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Research Article

Positive Education in the United Arab Emirates: Navigating Through and Beyond the Global Pandemic

التعليم الإيجابي في دولة الإمارات العربية المتحدة: التنقل عبر الوباء العالمي وما بعده

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Abstract

Drawing on data from the emirate of Ras Al Khaimah (RAK) in the UAE, this study looks at using Positive Education (PE) to build strengths, competencies, well-being, and toughness in educational communities, to combat learning loss before and during the pandemic. We were interested in understanding how educational leaders, teachers, and students perceive PE and its impact on student well-being, as well as how well-equipped they were to handle the effects of the pandemic after participating in PE. Using qualitative data from semi-structured in-person interviews, focus groups, classroom observations, and document analysis, this study argues that PE supported students in coping with stressors associated with the pandemic. We show three significant findings. First, we found that the pandemic impacted student well-being in numerous academic and nonacademic ways. Second, our results demonstrate that PE was helpful in supporting student resilience and well-being during the pandemic. Third, data show that because PE was rolled out just before the pandemic began, the pandemic curtailed its full implementation. We conclude by recommending a whole school approach to PE that includes family members since the pandemic revealed that when students are engaged in remote learning or otherwise not face-to-face at school, it is critical that parents/families can support youth who may be struggling. Finally, we note the need for school-based support, like PE, to engender student resiliency.

الملخص

بالاعتماد على بيانات من إمارة رأس الخيمة في دولة الإمارات العربية المتحدة، تبحث هذه الدراسة في استخدام التعليم الإيجابي لبناء نقاط القوة والكفاءات والرفاهية والصلابة في المجتمعات التعليمية، لمكافحة فقدان التعلم قبل وأثناء الوباء. كنا مهتمين بفهم كيف يرى القادة التربويون والمعلمون والطلاب التعليم الإيجابي وتأثيره على رفاهية الطلاب، بالإضافة إلى مدى استعدادهم للتعامل مع آثار الوباء بعد المشاركة في التعليم الإيجابي. باستخدام البيانات النوعية من المقابلات الشخصية شبه المنظمة، ومجموعات التركيز، والملاحظات الصفية، وتحليل الوثائق، تجادل هذه الدراسة بأن التعليم الإيجابي قام بدعم الطلاب في التعامل مع الضغوطات المرتبطة بالوباء. نعرض هنا ثلاث نتائج مهمة. أولاً، وجدنا أن الوباء له أثر على رفاهية الطلاب بطرق أكاديمية وغير أكاديمية عديدة. ثانيًا، تُظهر نتائجنا أن التعليم الإيجابي كان مفيدًا في دعم مرونة الطلاب ورفاههم أثناء الوباء. ثالثًا، تُظهر البيانات أنه نظرًا لانتشار التعليم الإيجابي قبل بدء الوباء مباشرة، فقد قلص الوباء تنفيذه الكامل.

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نختتم بالتوصية بنهج مدرسي كامل للتعليم الإيجابي الذي يشمل أفراد الأسرة منذ أن كشف الوباء أنه عندما ينخرط الطلاب في التعلم عن بعد، فمن الأهمية أن يتمكن الآباء / العائلات من دعم الشباب الذين قد يعانون. أخيرًا، نلاحظ الحاجة إلى الدعم في المدرسة، مثل التعليم الإيجابي، لتوليد مرونة الطلاب.

Keywords: *Positive education, Global pandemic, social-emotional learning, Learning loss*

الكلمات المفتاحية: التعليم الإيجابي، الجائحة العالمية، التعلم الاجتماعي والعاطفي، فقدان التعلم.

1. Introduction

The global SARS-CoV-2 [COVID-19 (coronavirus disease 2019)] pandemic that struck in 2019 is responsible for a sigmatic learning loss or “unfinished learning” plaguing national educational systems. As we scrambled to make sense of COVID-19, some schools remained fully open while others went fully remote (and everything in between). Ultimately, students ended the school year with lower achievement when compared to historical averages (Lewis et al., 2021; West & Lake, 2021). The global pandemic put some 1.6 billion students, at its peak, out of school, and this only widened an already existing gender divide in educational achievement and attainment. Karboul (2020) estimates that many students displaced by the pandemic may never return to school. The World Bank (2021) is reporting that “this generation of students now risks losing $17 trillion in lifetime earnings in present value, or about 14 percent of today’s global GDP, as a result of COVID-19 pandemic-related school closures” (para. 1).

