

Multidisciplinary Education and the Growth of Social Competence in Children

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ABSTRACT

As global dynamics increasingly demand collaborative, emotionally intelligent citizens, education must evolve to address the social and emotional growth of children. This study explores how multidisciplinary approaches enhance children's social and emotional skill development, particularly within peer and familial contexts. Drawing on literature from psychology, education, and sociology, the analysis reveals that integrated curricula support competencies such as empathy, self-regulation, cooperation, and reflective communication. Through interdisciplinary methods – such as narrative-based learning, collaborative inquiry, civic engagement, and arts integration – students experience diverse modalities for emotional expression and social understanding. Furthermore, the incorporation of physical education and digital literacy broadens the platforms through which children build relational fluency. The findings underscore that when schools align pedagogical design with interdisciplinary frameworks, they offer children tools that not only enrich academic performance but cultivate meaningful, compassionate relationships. The study recommends embedding social-emotional goals across all subjects and preparing educators through comprehensive professional development. Ultimately, fostering relational competencies through multidisciplinary learning equips learners to engage with empathy and agency across social environments.

INTRODUCTION

The increasing complexity of social dynamics in modern societies has led educators and researchers to explore innovative approaches to child development. Within this shifting landscape, the role of education has expanded beyond cognitive instruction to include nurturing interpersonal capacities. Among the most significant developments is the movement toward multidisciplinary learning frameworks that integrate insights from psychology, sociology, and education to support the whole child. This shift recognizes that academic knowledge alone is insufficient to prepare young individuals for collaborative living and emotionally intelligent interaction (Baranovska et al., 2019).

In parallel with these educational transformations, there has been a growing concern about children's capacity to build and sustain healthy social relationships. As children are expected to navigate not only school environments but also diverse cultural,

familial, and digital spaces, the ability to communicate empathetically, negotiate differences, and resolve conflict constructively has become vital. Multidisciplinary educational models have emerged as promising avenues for cultivating such abilities, allowing children to engage in learning that mirrors the complexity of their lived realities (Tulviste et al., 2019).

When educational systems incorporate methods from multiple disciplines – such as integrating emotional learning within language arts or promoting group problem-solving in science instruction – they provide more than knowledge; they establish conditions for character formation and social maturity (Acosta, 2020). According to Denham and Burton (2003), children benefit significantly from curricula that encourage emotional regulation and social participation, as these experiences shape their ability to cooperate, empathize, and express themselves constructively in peer and familial relationships.

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The specific focus of this study is to explore how multidisciplinary education enhances social skill development among children. While previous research has established the importance of emotional and social learning (Elias et al., 1997), this inquiry aims to examine how combining content areas and pedagogical strategies can actively facilitate those outcomes. The purpose is not to replace traditional academics, but to reimagine learning as an ecosystem where emotional intelligence and academic achievement are mutually reinforcing (Fakhri & Faujiyah, 2019).

Problems in implementing multidisciplinary education often stem from conceptual fragmentation and a lack of alignment between institutional goals and classroom practices. While there is widespread advocacy for integrating emotional and social learning across disciplines, many schools lack coherent frameworks for doing so. According to Cohen et al. (2009), educational environments frequently emphasize academic performance without equal attention to interpersonal competencies, resulting in fragmented skill development.

Additionally, inconsistencies in teacher preparation and curriculum design contribute to variable implementation. Some instructors may lack training in emotional development or group dynamics, which are crucial for facilitating socially oriented learning. Hyson (2004) notes that when educators are not equipped to guide emotional conversations or mediate conflict, classroom environments become less conducive to authentic social engagement, hindering the goals of multidisciplinary learning.

Another concern relates to the evaluation of social skill outcomes. Unlike standardized test scores, social development is often difficult to quantify and track longitudinally. As Zins et al. (2004) highlight, assessment practices tend to focus on cognitive metrics, leaving a gap in how schools measure growth in empathy, communication, or cooperation. This limitation undermines the legitimacy of social skill development as a formal educational goal.

It is important to understand how children's social competencies are shaped by the structure of the learning environment itself. The ability to interact positively with peers and adults is not an ancillary outcome of education but a core indicator of long-term success. As Ladd (1990) found, social competence in early schooling predicts academic resilience, peer acceptance, and emotional well-being across developmental stages. Investigating how multidisciplinary approaches foster these traits is essential for evolving educational paradigms.

