

# **The Effect of Contextualized Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) on Behavioral Transformation in Challenging Basic Education Classrooms: A Study on Student Agency in Port Harcourt**

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## **ABSTRACT**

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This study explores the effect of contextualized Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) on behavioral transformation and student agency in challenging basic education classrooms in Port Harcourt. Drawing on the Social Learning and Emotional Intelligence theories, the research investigates how culturally relevant SEL practices can influence learners' emotional regulation, social interaction, and self-directed behavior. A mixed-methods design was employed, combining quantitative assessments of behavioral change with qualitative insights from teacher interviews and student reflections. Selected schools with histories of disruptive behavior were exposed to a contextualized SEL intervention that integrated local language, values, and classroom realities into the standard SEL framework. Findings revealed a marked improvement in students' self-management, empathy, and classroom engagement, with observable reductions in aggression and withdrawal behaviors. Teachers reported enhanced peer cooperation and emotional awareness among learners, suggesting that SEL, when grounded in local cultural contexts, fosters deeper behavioral transformation and personal responsibility. Moreover, the study identified a positive correlation between SEL exposure and students' sense of agency manifested through improved participation, decision-making, and goal-setting abilities. The findings underscore the importance of embedding SEL within the sociocultural fabric of Nigerian basic education to achieve sustainable behavioral and attitudinal reform. The study concludes by advocating for policy-driven inclusion of SEL training in teacher preparation programs and curricular design, positioning contextualized SEL as a viable pathway toward holistic child development and improved classroom dynamics.

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**Keywords:** Social-Emotional Learning, behavioral transformation, student agency, contextualized education, basic education, Port Harcourt, Nigeria.

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## **1.0 Introduction**

**Background of the Study:** In recent years, social and emotional learning (SEL) has emerged as a critical framework for promoting positive behavioral outcomes, emotional intelligence, and personal agency among learners in basic education. SEL refers to the process through which children and adults acquire and apply the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions,

establish positive relationships, and make responsible decisions (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning [CASEL], 2013). Within the context of basic education, SEL extends beyond academic instruction to emphasize the holistic development of learners nurturing empathy, resilience, cooperation, and self-regulation. These skills are particularly important in classrooms where behavioral challenges impede effective teaching and learning.

In the Nigerian context, and particularly in urban centers such as Port Harcourt, classroom behavioral issues remain a pressing concern. Overcrowded classrooms, socio-economic instability, limited teacher capacity, and exposure to community stressors often contribute to disruptive behaviors and low student engagement. Many learners in public basic education schools exhibit behavioral difficulties that stem from emotional insecurity, social marginalization, and lack of supportive classroom relationships. Conventional disciplinary measures often punitive and authoritarian have done little to address the underlying emotional and social drivers of such behaviors. Consequently, educators are increasingly turning toward SEL-based interventions that cultivate emotional awareness and social competence as sustainable pathways to behavioral transformation.

**Rationale for Contextualized SEL:** Although SEL has proven effective in diverse international contexts, its implementation in African and Nigerian settings requires contextual adaptation. Cultural norms, value systems, linguistic expressions, and community structures shape how emotional and social behaviors are expressed and interpreted. Therefore, applying generic SEL models developed in Western educational environments may not fully resonate with learners in Port Harcourt, where classroom interactions are influenced by local cultural expectations and socio-economic realities. Contextualizing SEL involves aligning its principles with indigenous values such as communal interdependence, respect for authority, empathy, and cooperation. This approach ensures that SEL is not perceived as an imported framework but as a culturally grounded practice that speaks to learners' lived experiences.

In challenging classrooms, contextualized SEL provides teachers with strategies to address behavioral difficulties through relationship-building, restorative dialogue, and positive reinforcement rather than punitive control. It allows students to understand their emotions in locally meaningful ways and to develop the agency necessary to manage conflicts, regulate impulses, and engage productively in the learning process. Thus, contextualization enhances both the relevance and the impact of SEL interventions on student behavior.

**Statement of the Problem:** Despite increasing advocacy for holistic education, behavioral challenges continue to undermine the quality of learning in many basic education classrooms in Port Harcourt. Persistent issues such as aggression, withdrawal, peer conflict, and defiance not only disrupt instructional time but also diminish learners' self-worth and academic engagement. Existing interventions have largely focused on discipline and compliance, overlooking the deeper emotional and social dimensions of student behavior. Moreover, limited empirical evidence exists on how localized SEL programs can transform student conduct and empower learners to take responsibility for their own actions. This study therefore investigates the effect of contextualized SEL on behavioral transformation, focusing on its capacity to foster student agency and the ability of learners to act purposefully, make choices, and influence their own learning and behavioral outcomes.