Schools worldwide report being overwhelmed by the increase in student social-emotional concerns, and the unpredictable circumstances have undoubtedly impacted the well-being of children (Challenge Success, 2021). Currently, we know that students have experienced various types of fatigue related to online learning, with the biggest one being “Zoom fatigue.” There is still much to learn about how students have used social-emotional skills learned at school through social-emotional learning (SEL), both at home and when they return to school, to navigate and cope with the pandemic and its related stressors. Several studies have sought to examine the impact of COVID-19 on academic achievement and student learning (Kuhfeld et al., 2020; Middleton, 2020; Minkos & Gelbar, 2021), student academic growth (Dawson, 2021), and school exclusion and dropout rates (Tsolou et al., 2021). A few studies have examined the relationship between COVID-19 and SEL in the US context (Scott et al., 2021; Yang, 2021; Zieher et al., 2021); few have looked at this in an international context.

Elias et al. (1997) define SEL as "the process of acquiring core competencies to recognize and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, appreciate the perspective of others, establish and maintain positive relationships, make responsible decisions, and handle interpersonal situations constructively" (p. 2). In other words, SEL encompasses skills or lessons in emotional intelligence that focus on self-awareness, self-management, empathy, perspective-taking, and cooperation (Zins, 2004). Educators and education researchers have been developing and implementing the SEL curriculum in the US since the 1990s. Efforts have evolved from understanding the impact of SEL on children and adults in terms of overall well-being and life functioning to establishing policy advocacy groups and laws that require schools to support and implement SEL. The most recent reauthorization of federal policy under the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA, 2015) allows US school districts to use federal funds to implement evidence-based social-emotional development practices. Further, COVID-19 relief funds disbursed to schools are earmarked for this purpose. This is in large part due to the overwhelming research, which spans decades, that has shown that SEL is a foundation for learning, has a significant impact on child and adult success, and further establishes that SEL is an essential cornerstone to high-quality educational environments (Durlak et al., 2011).

Whereas SEL is the predominant approach to supporting student social-emotional skills in schools in the US, different related but distinct approaches are used in many other countries. For example, schools in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) have been implementing Positive Education (PE). Similar to SEL, Slemp et al. (2017) note that "positive education aims to build strengths, capabilities, well-being, and resilience in educational communities … it is not a single approach, but rather provides an umbrella under which multiple theories, programs, frameworks, and approaches reside" (p. 103). Some have categorized SEL as one of many approaches within the larger umbrella of PE[1] (Green et al., 2021; Slemp et al., 2017). Many PE programs aim to address one or more of the five components of Seligman's (2011) proposed PERMA model, which includes the five critical conditions believed necessary to enable child well-being: positive emotions (P), engagement (E), positive relationships (R), meaning (M), and achievement (A) (Shoshani & Slone, 2017). For example, a school implementing PE might develop one or more programs, lessons, or initiatives for each of the five PERMA components to increase student well-being. Shoshani and Slone (2017) conducted a module focused on positive emotions (P) with preschool children in which they discussed emotional expression, emotional regulation, empathy, positive thinking, and the ability to differentiate between positive and negative feelings and to express both freely. Examples of activities in this module included identification of personal sources

of happiness, exercises for expressing gratitude, free expression of different feelings in movement, art, speech and facial expressions, and descriptions of memories of happy experiences.

PE is now expanding globally in several countries, and some are looking at the Australian model as an example of what student well-being should look like. Today, PE has been borrowed, lent, and diffused worldwide as it has been applied across a growing number of contexts and populations since its foundations at the Geelong Grammar School, a private school in Victoria, Australia, where positive psychologists sought to incorporate positive psychology concepts, interventions, and practices unambiguously and subtly into the curriculum (e.g., offering brain breaks, discussing character strengths through literary characters, expressing gratitude during the school day [see White, 2012]). Since then, PE has been expanded, supported, and refined. Within this nexus of change, student outcomes are changing as policies and curricula try to keep *au fait* of "educational globalism" – the worldwide diffusion of knowledge (Das, 2011).

