

# Promising Social Emotional Learning Models in the MENA Region

## BACKGROUND

Social and emotional learning (SEL) refers to the set of social, emotional, and cognitive skills and the process for developing those skills through sequenced, active, focused, explicit (SAFE) instruction that allows students to understand and manage their emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions.

## PURPOSE

TALEEM conducted this research to identify promising SEL evidence and models with the aim of providing lessons learned and recommendations that could be applied to ongoing USAID education programs in the Middle East and Northern Africa (MENA) region.

## METHODOLOGY

TALEEM used a combined approach beginning with a desk review of SEL approaches globally and in the MENA region. Using the SEL models identified, TALEEM conducted primary research through key informant interviews with model implementers, donors and ministry of education officials to better understand the models.

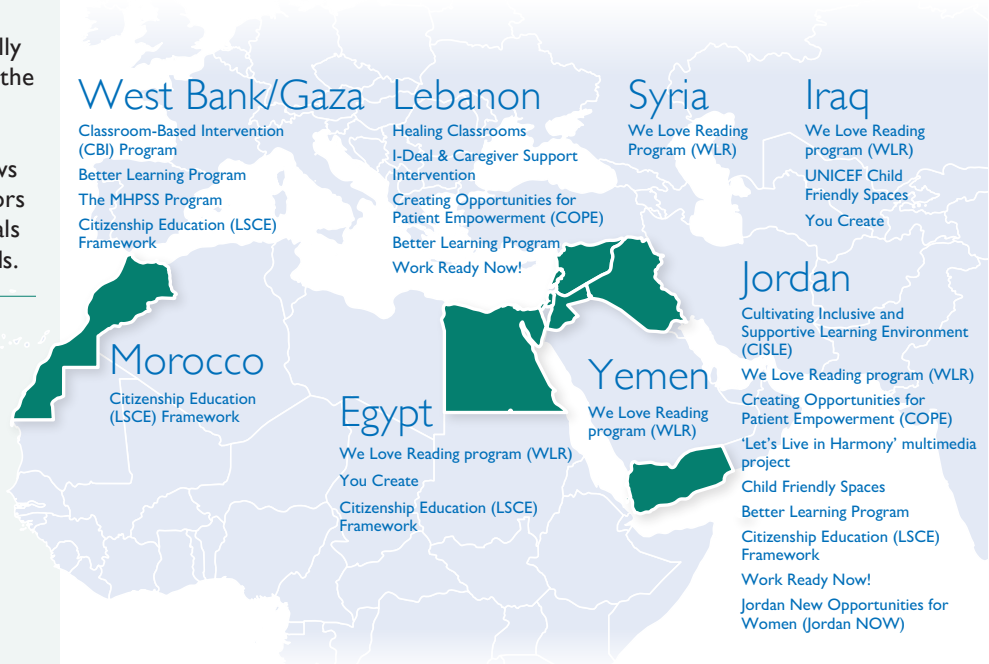
To access the full report on Social and Emotional Learning, visit: <https://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf/docs/PA021JVI.pdf>

## MAIN FINDINGS

### Research Question 1: What are promising education models using SEL in the MENA region?

Most of the SEL interventions reviewed were implemented in Jordan and Lebanon, followed closely by West Bank/Gaza, Iraq and Egypt. SEL programs in the region are implemented in different settings (public or private, formal or non-formal) and use different SEL strategies, depending on the needs of the population they serve. Considering the programs analyzed, interventions integrated into broader programs and offering sustained support demonstrated greater impact compared to stand-alone programs. While most SEL programs reviewed target vulnerable learners, limited information is available regarding programs focused on girls and learners with disabilities in the region.

Due to the large number of SEL strategies, and to assist in program design and planning, the PSS-SEL Toolbox has recently developed a platform that includes different SEL instruments, frameworks, and tools used in more than 50 countries, including the MENA region. This platform is a good entry point when designing a SEL program.