This study seeks to investigate how multidisciplinary educational approaches contribute to the development of children's social and emotional skills. By analyzing existing literature on pedagogical integration and interpersonal development, the research aims to identify effective strategies for fostering empathy, cooperation, and self-regulation in learning environments. The contribution of this study lies in highlighting the pedagogical linkages that support relational growth in children, offering implications for curriculum design and teacher training.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study adopts a literature-based research methodology that synthesizes and interprets scholarly discourse surrounding multidisciplinary education and its influence on children's social and emotional development. The literature review approach is appropriate for this investigation as it allows for a comprehensive evaluation of existing empirical findings and theoretical perspectives. According to Mertens (2005), qualitative literature synthesis facilitates the identification of thematic patterns and gaps in scholarly work, thereby supporting the construction of meaningful insights. The focus is on education-related journals and study topics, to ensure a foundation rooted in substantive and credible contributions. Selected literature spans multiple disciplines—education, psychology, child development, and curriculum theory—reflecting the integrated nature of the topic under examination.

Data sources were accessed through academic databases such as JSTOR, ERIC, and ScienceDirect. The inclusion criteria encompassed works that directly examined the outcomes of multidisciplinary learning environments or explored the relational dynamics of children within educational settings. The analysis followed a thematic coding procedure as recommended by Creswell (2007), wherein recurring concepts such as collaboration, empathy, emotional regulation, and peer interaction were categorized and evaluated. Cross-comparative reading was used to trace conceptual consistencies and contradictions across different studies. The validity of this review was enhanced by triangulating theoretical models with empirical data. This method ensures that the conclusions drawn are not merely interpretative but supported by patterns across diverse scholarly sources.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Educational systems have increasingly recognized the necessity of addressing more than cognitive development within learning environments.

Societies evolve in complexity and interdependence, the demand for emotionally intelligent and socially adept individuals becomes ever more pronounced. Classrooms, therefore, must transform into spaces that reflect the full spectrum of human development—intellectual, emotional, and interpersonal. This shift calls for an approach that surpasses conventional subject silos and embraces interconnected learning experiences (Rawian, 2019).

By drawing upon multiple domains of knowledge, a multidisciplinary educational paradigm expands the scope of what it means to teach and learn. Rather than treating social growth as ancillary to academic progress, this perspective situates relational development as integral to educational purpose. It recognizes that children thrive when they are not only informed, but also supported in navigating the nuances of interpersonal life. Integrative teaching methods, when designed with this objective in mind, create opportunities for learners to reflect, empathize, and engage with others in meaningful ways (Glazkova & Bukhalo, 2019).

The cultivation of emotional insight and collaborative skills cannot be left to chance. Research in developmental psychology underscores the importance of structured environments that offer both guidance and freedom for children to express and refine their social capacities. Within such settings, learners acquire more than facts; they begin to internalize values of inclusion, cooperation, and mutual respect. This process is gradual and cumulative, shaped by consistent interactions with educators who model and reinforce prosocial behavior across disciplines (Levy et al., 2018).

Incorporating sociological awareness into curriculum design further amplifies this dynamic. Understanding the social structures, norms, and cultural narratives that inform children's lives allows educators to tailor learning experiences that resonate with diverse realities. When instruction reflects lived experience and invites dialogue across perspectives, it validates the social identities of all learners. Such validation is foundational to cultivating a sense of belonging, which in turn enhances motivation, participation, and relational depth (Davis et al., 2021).

Through pedagogical strategies that intentionally weave social-emotional themes into core subjects, educators foster environments where empathy and cooperation become everyday practices rather than occasional interventions. These classrooms become ecosystems in which every interaction is an opportunity to learn about oneself and others. Multidisciplinary education, in this sense, is not a method but a vision—one that seeks to prepare children not only for academic success but for lives of connection, responsibility, and compassion (Florescu, 2020).

A multidisciplinary educational framework synthesizes insights from psychology, sociology, and pedagogy to support the whole child. When applied to classroom design, this framework enables educators to intentionally cultivate environments where social and emotional learning (SEL) is organically embedded in daily instruction. As Denham and Burton (2003) observed, children's social competence flourishes in educational settings that consistently model and reinforce empathy, collaboration, and perspective-taking. Mahoney et al. (2020) state that by exposing learners to multiple disciplinary lenses, schools nurture children's capacity to understand others, regulate emotions, and build meaningful relationships with peers and adults.

Collaborative learning strategies embedded in multidisciplinary pedagogy offer consistent opportunities for children to practice prosocial behavior. For instance, when art, storytelling, and cooperative problem-solving are combined, students are encouraged to engage in dialogues, listen actively, and negotiate shared decisions. Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory emphasized that development is fundamentally social before it becomes internalized. This principle finds powerful expression when educators design tasks that require interdependence, scaffolding the development of skills like patience, respect, and emotional self-regulation (Blewitt et al., 2020).