In this study, we explore PE in schools in the UAE, particularly Ras Al Khaimah (RAK). The current research focuses on PE's implementation in the COVID pandemic context. We are interested in understanding how educational leaders, teachers, and students perceive PE and its impact on student well-being, as well as how well-equipped they were to handle the effects of the pandemic after participating in PE. Additionally, we are concerned with understanding how the pandemic and associated virtual learning impacted PE implementation and what lessons have been learned from this global stressor that can inform how we best support students' well-being through PE implementation moving forward. This paper has five parts. First, we provide a brief overview of educational developments in the UAE to ground our case study. Then we will give an overview of PE and juxtapose it with the literature on SEL. In doing this, we recognize that SEL is a very American term not widely used in the UAE, but its foundation antecedents are well-known. After this, we discuss our methodology and findings based on interviews and focus groups with educational leaders, teachers, and students. We conclude by offering some insights on the perceived influence of PE on student well-being and ability to cope with stressors associated with the pandemic, as well as the impact of the pandemic on PE implementation and related suggestions for enhancing PE implementation in the region moving forward.

1.1. Educational developments in the UAE

In 1971, when His Highness Sheikh Zayed Bin Sultan Al Nahyan founded the UAE, he believed education was essential for creating an inclusive and prosperous society.

The UAE, with almost 10 million people, is a young country, and it is composed of a federation of seven emirates – Abu Dhabi (the federal capital), Ajman, Dubai, Fujairah, Ras Al Khaimah, Sharjah, and Umm Al Quwain. Its religion is Islam, and its official language is Arabic. It has the world's sixth and seventeen largest oil and natural gas reserves. While in the 1950s, there were limited opportunities for formal schooling, in the 1960s, schooling expanded greatly, and by the 1970s, the literacy rate was 58% for men and 38% for women. The government spends about 25% of the federal budget on education. Today literacy rates for both genders are around 90%, and before the pandemic, "in the 2017–2018 academic year, approximately 1,080,000 students were enrolled at 1,219 public and private schools" (Embassy of the UAE, n.d. para. 4). In the UAE, the education system is divided into public schools, private schools, higher educational institutions,[2] technical education centers, and semi-government schools.[3] In private schools, education is mainly conducted in English, with Arabic language classes as compulsory across the curriculum, and in most public schools, the medium of instruction is Arabic, and equal emphasis is given to the English language. Currently, private school growth is outpacing public schooling growth, leading to more Emiratis attending private schools. Emirati students make up the majority of public school students; however, in many private schools, attended by wealthy Emiratis and the children of expatriates, students are given access to one of the 15 different types of curricula (such as the American, British, Canadian, French, German, Indian, International Baccalaureate [IB], Japanese, and Pakistani) that are available across the country. While primary and secondary education is free and compulsory, boys and girls are segregated and schooled by gender at the secondary level. The Ministry of Education (MOE) determines the overarching centralized educational plan, with education councils in each emirate being tasked with implementing educational reforms. At the K-12 level, the education system is divided into three Cycles: Cycle 1 – Grades 1–4; Cycle 2 – Grades 5–8; and Cycle 3 – Grades 9–12.

Eighty percent of the UAE's labor force is expatriates, mainly Indians, Nepalese, Bangladeshi, Pakistani, Sri Lankan, and Filipinos. In the last few decades, educational reforms in the UAE have focused on preparing students to transition to the labor market and university. So, in the 2000s, educational reforms institutionalized Public–Private Partnerships, adopted a curriculum from Australia, and used consultants to increase English proficiency and the educational infrastructure (Matsumoto, 2019). In fact, UAE officials "defer to foreign expertise for the development of educational policies [and] tenets of the global reform movement – including an emphasis on standardization, competition, and external accountability – shape policy in the UAE" (Matsumoto, 2019, p. 8). There has been some criticism of this approach, as Yaaqeib (2014) explains that it