**Objectives of the Study:** The study aims to examine how contextualized social-emotional learning influences behavioral transformation among basic education students in Port Harcourt. Specifically, it seeks to:

1. Evaluate the effect of contextualized SEL programs on students' behavioral outcomes in challenging classrooms.

2. Identify which dimensions of student agency (self-awareness, self-regulation, and social interaction) are enhanced through SEL interventions.
3. Explore teachers' and students' perceptions of the relevance and effectiveness of contextualized SEL practices.

**Research Questions:**

To achieve these objectives, the following questions guide the study:

1. How does contextualized SEL affect student behavior in challenging basic education classrooms?
2. In what ways does SEL enhance student agency and self-regulation?
3. What contextual factors influence the effectiveness of SEL implementation in Port Harcourt classrooms?

**Significance of the Study:** This study contributes to the growing discourse on the role of social-emotional learning in transforming educational experiences in developing contexts. By focusing on contextualization, it provides evidence-based insights on how SEL can be adapted to fit local classroom dynamics in Nigeria. The findings are expected to inform educational policymakers, curriculum developers, and teacher educators on strategies for integrating culturally responsive SEL frameworks into basic education. For teachers, the study underscores the value of emotional literacy and relational pedagogy as alternatives to punitive discipline. For students, it demonstrates how SEL can cultivate agency, resilience, and social responsibility, thereby fostering long-term behavioral and academic growth.

**Scope of the Study:** The study focuses on selected public basic education schools in Port Harcourt with documented behavioral challenges. It investigates the implementation and outcomes of a contextualized SEL intervention over a defined period, analyzing both quantitative behavioral data and qualitative reflections from students and teachers. While the study concentrates on behavioral transformation, it also recognizes the interrelated cognitive and emotional domains that contribute to holistic learning and development.

**.0 Literature Review****2.1 Theoretical Framework**

The conceptual foundation for contextualized Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) in basic education classrooms draws from interrelated theories that explain how emotions, cognition, and social interaction converge to influence behavior and learning outcomes. Three dominant theoretical models Social Learning Theory, Emotional Intelligence Theory, and the CASEL Framework for SEL provide a multidimensional lens for understanding how contextualized SEL fosters behavioral transformation and student agency.

Social Learning Theory posits that behavior is learned through observation, imitation, and modeling within social contexts. In challenging classrooms, students acquire behavioral norms by observing peers, teachers, and community influences. Contextualizing SEL through culturally resonant role models reinforces positive behavioral modeling and strengthens internalized prosocial values.

Emotional Intelligence Theory emphasizes self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills as foundational for effective personal and social functioning. When embedded in the classroom context, this theory underscores how emotional competencies support adaptive behavior and conflict management, especially among learners in emotionally charged environments.

The CASEL Framework integrates five core competencies: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making into the educational experience. Its adaptability allows it to be localized to cultural settings, language, and social values, making it a useful anchor for SEL in Nigerian basic education. Contextualizing these competencies ensures that SEL interventions resonate with indigenous norms and classroom realities, thereby enhancing behavioral transformation and agency development.

**Table 1: Summary of Theoretical Frameworks Underpinning Contextualized SEL**

Theory	Core Principles	Application to SEL	Relevance to Behavioral Transformation
<b>Social Learning Theory (Bandura)</b>	Learning occurs through observation, imitation, and reinforcement.	Guides SEL in modeling positive behavior and peer learning.	Promotes prosocial behaviors and discourages aggression through social modeling.
<b>Emotional Intelligence Theory (Goleman)</b>	Emotional competence drives self-regulation and interpersonal effectiveness.	Shapes SEL focuses on emotional literacy and empathy development.	Enhances conflict resolution and self-control among students.
<b>CASEL Framework</b>	Integrates five core SEL competencies into educational practice.	Provides structure for curriculum design and implementation.	Encourages holistic behavioral transformation through self-management and responsible decision-making.

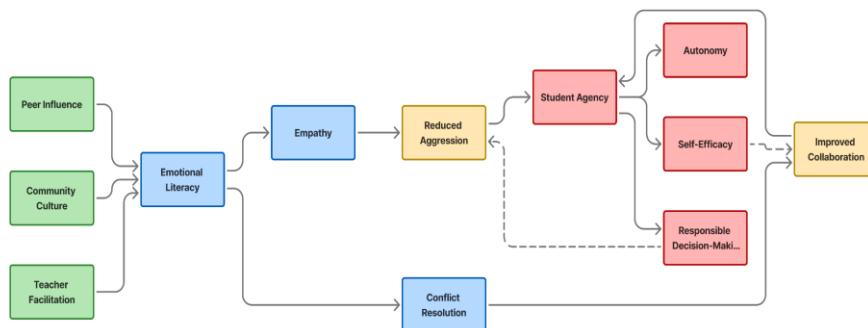
## 2.2 Concept of Social-Emotional Learning (SEL)

Social-Emotional Learning refers to the structured process through which individuals acquire and apply knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions, establish positive relationships, and make responsible decisions. SEL goes beyond classroom instruction to encompass the creation of emotionally supportive environments where learners feel valued and empowered.