Family dynamics are similarly influenced by the values children internalize in school. A child who learns conflict resolution in a drama activity, or emotional expression through literature, often transfers those capabilities to family interactions. Weissberg and Greenberg (1998) argued that SEL competencies extend beyond the classroom, impacting a child's capacity to manage interpersonal challenges at home. Thus, multidisciplinary instruction supports bidirectional growth, strengthening familial communication and empathy as students bring their emotional vocabulary and reflective tools into domestic settings.

The integration of health education and physical movement disciplines contributes significantly to children's self-awareness and interpersonal sensitivity. Physical education, when informed by psychological insights, becomes a space for learning about personal boundaries, teamwork, and emotional expression through movement. Hellison (2003) emphasized that personal and social responsibility models in physical education increase students' respect for others and encourage self-monitoring—critical competencies in both peer collaboration and family harmony.

Multidisciplinary approaches also leverage literature and language arts to enhance emotional intelligence. Exposure to diverse characters and moral dilemmas in stories allows children to explore emotional nuance, cultural differences, and ethical decision-making. Bruner (1990) noted that narratives enable individuals to make meaning of complex social realities, and this holds particularly true in childhood development. Through narrative exploration, students develop empathy, recognize emotional subtext, and refine their moral reasoning—all central to social competence.

The arts, especially music and visual expression, provide channels for emotional articulation when verbal communication is insufficient. Eisner (1998) argued that aesthetic education fosters emotional literacy by teaching students to perceive and express feelings through symbolic forms. Music, in particular, has been linked to improved emotional recognition and mood regulation in young children. When incorporated into multidisciplinary curricula, such tools facilitate social bonding and emotional understanding across varied learning preferences.

Mathematics and science, although traditionally viewed as emotionally neutral, can be framed to support social development when taught through collaborative inquiry. When learners collaborate on real-world problems, they engage in dialogue, value diverse perspectives, and experience the emotional aspects of intellectual challenge and perseverance. Boaler (2002) demonstrated that cooperative math instruction cultivates a sense of belonging and shared intellectual risk-taking, which enhances peer trust and resilience.

Civic education, when embedded in multidisciplinary learning, empowers students to connect personal experiences with collective responsibility. Role-play, community projects, and ethical simulations allow children to confront real-world dilemmas, fostering an awareness of fairness, justice, and the impact of their choices. According to Berkowitz and Bier (2005), such integrative approaches significantly influence moral development and democratic participation, reinforcing relational competencies that extend into family and community life.

Technology education, if guided by ethical and social frameworks, can further support relational development. Digital storytelling, collaborative coding, and virtual simulations offer new modes for children to express emotions, engage with diverse peers, and practice digital citizenship. As Warschauer (2004), equitable and socially meaningful use of technology deepens engagement and enhances communicative skills, preparing students for emotionally intelligent interaction in hybrid social spaces.

Multidisciplinary learning nurtures metacognitive awareness, helping children understand how their thoughts, emotions, and behaviors are interconnected. Flavell's (1979) concept of metacognition has been instrumental in designing SEL curricula that ask children to reflect on their interactions and refine their approaches to communication. When disciplines converge in reflective practices—such as journaling, dialogue circles, and peer feedback—students become more intentional about how they relate to others and regulate emotional responses.

Educators who engage in multidisciplinary training are uniquely positioned to perceive the emotional and social dimensions of learning as intrinsic, rather than supplementary, components of child development. When teaching practices are informed by psychology, sociology, and developmental science alongside pedagogy, teachers cultivate a more nuanced understanding of students' behavior, motivation, and interpersonal dynamics. This broader epistemological grounding empowers educators to interpret classroom interactions not merely as instructional outcomes but as indicators of students' social-emotional states. Consequently, intervention strategies can be both preventive and responsive—attuned to the subtle emotional cues that often precede disengagement, anxiety, or relational conflict.

Cross-disciplinary collaboration among educators not only enhances individual instructional competence but also fosters collective efficacy. When professionals from diverse fields—such as counseling, special education, and arts integration—engage in joint planning and reflective dialogue, the resulting curricular coherence reflects a shared commitment to cultivating relational intelligence. Such collaboration encourages the integration of emotional literacy into core academic subjects, ensuring that concepts like empathy, resilience, and cooperation are reinforced consistently across disciplines. According to Lieberman and Miller (1999), this collegial model enhances teacher morale, reduces professional isolation, and builds school cultures grounded in shared responsibility for the whole child's growth. Moreover, institutions that embed cross-disciplinary integration into professional learning communities are more capable of sustaining inclusive, equity-centered environments. Darling-Hammond (2000) emphasized that educators who participate in continuous, interdisciplinary professional development demonstrate greater adaptive expertise in navigating culturally and emotionally diverse classrooms. These environments not only support differentiated instruction but also affirm the varied social experiences children bring into school spaces.