has been attributed as a cause of poor academic outcomes for Emirati youth: as Earle Warnica, who was an educational consultant for Oman and the UAE for over 11 years, believed that these failures were due to the educational planning being conducted by foreign educators with little knowledge about the local context. Warnica (2010) states that there was little input from native staff, and constant administrative changes made it difficult to maintain a "reform streak," any change was met by passive resistance from the local educators. Other local professionals expressed that "dropping" overseas educational practices in the UAE would not help educational reform, and "foreign experts often compete to introduce new practices without sufficient knowledge of the local culture" (p. 3). Thus, most education reforms have focused on "preserving local traditions and principles, and the cultural identity of the country" (Embassy of the UAE, n.d., para. 5); others disagree and do not believe this has been a critical focus of education reform in the country (Pennington, 2017; Tabari, 2014).

The MOE has outlined eight strategic objectives: inclusive quality, leadership and educational efficiencies, good governance, safe and supportive learning environments, preparing students for higher education, strengthening scientific capacity, transparency, and innovation. The MOE (2020) paints the portrait of an Emirati youth who is personal (sincere, self-confident, has a passion for knowledge and has leadership skills), knowledgeable (poses community and contemporary knowledge), and skillful (creative thinker, bilingual, technologically literate, and a collaborator) upon graduation. However, the OECD (2015) notes that UAE "students still perform well below the levels expected in advanced economies" (para. 3).

Recently, as part of the *Vision 2021 National Agenda* and linked to the educational Strategic Plan for 2017–2021, the MOE has "set as a target that our students rank among the best in the world in reading, mathematics and science exams, and to have a strong knowledge of the Arabic language" (Vision 2021, 2021, p. 1). At its core, Emirati education is expected to instill moral values and positive trends through teaching history, culture, civilization, and new languages (UAE, MOE, 2020). Within this aim, the UAE decided in 2018 to move away from the structured, traditional learning approach and develop the student's well-being by launching *the National Program for Happiness and Well-being*. This "positive schools" network was launched with 10 schools across the country after the experimental program showed impressive results in higher academic attainment, higher health standards, and lower absenteeism. The program aimed "at adding well-being to education to help students build personal and positive skills in parallel with their academic and futuristic skills; the network features a flexible mechanism that helps the participating schools implement positive education and well-being concepts" (UAE, MOE, 2018, para. 2). While this program also provided financial support for schools

and resources, little is known about its success, whether it was fully executed or the schools where it was implemented. The global pandemic hit shortly after the program's announcement, and it is unclear what percentage of the program was implemented. In light of this, the current project aims to understand how PE had been implemented before the pandemic, if at all, and to what extent and how students used the PE tools they learned previously to cope with the pandemic and its related stressors and impacts.

Happiness and well-being have become a central tenet of education in the UAE. For the last six iterations of the United Nations Sustainable Development Solutions Network's (SDSN) World Happiness Report, the UAE has placed first among Arab countries. Officially the focus on happiness and well-being dates to the February 2016 appointment of Her Excellency Ohood bint Khalfan Al Roumi as the first and only Minister of State for Happiness (and in 2017, after a cabinet reshuffle,[4] well-being was added to her portfolio). This post was one of the focus areas[5] for achieving Vision 2021. This ministerial post came with an official office and all the trappings, but by 2020, in another cabinet reshuffle, it had been reduced to an office inside the Ministry of Community Development and renamed the "Quality of Life and Happiness" portfolio. Under the original designation, the office was supposed to create government policies, programs, and services that promoted the virtues of a positive lifestyle and develop the happiness index to measure people's satisfaction.[6] In March 2016, Sheikh Mohammed approved the National Program for Happiness which was meant to serve as the National Charter for Happiness, which aimed to establish an environment that ensures the happiness and well-being of society.[7] In education, the National Program for Happiness and Well-being, in cooperation with the MOE, launched the Well Schools Network, which intended to give public and private schools the tools to foster a culture of well-being for their students and teachers. To accomplish these goals, in 2019, the virtual Wellbeing Academy was launched to integrate well-being into government work, public policies, and government services and measure the impact of sustainable well-being, institutionalizing excellence in well-being and instilling readiness for future variations of well-being (UAE, 2021).

