



FOREIGN EXPERIENCE IN DEVELOPING YOUNG PEOPLE'S DIGITAL COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE THROUGH SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING: A COMPARATIVE PEDAGOGICAL ANALYSIS

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Abstract. This paper examines how education systems abroad combine the development of emotional intelligence with the formation of responsible online communication, and what this experience implies for higher education in Uzbekistan. Using a comparative pedagogical analysis of national policy frameworks and evaluated programmes from the United States, Finland, Spain, Italy, Singapore, the United Kingdom and the European Union, together with the findings of published meta-analyses, the study identifies the organisational models, content emphases and instructional formats on which these programmes rely. The analysis shows that the most successful practices treat digital behaviour as an expression of social and emotional skills, are embedded in regular curricula rather than delivered as one-off events, and combine whole-institution measures with explicit skill training. At the same time, most of the evidence comes from school settings, and effects reported for university students are smaller. Five transferable principles are formulated and their adaptation to social sciences and humanities programmes in Uzbek universities is discussed.

Keywords: *digital communicative competence; social and emotional learning; emotional intelligence; cyberbullying prevention; media literacy; foreign experience; higher education.*



Introduction

Few changes in the everyday life of young people have been as rapid as the shift of communication into digital spaces. In Uzbekistan, internet penetration had reached 89.0% of the population by late 2025, and the number of social media user identities grew by 41.7% within a single year, to 14.1 million [2]. Such figures matter for educators because communication is not only a channel for information but also a field in which values, self-esteem and social norms are formed. In an earlier paper we showed that internet communication affects the socio-psychological characteristics of young people in an ambivalent way: it expands opportunities for self-expression and civic participation, yet it can also reduce face-to-face contact, intensify anxiety and, under conditions of perceived anonymity, weaken the sense of responsibility for one's words [1].

If these effects are real, the question for pedagogy is no longer whether to respond but how. Here foreign experience is instructive. Over the past two decades several countries have developed and, importantly, evaluated programmes that address online behaviour through the lens of social and emotional skills. Some of them began as anti-bullying or social and emotional learning (SEL) initiatives and gradually extended to the digital environment; others were designed from the outset as media literacy or “cyber wellness” curricula. Their evaluation data allow us to move beyond general recommendations and to ask which design features are actually associated with positive outcomes.

The national context adds urgency. The “Digital Uzbekistan – 2030” strategy, approved by Presidential Decree No. UP-6079 of 5 October 2020, sets ambitious goals for the digitalisation of education, yet the emotional and ethical side of digital communication receives comparatively little attention in university curricula. The aim of this study is therefore to analyse foreign experience in developing young people's digital communicative competence on



the basis of emotional intelligence and to identify principles that can be adapted to higher education in Uzbekistan. Three research questions guided the work: (1) which organisational models are used abroad; (2) what evidence exists on their effectiveness; and (3) which of their features are transferable to the university level.

Materials and Methods

The study is a comparative pedagogical analysis based on document analysis and a narrative synthesis of published evaluations. Two types of material were examined. The first comprised official policy and curriculum documents: the Finnish national media education policy [9], the Singaporean Cyber Wellness framework [10], the British framework Education for a Connected World [11] and the European DigComp 2.2 and DigCompEdu frameworks [12; 13]. The second comprised peer-reviewed evaluation studies and meta-analyses retrieved from Web of Science, Scopus and PubMed using combinations of the terms “social and emotional learning”, “emotional intelligence training”, “cyberbullying prevention”, “media literacy intervention” and “problematic social media use”.

Programmes were included if they (a) explicitly targeted emotional, social or ethical aspects of communication, (b) had a documented curriculum or framework and (c) had been evaluated with a controlled or quasi-experimental design, or were national frameworks implemented at system level. Each case was described along six parameters: country, target level, leading idea, emotional component, digital component and type of evidence. Effect sizes were taken as reported by the original authors; no new meta-analytic computation was performed, since the outcome measures across studies are too heterogeneous to be pooled meaningfully.

Results

Organisational models

Table 1 summarises the cases. Despite differences in age groups and terminology, they fall into three recognisable models. The first is the skill-based SEL model, represented by the RULER approach developed at Yale University, in which emotional literacy is taught through regular lessons and shared classroom tools. In a cluster-randomised trial involving 62 schools, classrooms implementing RULER were rated as warmer, with more student autonomy and closer teacher–student relationships, than comparison classrooms [4].

Table 1. *Foreign models combining emotional and digital components*

Country	Programme / framework	Emotional and social component	Digital component and evidence
USA	RULER (Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence)	Recognising, understanding, labelling, expressing and regulating emotions; shared classroom tools	Indirect: improves classroom emotional climate; cluster RCT in 62 schools [4]
Finland	KiVa anti-bullying programme	Empathy toward victims, bystander self-efficacy, whole-school measures	Reduced cybervictimisation vs control; effect on perpetration moderated by age [6]; used by about 90% of comprehensive schools [5]





Country	Programme / framework	Emotional and social component	Digital component and evidence
Finland	National media education policy (2019)	Interaction skills, ethical reflection	Media literacy for all age groups as a national objective [9]
Spain	ConRed	Coexistence, perceived control and safety	Quasi-experiment, N = 893: reduced cyberbullying and cyber-dependence [7]
Italy	NoTrap!	Peer-led empathy and responsibility	Two quasi-experimental trials with high-school students; peer educators as agents of change [8]
Singapore	Cyber Wellness in Character and Citizenship Education	Linked to SEL competencies; principles of respect, safe use and positive peer influence	Curriculum topics: cyber use, identity, relationships, citizenship, ethics [10]
United Kingdom	Education for a Connected World	Self-image, online relationships, health and well-being	Age-graded outcome statements across eight strands [11]
European Union	DigComp 2.2; DigCompEdu	Netiquette, managing digital identity, protecting well-being	Reference frameworks for citizens and educators [12; 13]



The second model is the whole-institution prevention model, illustrated by KiVa in Finland, ConRed in Spain and NoTrap! in Italy. Here the emotional component, above all empathy and the responsibility of bystanders, is built into a broader system that includes lessons, school rules, work with parents and monitoring. Williford and colleagues found that pupils in KiVa schools reported less frequent cybervictimisation at post-test than controls, although the effect on cyberbullying perpetration appeared only among younger students [6]. ConRed, evaluated with 595 experimental and 298 control students, reduced both cyberbullying and what the authors call cyber-dependence, while increasing students' sense of control over personal information [7]. NoTrap! is notable for relying on trained peer educators rather than adults alone [8].