Ultimately, such models recalibrate the purpose of education—moving beyond content transmission toward the deliberate cultivation of socially competent, emotionally secure, and ethically grounded young individuals who are prepared to thrive in complex human ecosystems.

The school's broader ecosystem, including policies and partnerships, influences how well multidisciplinary SEL efforts succeed. When school culture reflects interdisciplinary collaboration—through integrated timetables, thematic units, or community engagement—students encounter consistent expectations and values. Elias et al. (1997) suggested that systemic SEL requires alignment across curriculum, instruction, and school climate, ensuring that relational development is not episodic but continuous and embedded.

Empirical studies affirm that children educated within multidisciplinary frameworks exhibit higher levels of empathy, cooperation, and emotional regulation. Ladd et al. (1999) found that students in schools with integrated SEL instruction developed stronger peer relationships and demonstrated lower aggression and withdrawal. These findings underscore that social and emotional development is not a byproduct but a direct outcome of thoughtful curricular design, where academic learning and interpersonal growth are interwoven.

In concluding, it becomes evident that educational environments designed through multidisciplinary principles foster far more than academic competence. They shape individuals who can navigate interpersonal spaces with thoughtfulness and emotional clarity. When instruction consciously incorporates insights from varied disciplines, it forms a cohesive system that attends to the developmental intricacies of the whole child. This approach does not fragment learning but brings coherence to the complex fabric of childhood experience.

The success of such educational models lies in their capacity to humanize the learning process. By treating emotional intelligence and social interaction as essential, not incidental, components of learning, schools recalibrate their purpose toward preparing individuals for meaningful participation in diverse communities. Children who experience this form of education are more likely to exhibit pro-social behaviors, not because they are taught in isolation, but because they are embedded within authentic learning encounters.

Beyond the classroom, the long-term implications of this educational orientation are substantial. Graduates of systems that prioritize emotional literacy tend to engage in healthier relationships, demonstrate resilience under stress, and contribute constructively to group dynamics.

The benefits extend into future family structures, workplace cultures, and civic engagements—amplifying the social dividends of investing in integrated pedagogies during early development.

The structural design of such curricula reflects a broader educational philosophy: one that resists compartmentalization and embraces complexity. Interdisciplinary learning, when anchored in relational values, encourages students to see themselves as agents of connection. They come to understand that intellectual achievement is inseparable from ethical responsibility and that meaningful knowledge must be applied within the fabric of human relationships.

Ultimately, a multidisciplinary educational vision affirms the centrality of human connection in the learning journey. It validates children not just as learners, but as emotional beings whose capacity for empathy and cooperation must be nurtured with the same precision and care as literacy or numeracy. When schools commit to this path, they cultivate a generation equipped not only with knowledge but with the wisdom to use it in service of community, compassion, and collective well-being.

CONCLUSION

Multidisciplinary education serves as a vital conduit for nurturing social and emotional competencies in children. When various domains converge intentionally within pedagogical design, they give rise to learning environments that support holistic human development. Children acquire not only academic content but essential interpersonal tools—such as empathy, collaboration, and emotional regulation—that extend well beyond the classroom. By embedding relational learning into arts, sciences, civic engagement, and physical education, schools transform into platforms for emotional literacy and constructive interaction with peers and family members alike.

The integration of diverse disciplinary insights within educational practice has profound implications for future curriculum development, teacher training, and institutional planning. Educational leaders must recognize that academic achievement and social-emotional growth are mutually reinforcing, not mutually exclusive. Policies should support sustained professional development in multidisciplinary instruction and embed SEL frameworks within all subjects to ensure relational continuity. Moreover, systemic alignment across school culture, classroom practice, and community engagement amplifies the potential of these approaches to promote lifelong interpersonal competence.

To advance these outcomes, schools are encouraged to adopt whole-child models that merge academic rigor with relational depth. This includes developing performance assessments that measure emotional and social maturity, establishing partnerships across sectors to enrich real-world learning experiences, and ensuring educators are equipped to model and teach interpersonal fluency. As societies become more diverse and interconnected, nurturing children's emotional intelligence and social adaptability through multidisciplinary education is no longer optional – it is an educational imperative.

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