It is clear that the emirate of Dubai has a highly active PE program under the Knowledge and Human Development Authority (KDHA), a MOE-affiliated regulatory agency, and it is well-publicized. KDHA is responsible for implementing international educational practices in education, and its intelligent reporting of every private school in the emirate of Dubai makes it a unique entity. In fact, KDHA has effectively led the charge on PE in Dubai because of the number of private schools there; no other emirate has as strong of a PE presence. As such, PE was something that KDHA brought to Dubai from Australia around 2009. KDHA began to measure student happiness in 2017.[8] In

2021, the fifth iteration of the Dubai Student Wellbeing Census was conducted, and the 2020 survey revealed that of 102,854 students from 162 nationalities at 189 schools in Dubai, 70% of Grades 6 through 9 and 65% of Grades 10 through 12 had a high emotional engagement with their teachers. Moreover, 2020 respondents reported that they felt satisfied with their lives (87% for Grade 6 through 9 boys, 80% for Grade 6 through 9 girls, 80.7% for Grade 10 through 12 boys, and 73.8% for Grade 10 through 12 girls) and had improved relations with their friends during the pandemic. Overall, survey results from 2018–2020 suggest high levels of student happiness and positive school climates, which may be related to the robust PE implementation in Dubai (although causation cannot be inferred). However, the question beckons, are these results unique to Dubai, or are students in the other emirates showing similar outcomes, particularly those in emirates with fewer resources? This study focuses explicitly on the implementation of PE in the RAK, a region with disparities in resources and differences in how local authorities prescribe educational reforms. It should be noted that Abu Dhabi and Dubai have their own educational authorities, and there are jurisdictional boundaries between Abu Dhabi's Department of Education and Knowledge (ADEK), KHDA, and MOE's Education Zones. This is a significant political-educational aspect of the UAE. But because this case study is set in RAK, it falls under MOE jurisdiction; therefore, our focus on MOE's Education Zone is warranted.

In RAK, the Education Zone supervises and implements policies and administrative staff support in private and public schools. However, with the restructuring of Educational Zones in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, these zones are now responsible for school inspection. The coordination of administrated support and other responsibilities has been sent back to Abu Dhabi. Unlike Dubai and Abu Dhabi, which have quasi-governmental regulatory agencies, KDHA and ADEK, respectively, private education suppliers are not regulated by the RAK Education Zone. Instead, they follow their own curriculum. Following MOE regulations, they are expected to teach all students four mandatory subjects: Islamic education, Arabic language instruction, UAE social studies, and UAE moral education. In RAK, there are more public schools (58) than private schools (33), with 14 public kindergartens and 39 privately licensed early-childhood education centers. Most Emirati children attend public schools, and there are more Emirati teachers than expatriate teachers (usually in Cycles 2 and 3) in RAK. The Sheikh Saud bin Saqr Al Qasimi Foundation for Policy Research (2020) reports that of the 33 private schools in RAK, 17 followed the official MOE curricula, six the Indian curricula, four the United Kingdom's curricula, and three the United States' curricula. There is one International Baccalaureate school, and a few individual schools follow the Pakistani, Bangladeshi, and SABIS curricula. There is also a network of four Charity schools (two

for boys and two for girls) in RAK, run by the government and funded through public donations. Like the rest of the UAE, in RAK, private schools have uncritically borrowed curricula from foreign countries as an alternative to government schools.

2. Theoretical Orientation and Literature Review

While PE has come to be characterized in several ways, for this article, we use Seligman et al.'s (2009) definition of "education for both traditional skills and happiness" (p. 293) in conjunction with Oades et al.'s (2011) ideas that PE is "the development of educational environments that enable the learner to engage in established curricula in addition to knowledge and skills to develop their own and others' well-being" (p. 432). In essence, like SEL, PE draws upon positive psychology and applies it to education by "bringing together the science of positive psychology with best-practice teaching to encourage and support schools and individuals within their communities to flourish" (Norrish et al., 2013, p. 148). PE can be thought of as an "umbrella term to describe empirically validated interventions and programs from positive psychology that have an impact on student well-being" (White et al., 2017, p. 1). These understandings of PE have come about because most parents want their children to be happy, and in most societies, happiness is equated with success (Seligman et al., 2009). Moreover, schools as social institutions, with their traditional focus on academic achievement (measured through grades and standardized examinations), are now viewed as instrumental in fostering happiness and well-being. However, it is essential to note that the cross-cultural validity of the premises underlying PE has not been directly studied, and there has been debate on its universality. Research exploring the implementation of PE in the Gulf region suggests that it is well-received by students and teachers but is quite limited in scope (Samways et al., 2019).