The third model is the curriculum-framework model typical of Singapore, the United Kingdom and the European Union. Instead of a single branded programme, the state defines expected outcomes and leaves schools to design activities. The Singaporean framework is especially relevant to our topic, because it explicitly links each cyber wellness topic to social and emotional competencies and organises content around online identity, relationships, citizenship and ethics [10]. Finland treats media literacy as a lifelong objective extending from early childhood to older adults [9].

Evidence of effectiveness

Programme-level results become more convincing when read together with meta-analytic data (Table 2). The well-known synthesis of 213 school-based SEL programmes by Durlak et al. reported gains in social and emotional skills, attitudes and behaviour, as well as an 11-percentile-point gain in academic achievement [3]. Media literacy interventions show an average effect of $d = .37$, and, importantly for curriculum design, interventions with more sessions were more effective while those with more components were less effective [14].



Table 2. *Meta-analytic evidence relevant to the pedagogical design*

Source	Scope	Main finding
Durlak et al., 2011 [3]	213 school-based SEL programmes	Improved SEL skills, behaviour and an 11-percentile-point gain in achievement
Jeong, Cho & Hwang, 2012 [14]	51 media literacy interventions	$d = .37$; more sessions $\rightarrow$ larger effect; more components $\rightarrow$ smaller effect
Hodzic et al., 2018 [15]	24 studies, 28 adult samples	Moderate effect of EI training, stable at follow-up
Mattingly & Kraiger, 2019 [16]	58 published and unpublished studies	Moderate positive effect of EI training regardless of design
Asiedu, 2025 [18]	49 (quasi-)experimental studies with university students	Pooled effect $g = 0.23$
Piccerillo & Digennaro, 2025 [17]	25 studies, 41,624 adolescents	Lower EI consistently linked to problematic social media use

Two further findings are decisive for our purposes. First, emotional intelligence is trainable: meta-analyses of adult samples report moderate effects that persist at follow-up [15; 16]. Second, emotional intelligence is not merely a





correlate but a plausible protective factor, since the reviewed studies consistently associate lower EI with problematic social media use among adolescents [17]. The picture for university students is more modest. A recent synthesis of 49 trials in this population obtained a pooled effect of $g = 0.23$ [18], which is roughly half of the effects reported for adult training in general.

Cross-cutting principles

Comparison of the cases allowed us to formulate five principles that recur across successful practices. (1) Integration: emotional and digital skills are taught within existing subjects or a stable curriculum strand, not as isolated campaigns. (2) Explicitness and sequence: skills are named, modelled and practised step by step, in line with the requirements of sequenced, active, focused and explicit instruction identified by Durlak et al. [3]. (3) Dosage over breadth: a smaller number of components delivered across enough sessions is preferable to a broad programme with many elements [14]. (4) Social context: bystanders, peers and the classroom climate are treated as targets of intervention, not merely as background [4; 6; 8]. (5) Positive framing: the aim is responsible and meaningful participation online rather than restriction of use, as the Singaporean and Finnish frameworks show [9; 10].

Discussion

The results support the view that digital communicative competence is best developed as part of social and emotional education, not as a purely technical skill set. This conclusion agrees with the European DigComp 2.2 framework, which places netiquette, digital identity and the protection of well-being within the same competence model as information and safety skills [12]. What the foreign programmes add is an operational answer to the question of how such competence is actually taught.

Transferring this experience to Uzbek universities, however, requires caution. Most evaluated programmes were designed for children and adolescents





in Western or East Asian school systems, and the smaller effect obtained for university students [18] suggests that adult learners need different formats. Students are less dependent on classroom climate created by a single teacher, and their online behaviour is shaped more by professional and civic contexts. It therefore seems reasonable to retain the principles listed above while changing the forms: case analysis of authentic online situations, peer-led discussion groups modelled on NoTrap!, reflective digital diaries and project work in which students create content for real audiences. The DigCompEdu framework, which assigns teachers responsibility for facilitating learners' responsible digital behaviour [13], also implies that the preparation of university teachers is a precondition rather than an optional addition.

The study has limitations. It relies on published evaluations, which may overrepresent positive results, and it does not include programmes reported only in national languages other than English. In addition, the outcome measures in the reviewed studies differ considerably, so the effect sizes cited in Table 2 cannot be compared directly. These limitations point to the need for empirical verification of any adapted model in Uzbek conditions.

Conclusion

Foreign experience demonstrates that young people's online behaviour can be improved through education when emotional skills are treated as its foundation. Three organisational models were identified: skill-based SEL, whole-institution prevention and curriculum frameworks. Their common features, namely integration into regular teaching, explicit and sequenced skill training, adequate dosage, attention to the social context and a positive framing of digital participation, can serve as principles for designing a methodology for Uzbek universities. Given the more modest effects observed in student populations, such a methodology should be embedded in social sciences and humanities courses and tested in a controlled pedagogical experiment.



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