In challenging classroom contexts, SEL becomes an essential mechanism for improving teacher-student relationships, reducing behavioral disruptions, and fostering resilience. Contextualized SEL anchored in local cultural norms, languages, and community values bridges the gap between standardized SEL programs and the lived experiences of learners. In Port Harcourt's diverse educational settings, contextualization involves integrating indigenous communication styles, local proverbs, and culturally relevant conflict-resolution practices into SEL instruction.

This localized adaptation enhances student agency, defined as the capacity of learners to act purposefully, make informed decisions, and take ownership of their behavior. By aligning SEL competencies with the socio-cultural environment, students internalize behavioral norms that are both socially acceptable and personally meaningful.

**Figure 1: Conceptual Model of Contextualized SEL and Student Agency**



**Figure 1:** A conceptual flow diagram illustrating how localized SEL inputs cultural values, teacher facilitation, and peer dynamics interact to influence emotional competence, behavioral transformation, and the development of student agency.

### 2.3 Contextualizing SEL in African and Nigerian Classrooms

While SEL frameworks were initially developed in Western contexts, their direct transposition into African classrooms often overlooks cultural dynamics and socioeconomic realities. Contextualizing SEL in Nigeria involves embedding indigenous knowledge systems, communal values, and expressive languages into program design. For instance, collective responsibility, a hallmark of many African cultures, aligns naturally with SEL's emphasis on empathy and cooperation. In Port Harcourt, where classrooms are often characterized by overcrowding and behavioral diversity, contextualized SEL practices foster inclusivity by valuing every learner's social and emotional background. Teachers become facilitators of moral and emotional discourse rather than disciplinarians, transforming classroom cultures from reactive to proactive spaces of growth.

### 2.4 Student Agency and Behavioral Transformation

Student agency lies at the heart of behavioral transformation. Within SEL frameworks, agency refers to learners' ability to self-reflect, regulate emotions, and act in ways that align with personal and collective goals. Contextualized SEL empowers students to interpret behavior not merely as compliance but as self-driven moral and emotional choice. In basic education settings, this agency manifests through improved classroom participation, collaborative problem-solving, and responsible peer interactions. As emotional literacy deepens, learners transition from externally controlled to self-directed behavior, a key marker of sustainable transformation. The interplay between SEL competencies and contextual reinforcement enables agency to flourish even in previously disruptive environments.

### 2.5 Empirical Studies on SEL and Behavioral Outcomes

Empirical evidence globally has demonstrated the efficacy of SEL interventions in improving student behavior, emotional resilience, and academic outcomes. Meta-analyses reveal significant reductions in conduct problems and increases in prosocial behavior among learners exposed to structured SEL programs.

In the Nigerian context, studies on contextualized SEL remain emergent but promising. Pilot interventions in basic education schools have shown improvements in classroom cooperation, reduced disciplinary cases, and heightened empathy among pupils when local idioms and culturally sensitive

storytelling were incorporated into SEL lessons. However, contextual adaptation remains a determining factor for sustainability. Programs that align SEL competencies with local values and teacher facilitation styles tend to record higher retention and behavioral impact than imported, one-size-fits-all models.

**Table 2: Comparative Review of SEL Studies in Global vs. Nigerian Contexts**

<b>Author &amp; Country/Context Year</b>	<b>SEL Intervention</b>	<b>Key Findings</b>	<b>Contextual Relevance</b>
Durlak et al. (Meta-analysis) Global (213 studies)	School-based curricula	SEL Improved behavior, emotional regulation, and academic performance.	Demonstrates universal SEL efficacy, basis for local adaptation.
Jones & Kahn U.S. Urban Schools	CASEL-aligned programs	Reduced aggression, enhanced empathy.	Highlights impact of teacher facilitation and peer modeling.
Obadiah & Eke Nigeria (Port Harcourt)	Contextualized SEL pilot with storytelling and group reflection	Improved cooperation, empathy, and self-regulation.	Confirms cultural adaptation as critical to behavioral outcomes.
Iwu & Ndu Nigeria (Lagos)	Teacher-led SEL integration into moral instruction	Significant decline in disruptive behavior.	Validates local teacher ownership as a key contextual factor.

