making, catering and other entrepreneurial skills must have been solidly laid in practical terms with the learners being able to display these skills practically. Higher Education, alongside cognitive skills, should build on these skills to ensure that the learner is equipped for life upon graduation.

### **Perspectives from Neuroscience**

One of the basic needs for holistic education to thrive is a conducive environment. A conducive environment is not limited to the physical. A conducive socioemotional environment is of even greater importance to learning. Advancement in neuroscience has shed light on the fact that, the presence of stress in the learning environment activates the General Adaptation Syndrome (GAS) response, otherwise known as the Fight, flight or freeze response; first explained by Selye in 1975. This response is triggered by signals from the amygdala to the hypothalamus and eventually to the adrenal gland which releases the stress hormone epinephrine also called adrenaline. If the stress condition persists eventually the Hypothalamus, Pituitary and Adrenal gland (HPA) release the second stress hormone cortisol which stays much longer in the brain.

While the brain stem and the limbic system responsible for the fight, flight or freeze response is active, the prefrontal cortex responsible for learning, planning, rational thinking, decision making is more or less inactive. This is because these two parts of the brain cannot be active at the same time. Since the prefrontal cortex is the major site for learning and it is being hindered by the stress response activated by the limbic system and the brain stem, it therefore means that, stress prevents learning, hence the learning environment must be stress free. It is important to note that stress is the body's response to the perception of threat. The learning environment must hence be free of all forms of threat and danger and must also be physically conducive. Different institutions have come up with different approaches to the implementation of education of

the head, the heart and the hands. One of these is engaging learners in exercises meant to train attention, emotion and values. Roeser (n. d.) contemplated ways of incorporating attention emotion and values training into education in a non-sectarian way by using the gains of psychology and neuroscience to explain their utility. This led him to the Social Emotional Learning (SEL) Movement.

### **Social Emotional Learning with the application of psychological principles as a tool for achieving the education of the Head, heart and Hands**

Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) according to Zins, Weissberg, Wang and Walberg (2004), is a process targeted at helping children enhance their ability to integrate thinking feeling and behaving. Interestingly the ability to integrate thinking feeling and behaving, and articulate their mutual effects on each other is the bane of Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT). CBT will therefore be useful in schools in various ways in helping learners successfully integrate thinking, feeling and behaving. SEL equips learners with the ability to recognise and manage their emotions as well as the emotions of others, establish positive relationships; which increases their resilience and impacts positively on their stress response and coping mechanisms, set positive goals, meet personal and social needs and make responsible and ethical decisions. Emotional intelligence training is definitely an important aspect of the SEL model as it teaches individuals to understand their emotions, the emotions of others, how other people are affected by their actions and emotional reactions and how this knowledge about emotions can be maximized in fostering healthy relationships and productivity.

Meeting our needs within the confines of right, reality and responsibility as proposed by Glasser's Reality Therapy propounded in 1965, aligns and overlaps well with SEL and could provide a productive pathway for schools to achieve affective education. The principle of Reality therapy can be summarised thus, equipping individuals with skills needed to be able to meet their needs realistically, without infringing on the rights of other people or depriving other people of opportunities for meeting their own needs while taking responsibility for their actions.

Research has shown that schools that promote SEL are more inclined to succeed in their educational mission and students who participate in SEL programmes show improved; social emotional skills, academic motivation and behaviour, and significant improvements on achievement test performance, (Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor and Schellinger, in Roeser n. d.). Roeser, (n. d.) posits that the emerging approach to head, heart and hands education in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is what is called SEL

2.0. This involves incorporating attention/mindfulness training, emotion/compassion training and systems thinking training into the school curriculum. It is an extension of SEL training. An example of this is the Social Emotional and Ethical Learning (SEEL) training developed at Emory University (see <https://seelearning.emory.edu>). SEEL training has three dimensions and three domains and should be considered a model for implementing value training. The curriculum could be adopted or adapted for use. A summary of the curriculum is shown in the chart below.