It is noteworthy that PE arose during the global mental health crisis of the 1990s (Kern & Wehmeyer, 2021; Seligman et al., 2009). PE is essential today, particularly as students face higher levels of disconnection, detachment, and mental health issues that the global pandemic has exacerbated. PE promotes "positive states and qualities, such as happiness, flourishing, strengths, and capabilities" (Kern & Wehmeyer, 2021, p. 3), emphasizing well-being instead of disciplinary actions. At its core, PE highlights strengths over weaknesses and the pursuit of virtuous, honorable, and conceivable emotions and engagement. The idea is that well-being comes from the environment and that "*more well-being is synergistic with better learning"* (Seligman et al., 2009, p. 294, *emphasis in original*).

The development of PE encompasses three waves. The first wave focused on training teachers to deliver curriculum material to support learners in being happy and engaged. While the emphasis was on student happiness and well-being, questions arose about how to deal with teachers' struggles in teaching about well-being. Thus, PE was broadened to include teachers, school leaders, and non-teaching staff, and it recognized that the environment contributed to well-being. In this way, the second wave of PE "emphasizes moving beyond specific programs developing specific skills to the creation of learning environments that support the well-being of everyone within the school community, through both the taught and caught curriculum" (Kern & Wehmeyer, 2021, p. 6). However, the purpose of PE and its relationship, if any, to SEL, positive behavioral interventions and supports, character education, and holistic education remained unclear. As such, these relationships and other broader questions are what constitutes the third wave of PE, which views PE as a "perspective" aimed at embracing "positively oriented programs, structures, frameworks, etc. that already exist within schools, with continued refinements towards bringing out the best of what could be" (Kern & Wehmeyer, 2021, p. 6). In other words, the third wave is grounded in community relations and a deep understanding of the various well-being approaches, as PE should aim to help young people develop their full potential. Arguís-Rey et al. (2012) claim that PE should have a solid scientific foundation, be multidimensional, integrated into the school curriculum, and be built on a system of explicit ethical values. This must be coupled with a whole-school approach.

PE, which private/independent schools have embraced in the UAE, teaches students and staff strategies around growth mindset, mindfulness, character education, well-being, mental toughness, resilience, self-efficacy, positive emotion, and flourishing to prevent mental illness, promoting student thriving, and encouraging academic performance. However, Green et al. (2021) argue that since private/independent schools typically have more resources than public schools, they have integrated PE more quickly and effectively into their schools. Additionally, in instances where public schools endeavor to try PE strategies, they are rarely fully realized as the teacher learning acquired during professional sessions is "not transferred into lived practices at the school, nor are they embedded in school processes" (p. 24). Research shows that PE, like most other educational initiatives, is most successful when it is championed by educators who build the internal capacity for implementation within the school by understanding the school context and having access to PE resources. Despite the importance of implementing PE in a whole school approach, PE has often suffered from a programmatic approach; it is often segmented into several complementary or competing approaches, such as SEL, growth mindset, or character education.