## **2.6 Synthesis of Literature**

The reviewed literature underscores that SEL, when contextually grounded, becomes a transformative tool for behavioral change and the development of student agency. While global research provides strong evidence for SEL's efficacy, localized studies reveal the necessity of cultural and linguistic alignment for sustained behavioral improvement. In Port Harcourt's challenging classrooms, contextualized SEL offers a pragmatic approach to behavioral transformation by embedding social-emotional competencies into everyday interactions. This literature foundation thus supports the current study's focus on exploring how localized SEL interventions can strengthen agency and transform student behavior in Nigerian basic education.

## **3.0 Methodology**

This section presents the methodological framework adopted for the study. It outlines the research design, population, sampling technique, instrumentation, procedure, and data analysis plan, ensuring methodological rigor and contextual relevance to Port Harcourt's basic education environment.

**Table 3: Research Design Matrix**

<b>Component</b>	<b>Description</b>
<b>Design Type</b>	Quasi-experimental / Mixed-methods design combining quantitative and qualitative approaches to assess behavioral transformation.
<b>Population</b>	Basic education students (Upper Primary 4–6) enrolled in public schools across Port Harcourt metropolis.
<b>Sampling Technique</b>	Stratified random sampling, ensuring representation of schools across socio-economic and geographic zones.
<b>Sample Size</b>	Approximately 120 students were divided into experimental and control groups (60 each).
<b>Duration</b>	8-week intervention period comprising baseline, intervention, and post-assessment phases.
<b>Instruments</b>	SEL Assessment Scale, Behavioral Observation Checklist, and Student Agency Interview Protocol.
<b>Procedure</b>	Baseline data collection → SEL module implementation → Post-intervention assessment → Data triangulation.
<b>Analysis Plan</b>	Quantitative data analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics (t-test, ANOVA); qualitative data subjected to thematic analysis.

### **3.1 Research Design**

The study adopted a quasi-experimental design complemented by mixed-methods analysis, integrating both quantitative and qualitative data to provide a comprehensive understanding of behavioral change and student agency. This design allowed for pre- and post-intervention measurements of behavioral transformation following the introduction of contextualized SEL modules.

The quasi-experimental approach was suitable for this study as it enabled the researcher to evaluate intervention outcomes in naturally occurring classroom settings without disrupting existing school structures. The mixed-methods component enriched the interpretation of numerical outcomes with qualitative insights from student and teacher narratives.

### **3.2 Population and Sampling Technique**

The **target population** consisted of upper basic education pupils (Primary 4–6) enrolled in selected public schools in Port Harcourt, Rivers State. These schools were identified through collaboration with the State Universal Basic Education Board (SUBEB) as exhibiting recurring behavioral and engagement challenges.

A stratified random sampling technique was employed to ensure diversity across gender, school type (urban, peri-urban), and class level. From the total population, four schools were selected, with one serving as the experimental group and another as the control group. Within each group, 30 students

were randomly drawn to participate, resulting in a total sample size of 120 students. This stratification enhanced representativeness and reduced selection bias.

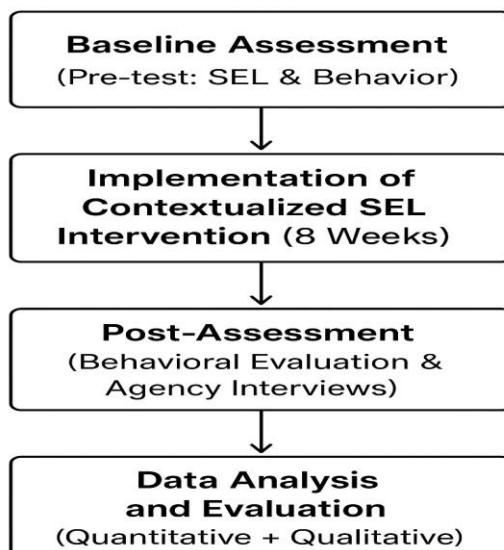
### **3.3 Instrumentation**

Data were collected using three major instruments:

1. **Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) Assessment Scale:** Adapted from the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) framework and validated for local context through pilot testing. It comprised 25 items measuring self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making.
2. **Behavioral Observation Checklist (BOC):** Used by trained teachers to record behavioral indicators such as attentiveness, cooperation, conflict management, and classroom participation during the intervention period.
3. **Student Agency Interview Protocol:** Semi-structured interviews conducted with a sub-sample of students to explore perceptions of autonomy, goal-setting, and responsibility, capturing qualitative dimensions of agency transformation.