## Key findings

1. **SEL programs are most effective when integrated** into other programs and when they seek a balance between different outcomes, such as academic and life skills. Social and emotional competencies directly influence other life outcomes, such as improved school performance, reduced school absenteeism, or reduced violence.
2. Programs targeting refugees and the host community with **the same intervention show** different results across sub-populations due to their differing needs. In some cases, programs demonstrate improvements in emotional development outcomes in refugee learners but not in host community learners, and vice versa.
3. Interventions that **include parents in program** design in areas such as mental health support and positive parenting skills tend to show increased interest in school, decreased risky behavior and improved self-confidence of learners.
4. The **active contribution and engagement of youth** in SEL programs empowers youth and strengthens their self-perception and self-esteem. This work is essential in guiding adolescents towards vocational choices and career paths, exploring positive relationships, and engaging in non-violent political and social views.
5. SEL interventions that take place in a context of ongoing violence should **differentiate programs** by age, especially for adolescent boys. Adolescent boys cannot be protected from witnessing or being involved in ongoing violence, so it is crucial to offer them ongoing support and to adapt the structure and content to their developmental stage and needs.
6. Programs that target both men and women with the same initiative may weaken program effectiveness for girls. It is crucial to consider **negative cultural attitudes**, such as gender-based violence or early marriage, in the program design.
7. Programs that **focus on family engagement** and community awareness campaigns do better in supporting children and especially children with disabilities in developing SEL skills.

Three SEL promising practices were identified in the region:  
*Better Learning (West Bank/Gaza); Nashatati (Jordan);  
and I-Deal and Be There (Iraq, Jordan, West Bank/Gaza, Syria).*

**The Better Learning Program (BLP)**, developed by the NRC in West Bank/Gaza, is currently implemented in six countries in the MENA region and in 20 other countries around the world. BLP is a program for emergency contexts that can be adapted to 3 different stages of an emergency, which are fully described in the research report. BLP-2 is a classroom-based, teacher-led intervention that aims to support well-being and resilience among under-achieving primary and secondary learners (ages

6-16) in Gaza and the West Bank. It aims to improve students' learning capacity by focusing on executive functioning, time management, and homework completion for the whole class or in small groups, depending on context, state of emergency, and trauma. The program is designed for all learners and supports the most vulnerable populations, such as internally displaced persons, refugees, and the most vulnerable learners in host communities.

**The Nashatati Program**, developed by UNICEF MENA and implemented by UNICEF Jordan and Generations for Peace (GfP), integrates SEL through sports and arts activities. Nashatati in Jordan is teacher-led in public schools experiencing high rates of violence and bullying. The program was designed for adolescents ages 13-16 (grades 7-10), with emphasis on supporting the most vulnerable populations such as youth from low-income families, youth at risk of dropping out of school, girls at risk of early marriage, refugee adolescents, and students with disabilities. The school-based model was transferred to the Ministry of Education in 2021 and is now an optional program public schools can implement in extracurricular activities during school hours.

**THE I-DEAL INITIATIVE (IDI) AND BE THERE (BT) INITIATIVES**, developed by War Child in

Lebanon, are a set of non-formal SEL psychosocial support (PSS) interventions led by trained community members and held in community centers. The IDI is implemented in Iraq, Jordan, West Bank/Gaza, Syria, and several African countries. The program aims to strengthen learners' resilience by addressing key issues such as social identity development and management, cognitive and emotional regulation skills, and sense of security and belonging. Two types of learners ages 10-14 are targeted in Lebanon: refugees and vulnerable Lebanese learners at risk of dropping out of public schools, and out-of-school youth. It also targets caregivers of learners (under age 12) to provide them with effective positive parenting skills and techniques to improve their own well-being as caregivers.

## Research Question 2: What is the evidence base to support these models? What are the conditions for implementation?

Extensive research in education shows a significant correlation between social and emotional skills and academic achievement. SEL programmes are typically based on the principle that strengthening students' social and emotional competencies can have a positive impact on their ability to learn academically. This means that while SEL programmes focus primarily on personal well-being and the development of social skills, and accordingly use tools to assess these areas, improvements in the social and emotional domains are also expected to have a direct, positive impact on academic performance.