Slemp et al. (2017) argue that "the vision, scope, and boundaries of positive education are yet to be fully defined, but it both intersects with and complements social and emotional learning" (p. 103). While there is no established framework linking SEL to PE (see Ng & Vella-Brodrick, 2019), SEL stems from extensive education-based research on the development of emotional intelligence (Goleman, 1998), while PE comes from positive psychology applied to education. As such, Green et al. (2021) suggest that SEL is an approach to PE in that its core competencies

> *support Seligman's PERMA model [Positive Emotion, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning, and Accomplishment], with self-awareness needed to identify positive emotions, self-management required in choosing to be engaged in a task, social awareness helps us build positive relationships, and responsible decision-making is needed to make meaningful contributions to the world around us.* (pp. 28–29)

SEL advocates believe that social-emotional skills can be taught and learned, just as academic skills like reading or math (Goleman, 1998). They also tout research showing that social-emotional health and academic progress are inextricably linked (Adelman & Taylor, 2000; US Department of Education, 2011). In addition to having academic impacts, social-emotional competence is also predictive of other critical long-term outcomes, including college completion, stable employment, use of public housing and public assistance, and criminal involvement (Jones et al., 2015). SEL has been integrated into programs into five cognitive, affective, and behavioral competencies – self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making (CASEL, 2014). SEL is typically within a three-tiered public health model of prevention and intervention, termed multitiered support systems ([MTSS]; Nantais et al., 2014). The MTSS framework argues for a continuum of care in which social-emotional health promotion, prevention, and intervention are provided in schools in a stepped fashion. At the first tier, the universal level (Tier 1), support is provided to all students through curriculum and programming, 80% of which are expected to benefit from these comprehensive supports alone. At the second level, the targeted level (Tier 2), approximately 15% of students are expected to benefit from more targeted and specific prevention and intervention support (e.g., small group instruction). At the third level, the intensive level (Tier 3), approximately 5% of students are expected to need intensive, individualized support to develop expected social-emotional skills (Fletcher & Vaughn, 2009). SEL curriculum and programming can be situated along this entire continuum of care, though it is typically described at the universal or classroom level. SEL approaches include manualized interventions (e.g., Promoting Alternative Thinking

Strategies [PATHS] and Second Step) and explicit instruction, teacher instructional practices that support SEL, integration of social-emotional skills into academic curriculum content (e.g., literature, history), and the culture and climate of the school more broadly (CASEL, 2014). Research on the impact of SEL programs on the development of SEL competencies in students has accelerated over the last decade. These studies have found that student participation in SEL programs impacts student prosocial behaviors and class behavior, emotional distress, and academic proficiency (grades, test scores; [Greenberg et al., 2003]), though the size of this effect tends to be small to moderate. However, one main criticism levied against SEL is that the teacher is often the facilitator and "little time is given to teachers to learn and live these competencies themselves" ... and therefore, "SEL programs are only effective if all stakeholders are involved in the implementation process holistically and sustainably" (Green et al., 2021, p. 29).

As Green et al. (2021) remind us, there is no one size fits all approach to achieving students' well-being as "schools often take a scatter-gun approach rather than a strategic approach" (p. 42). Thus, schools often focus on a single well-being approach, such as implementing an SEL curriculum, growth mindset, or character strengths, rather than a holistic approach proposed by PE. Therefore, for any change to be introduced, there needs to be a suitable school climate, and PE should not be layered on top of other initiatives. Instead, it should be embedded across the school and general curriculum. After all, as Seligman et al. (2009) note, well-being should be taught in schools "as an antidote to depression, as a vehicle for increasing life satisfaction, and as an aid to better learning and more creative thinking (p. 295). In the cross-cultural context of the current study, in which the implementation of a Western concept (PE) within the UAE education system has not been sufficiently studied, and the best way to support culturally-appropriate PE is unknown, the importance of not using one size fits all approach is particularly important. In this way, recognizing that PE has a broader focus than SEL, we examine how PE is implemented in private schools in the UAE and its perceived benefits before and during the global pandemic.

3. Methods

3.1. Study context

The results presented here are one facet of a larger project about PE in the UAE. The larger project focuses on broadly understanding PE within the UAE and RAK,

including its origins, development, implementation, and perceived impact. It was supported through a grant from The Sheikh Saud bin Saqr Al Qasimi Foundation (Al Qasimi Foundation).[9] This article focuses specifically on how PE is implemented in the emirate of RAK within the context of the global COVID-19 pandemic. We were initially interested in conducting research in public and private schools and sought to recruit schools with varying degrees of implementation (new, moderately-established, and well-established). However, due to COVID-19, we were only given access to private schools, and it was difficult to recruit participants during such unprecedented times; these constraints thus limited the scope of the project.