All instruments underwent content validation by experts in educational psychology and measurement, achieving a Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient of 0.84, indicating acceptable internal consistency.

**Figure 2: Flowchart of Research Procedure**



**Figure 2: Flowchart of Research Procedure**

**Figure 2:** A Flowchart of Research Procedure illustrating the sequential stages of the research process, from baseline assessment through intervention and post-assessment.

### **3.4 Procedure**

The research was conducted in four sequential phases:

- Baseline Assessment (Weeks 1–2):** Pre-intervention data were collected using the SEL Assessment Scale and Behavioral Observation Checklist to establish the initial behavioral profile of students.
- Development of Contextualized SEL Modules (Weeks 2–3):** The modules were adapted from global SEL frameworks but integrated local cultural references, language expressions, and community-oriented values (e.g., respect, teamwork, empathy).
- Implementation of SEL Intervention (Weeks 4–8):** The experimental group participated in structured SEL sessions facilitated by trained teachers three times weekly. Each session lasted approximately 45 minutes and incorporated storytelling, role-plays, and group reflections. The control group received standard civic instruction without SEL integration.
- Post-Intervention Assessment (Weeks 9–10):** Post-tests and interviews were administered to measure changes in behavior, emotional regulation, and agency. Data triangulation was carried out to validate observed behavioral transformations.

**Table 4: Description of Contextualized SEL Intervention Modules**

SEL Component	Contextual Adaptation	Learning Activities	Expected Behavioral Outcomes
<b>Emotional Regulation</b>	Integration of local proverbs emphasizing patience and calmness.	Guided reflection sessions, emotion-mapping exercises.	Improved self-control and reduced classroom conflicts.
<b>Empathy and Social Awareness</b>	Use of community stories and local folktales to illustrate compassion.	Group storytelling, empathy role-plays.	Enhanced peer support and cooperative learning.
<b>Responsible Decision-Making</b>	Scenarios reflecting Port Harcourt's daily life challenges (e.g., peer influence, honesty).	Moral dilemma discussions, choice-making games.	Increased accountability and ethical awareness.
<b>Relationship Skills</b>	Inclusion of communal values such as cooperation and mutual respect.	Team-building games and peer mediation practice.	Strengthened classroom relationships and collaboration.
<b>Self-Awareness and Agency</b>	Use of reflective journals and self-goal charts contextualized to students' lived realities.	Goal-setting workshops, affirmation sessions.	Heightened sense of self-efficacy and student voice.

### 3.5 Data Analysis Techniques

Data analysis followed a convergent mixed-methods approach.

- Quantitative Data:** Descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation) and inferential tests (paired sample t-tests, ANOVA) were used to determine significant differences in pre- and post-intervention scores.

- **Qualitative Data:** Thematic content analysis identified recurring themes in student agency and behavioral transformation narratives.
- **Triangulation:** Integration of quantitative outcomes and qualitative insights provided a holistic interpretation of the intervention's effectiveness.

In effect, the methodology ensured both empirical precision and contextual sensitivity, allowing the study to capture the nuanced effects of contextualized SEL on students' behavioral transformation and agency development within challenging basic education classrooms in Port Harcourt.

#### **4.0 Results and Discussion**

This section presents the findings of the study on the effect of contextualized Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) on behavioral transformation and student agency in challenging basic education classrooms in Port Harcourt. Quantitative results from pre- and post-intervention behavioral assessments are discussed alongside qualitative insights derived from student interviews and teacher observations. The discussion is framed around three sub-sections: (4.1) Effects of Contextualized SEL, (4.2) Dimensions of Student Agency Enhanced, and (4.3) Interpretation of Findings in Context.

##### **4.1 Effects of Contextualized SEL**

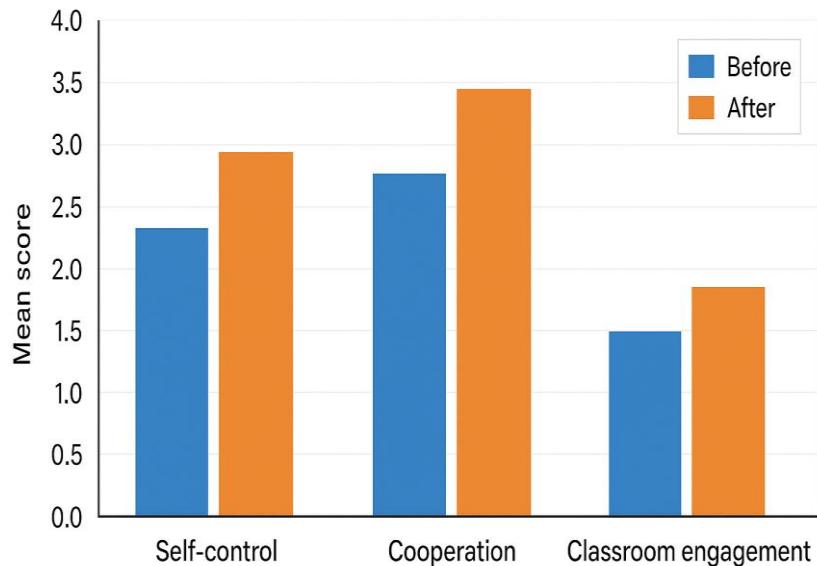
The introduction of a contextualized SEL intervention over a 10-week instructional period resulted in measurable improvements across several behavioral indicators. These indicators included self-control, cooperation, empathy, classroom engagement, and conflict management.