		<b>DIMENSIONS</b>		
		<b>Awareness</b>	<b>Compassion</b>	<b>Engagement</b>
<b>DOMAINS</b>	<b>Personal</b>	<b>Attention and Self-Awareness (1A)</b>	<b>Self-Compassion (1C)</b>	<b>Self Regulation (1E)</b>
	<b>Social</b>	<b>Interpersonal Awareness (2A)</b>	<b>Compassion for others (2C)</b>	<b>Relationship Skills (2E)</b>
	<b>Systemic</b>	<b>Appreciating Inter-Dependance (3A)</b>	<b>Recognizing Common Humanity (3C)</b>	<b>Community and Global Engagement (3E)</b>

Figure 1: Social-Emotional and Ethical Learning Curricular Framework (In Roeser, n. d.)

Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL), in Swartz (2017) also identified five types of competences related to SEL skills. They include: Self-awareness, Self-management, Social-awareness, relationship skills and responsible decision making skills. As a result of the scientific evidence of the effect of SEL learning, schools in the west have developed standardized frameworks and guidelines for the implementation of SEL. Swartz (2017) stated that all 50 states in the United States have developed this framework and guidelines. It is high time that countries in Africa, Nigeria particularly adopts SEI learning and develops a standardized framework and guidelines for its implementation.

For a school to be able to teach empathy it must model empathy systemically, hence emphasis must be placed on a conducive socioemotional climate. Inclusive and individualised learning is also paramount to achieving the education of the head, heart and hands. The goals of every educational institution must be targeted towards education of the head, the heart and the hands; holistic education.

Teaching is an emotionally demanding job. According to Oliveira, Preira, Pinto and Veiga-simao (2021), teaching-specific stressors are mainly socioemotional related. Social emotional learning strategies for teachers have increased over the years. Oliveira, Roberto, Pereira, Marques-Pinto and Veiga-Simao (2021), carried out a meta-analysis of 43 empirical studies that measured the efficacy of school based SEL interventions involving 3,004 in-service prek-12 teachers. The results revealed that SEL strategies were effective in positively impacting teachers social and emotional competence, wellbeing and psychological distress. This study added to the case for SEL learning and also made a case for standardized guidelines on SEL learning. If employing SEL learning could be useful for teachers, how much more useful will it be for learners?

An article by Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor and Schellinger (2011) presented findings from a meta-analysis of 213 school-based, universal social and emotional learning (SEL) programmes involving 270,034 kindergarten through high school students, against the control groups. The analysis revealed that SEL participants demonstrated significantly improved social and emotional skills, attitudes, behaviours and academic performance that reflected an 11-

percentile-point gain. The body of evidence for the support of SEL is growing rapidly. This article recommended that policy makers, educators and the public can contribute to healthy development of children by supporting the incorporation of evidence based SEL programmes into standard educational practice.

### **Social Emotional Learning Practices in the Classroom**

There is no singular approach to SEL. SEL involves a range of practices targeted at achieving similar objectives. Resources on approaches and implementation of SEL abound on the internet. Lee (2022) provides the following tips for teachers to practice SEL.

1. Start the day with a student's emotional check in: The teacher could use a colour chart or an emoji chart that represents to help the students indicate how they are feeling and what their emotional needs are.
2. Create opportunities for partner and group work.
3. Nurture a culture of kindness.
4. Build social-emotional vocabulary
5. Include reflective writing.
6. Incorporate a calm down corner.
7. Allow time for talking- for students to provide meaningful feedback regarding their emotions.
8. Teach mindfulness: This should top the chart in my opinion as mindfulness is very useful in regulating emotions and reducing stress.
9. Encourage expression through art.
10. Teach kids to work toward a common goal.

### **Suggestions for learning**

1. The learning environment, both physical and socioemotional should be conducive. This implies a learning environment designed with the individual needs of the learners taken into consideration. An environment safe for all learners, a non-threatening, stress free and empathetic environment.
2. Social Emotional Learning should be prioritized in school with the school system and structure serving as a model for students learning. Psychological and non-sectarian methods of incorporating attention, emotion and values training into the school curriculum must be exploited. Some of such methods include; Mindfulness training, relaxation training, Care therapies, Emotional Intelligence training among others.
- 3.

3. Psychological principles such as reality therapy, CBT amongst others, should be incorporated into our educational systems.
4. All educational institutions should have school psychologists and counselling/Clinical Psychologists to provide socioemotional support and training for both staff and students.
5. Psychomotor education should be given top priority in schools. As much as possible, every learner must be trained to acquire functional psychomotor and entrepreneurial skills.
6. Regulatory bodies should develop a standardized framework and guidelines for the implementation of SEL.

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