Teachers administer **contextualized and heavily modified international tools to students to measure well-being**. Tools are adapted to the local context and the focus of the SEL intervention



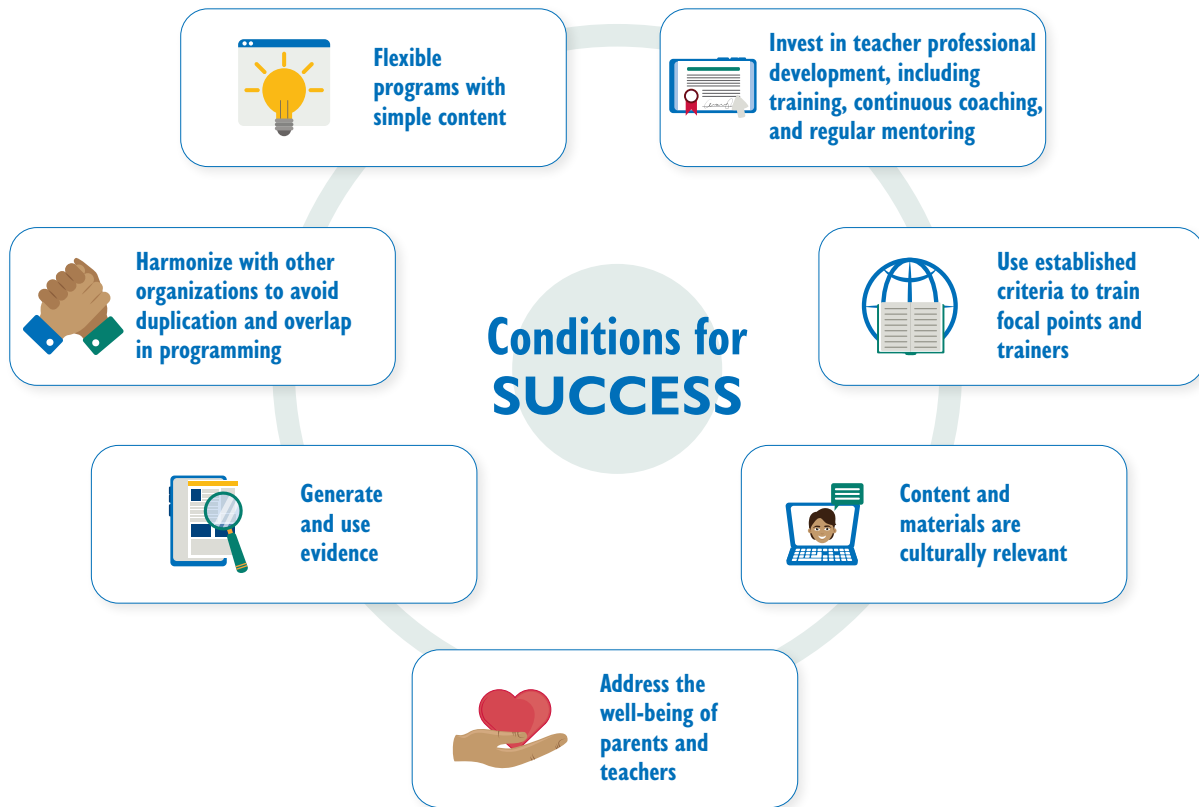
Program staff administer **monitoring tools to collect information on the program**, such as teacher surveys, classroom observations, training session evaluation feedback forms



Teachers administer monitoring tools to students to **collect information on student well-being**, such as student well-being checklists and pre-post tests



Programs conduct **external impact evaluations and qualitative program evaluations**



## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SEL PROGRAMMING IN THE MENA REGION

### Question 3: What are the recommendations for RL programming in the Middle East?



Assess and design the SEL approach to the unique needs of the context



Keep content simple and validate content at the community and school level



Use the PSS-SEL Toolbox



Support SEL approaches for teachers and parents to create a positive environment



Tailor content and teaching approach to the diversity of the target populations



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