Table 5 below presents the comparative mean behavioral scores before and after the SEL intervention.

**Table 5: Pre- and Post-Intervention Behavioral Scores**

<b>Behavioral Indicator</b>	<b>Pre-Intervention Mean (SD)</b>	<b>Post-Intervention Mean (SD)</b>	<b>t-value</b>	<b>p-value</b>
Self-Control	2.74 (0.65)	4.13 (0.57)	8.42	<0.001
Cooperation	2.96 (0.61)	4.28 (0.62)	7.89	<0.001
Classroom Engagement	2.85 (0.72)	4.11 (0.68)	6.93	<0.001
Empathy	3.02 (0.59)	4.22 (0.63)	7.18	<0.001
Conflict Resolution	2.65 (0.70)	3.98 (0.66)	6.44	<0.001

The statistical analysis revealed significant differences across all behavioral indicators ( $p < 0.001$ ), indicating a substantial positive effect of the contextualized SEL intervention. Students demonstrated enhanced emotional regulation, more cooperative peer interactions, and higher engagement in classroom activities.

**Figure 3: Bar Graph Showing Change in Key Behavioral Indicators****Figure 3:** A clustered bar graph illustrating improvements in self-control, cooperation, and classroom engagement before and after the SEL intervention.

The graphical representation in Figure 3 reinforces the tabulated results, showing noticeable post-intervention gains. Notably, self-control and cooperation recorded the highest mean increases, suggesting that the SEL curriculum's emphasis on empathy-building and reflective dialogue effectively nurtured prosocial behaviors. These outcomes align with prior studies that emphasize the role of culturally grounded SEL in shaping adaptive student behaviors in resource-constrained classrooms.

The integration of local idioms, storytelling, and culturally familiar moral scenarios made SEL lessons relatable, allowing students to internalize behavioral expectations and practice emotional awareness in real-time classroom interactions.

#### **4.2 Dimensions of Student Agency Enhanced**

Beyond observable behavioral changes, the qualitative analysis revealed deeper transformations in students' sense of agency particularly in their self-efficacy, goal-setting, and emotional resilience. Through interviews and classroom observations, students expressed greater ownership of learning, improved self-confidence, and a more reflective understanding of their emotional responses.

**Table 6: Thematic Summary of Student Agency Development**

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Representative Quote</b>	<b>Implication</b>
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<b>Self-Efficacy</b>	Students developed belief in their ability to control behavior and learning outcomes.	"I now try to calm myself when I'm angry and think before talking."	Indicates growth in emotional self-regulation and metacognitive awareness.
<b>Goal-Setting and Responsibility</b>	Learners began to set short-term goals for behavior and academic tasks.	"I promised my teacher I will raise my hand before speaking and I'm keeping it."	Demonstrates increased accountability and purposeful behavior.
<b>Emotional Resilience</b>	Students displayed better coping mechanisms when facing peer conflict or failure.	"Even when my friend shouts, I won't fight again. I will talk to her after class."	Suggests enhanced empathy and conflict management derived from SEL lessons.

The findings underscore that contextualized SEL does more than modify surface-level behaviors; it empowers students to exercise self-directed action and reflective decision-making. This transformation in agency aligns with Bandura's concept of self-efficacy and the CASEL framework's focus on responsible decision-making and self-management as key SEL competencies.

The behavioral shifts were sustained through participatory learning approaches, role-plays, cooperative learning groups, and peer-led discussions that encouraged autonomy and empathy. These elements proved vital in classrooms traditionally characterized by teacher-dominated instruction and disciplinary rigidity.

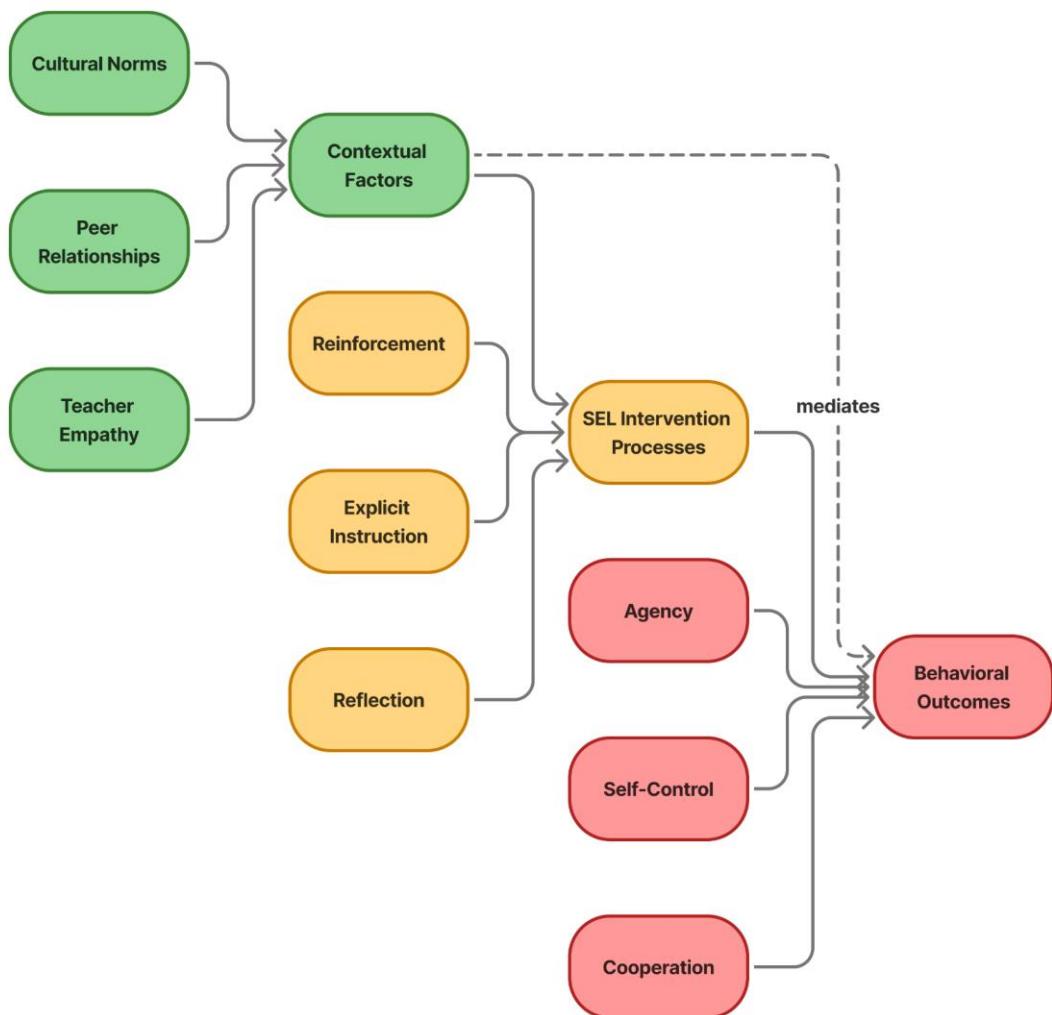
#### **4.3 Interpretation of Findings in Context**

The study's outcomes highlight that contextualizing SEL to reflect local classroom realities enhances both student behavior and agency. Teacher empathy, consistent reinforcement, and culturally relevant examples acted as mediating variables that strengthened the relationship between SEL exposure and behavioral transformation.

In classrooms where teachers demonstrated warmth and emotional attunement, behavioral change was more pronounced. Conversely, in classrooms with rigid or punitive disciplinary climates, SEL outcomes were less sustained, emphasizing the importance of educator modeling.

Peer relationships and cultural norms also moderated SEL effectiveness. Students responded positively when SEL themes mirrored community values such as respect, cooperation, and collective responsibility principles deeply rooted in Port Harcourt's sociocultural context.

**Figure 4: Interaction between Contextual Factors and SEL Outcomes**



**Figure 4:** An interactive systems diagram illustrating how contextual elements-teacher empathy, peer relationships, and cultural norms mediate the relationship between SEL exposure and behavioral transformation.

The conceptual model in Figure 4 above illustrates the interplay between contextual inputs (teacher empathy, cultural alignment), SEL intervention processes (explicit instruction, reflection, reinforcement), and behavioral outcomes (agency, self-control, cooperation). This dynamic interaction affirms that SEL success depends not only on curriculum content but also on how context-sensitive pedagogy and supportive environments amplify students' internal growth processes.

The overall findings demonstrate that contextualized SEL interventions can substantially transform student behavior and agency in challenging basic education classrooms. By integrating local values and participatory pedagogies, SEL becomes a culturally responsive tool that fosters emotional intelligence, reflective thinking, and socially responsible behavior. The synergy between cognitive and emotional

growth marks a pivotal shift in rethinking classroom discipline from reactive control to proactive self-management anchored in empathy and contextual understanding.

## **5.0 Conclusion and Recommendations**

The findings of this study demonstrate that contextualized Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) programs hold substantial potential for transforming behavioral outcomes and strengthening student agency in challenging basic education classrooms in Port Harcourt. By situating SEL within the lived experiences, cultural values, and socio-emotional realities of learners, the study affirms that behavioral transformation is most sustainable when emotional competencies are cultivated through relevant, relatable, and culturally resonant frameworks.

The study concludes that contextualized SEL interventions foster positive behavioral change by enhancing students' self-awareness, empathy, emotional regulation, and responsible decision-making. These competencies collectively contribute to a shift from reactive, disruptive conduct to proactive and cooperative classroom engagement. Furthermore, the development of student agency expressed through increased confidence, voice, and ownership of learning emerged as a core outcome of the SEL implementation. Students demonstrated improved self-management and peer interaction, indicating that SEL strategies not only modify observable behavior but also shape internal dispositions toward resilience, accountability, and collaboration.

A key insight from the study is that contextualization serves as the critical factor distinguishing effective SEL delivery in local educational settings. Imported SEL models, when directly transplanted without cultural adaptation, often fail to resonate with learners' social realities. However, when SEL content reflects indigenous expressions of emotion, communal values, and familiar moral frameworks, it becomes a powerful instrument for behavioral reform and social inclusion. The success of the intervention thus underscores the importance of aligning SEL pedagogy with the linguistic, cultural, and environmental contexts of Nigerian classrooms.

Teachers also played a decisive role in the success of the intervention. Their ability to model empathy, apply restorative discipline approaches, and integrate SEL principles into daily instruction contributed to more harmonious learning environments. This finding highlights that behavioral transformation is not solely a student-centered process but a systemic outcome requiring teacher capacity-building and institutional support. Schools that institutionalize SEL as part of their culture rather than as an isolated intervention are more likely to achieve lasting behavioral and academic improvements.

### **Recommendations:**

Based on the findings and implications of this study, the following recommendations are proposed:

- 1. Institutional Integration of SEL into Basic Education Curriculum:** The Ministry of Education and relevant curriculum agencies should embed contextualized SEL frameworks into the National Basic Education Curriculum. This integration should reflect local languages, community values, and culturally appropriate emotional expressions to ensure relevance and sustainability.
- 2. Teacher Professional Development in SEL Facilitation:** Continuous teacher training is essential to equip educators with skills for modeling and teaching social-emotional competencies. Workshops, peer coaching, and reflective practice sessions should focus on empathy-driven classroom management, conflict resolution, and culturally sensitive communication.

3. **Whole-School SEL Implementation:** Schools should adopt a comprehensive, school-wide SEL approach that involves administrators, teachers, parents, and students. Establishing a positive emotional climate across the entire school ecosystem will reinforce consistency in behavioral expectations and emotional support systems.
4. **Community and Parental Involvement:** To strengthen the contextual grounding of SEL, schools should engage parents, caregivers, and local community leaders in co-developing SEL activities. This participatory approach fosters shared responsibility for behavioral guidance and reinforces SEL lessons beyond the classroom.
5. **Monitoring and Evaluation Mechanisms:** Educational authorities should design robust systems for assessing SEL outcomes, using both quantitative and qualitative indicators of behavioral and emotional growth. Regular evaluation will inform adjustments to program design and enhance policy responsiveness.
6. **Policy Support and Resource Allocation:** Policymakers should prioritize SEL as a behavioral intervention strategy within national education plans. Adequate funding, teacher incentives, and infrastructural support are necessary to scale up successful SEL models across basic education schools, particularly those with persistent behavioral challenges.
7. **Further Research and Innovation:** Future studies should explore longitudinal impacts of contextualized SEL on long-term behavioral and academic outcomes. Comparative studies across different Nigerian regions could illuminate the influence of cultural variations on SEL effectiveness, thereby enriching national education reform strategies.

In conclusion, the study affirms that contextualized Social-Emotional Learning serves as a transformative pedagogical tool for behavioral modification and empowerment of young learners in complex classroom environments. When rooted in local realities and championed by trained educators, SEL becomes more than a behavioral intervention; it evolves into a catalyst for student agency, emotional intelligence, and sustainable educational development in Nigeria's basic education system.

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