3.2. Procedures and participants

In the fall of 2021, we conducted semi-structured in-person interviews, focus groups, classroom observations, document analysis,[10] and a survey in the UAE. One of the researchers traveled to RAK for six weeks to conduct in-person interviews, focus groups, and classroom observations. Only data from the interviews and teacher and student focus groups were analyzed for this paper. Teacher and student data were gathered from one private school in RAK and one private school in the emirate of Abu Dhabi. These schools became our case study and served as the primary unit of analysis, as we were interested in "systematically [analyzing] arraying qualitative data (narratives and words) into hierarchical relationships, matrixes, or other arrays" (Yin, 2012, p. 150). Given that the emirate Dubai is a PE hub, we also did interviews with educational leaders in Dubai but did not conduct research in schools there.

We used the Al Qasimi Foundation network to recruit schools for focus groups in English and Arabic. Schools in RAK were emailed, and we described the study and asked if they were interested in: (i) allowing teachers to participate in a focus group; (ii) allowing students to participate in a focus group; and (iii) allowing SEL/PE lessons to be observed by researchers.

Individual interview participants, mostly educational leaders,[11] were recruited by researching educational leaders (all adults) in the region that we believed to have knowledge of the landscape of SEL/PE in the region. The researchers emailed potential participants and asked if they were interested in participating in an interview about SEL/PE in RAK and the UAE more broadly. Across all instruments, we had a diverse pool of students, teachers, and educational leaders regarding gender, age, racial/ethnic background, and expatriate status. Informed adult consent and youth assent were received from all participants before participation. Study procedures were approved by the Institutional Review Board at Loyola University Chicago.

Table 1

Sample teacher training book on promoting student well-being.

Wellbeing for the IB PYP: Teaching for Success	
Chapter	Contents
1	The Importance of Wellbeing and Social Emotional Learning
2	Wellbeing and the Learner Profile
3	Approaches to Learning (ATL) Skills
4	ATL Skills: Social Skills
5	ATL Skills: Communication Skills
6	ATL Skills: Self-Management Skills
7	Anxiety, Stress, and Mindfulness
8	Conclusion
	Learner Profile Worksheets

From O'Brien, K. (2020). *Wellbeing for the International Baccalaureate Primary Years Programme: Teaching for Success*. Hodder Education.

Interviews with educational leaders. Twelve participant interviews were conducted with educational leaders[12] and teachers[13] both in person and over Zoom (Vaughn et al., 1996). The semi-structured interviews lasted approximately 45 minutes to 1 hr, and the interviewees were asked 10 questions. Most interviews were done in English and some in Arabic and translated verbatim by a local research assistant.

Focus groups with students and teachers. Six focus groups were conducted in total. Two with students[14] (from both private and public schools[15]) who had participated in PE lessons (in Grades 8, 9, and 10) at school and four with teachers who teach PE at different grade levels in private schools. Table 1 provides an example of the table of contents of a training manual for teachers that addresses incorporating well-being into the classroom, which is one example of how PE is being applied in the region. There were four to six individuals in each focus group. Focus groups lasted 45 minutes to 1 hr, and focus group facilitators used a semi-structured protocol to guide participants through five to eight questions. Focus groups were conducted in English and Arabic and translated verbatim by a local research assistant.

3.3. Data analysis

Triangulation was developed by conducting multiple interviews and focus groups with students, teachers, and education leaders, including students and teachers from different grades. We then coded the data and used "thematic analysis" (Braun & Clarke, 2012) to arrive at our themes. In this way, we used "an inductive approach to data coding and analysis [which] is a bottom-up approach and is driven by what is *in* the data" (Braun

& Clarke, 2012, p. 58). This article analyzed and presented data from these different sources in thematic areas. This paper employs direct quotes from the interviews/focus groups as a primary data source. The quotes provided represented the larger whole and were chosen because they illustrated one of our themes and offered a clear example of an expected finding or highlighted, in a focused way, areas in which all participants' thinking converges.

4. Findings and Discussion

Following Braun and Clarke (2006), we did a top-down or theoretical thematic analysis driven by the research questions. This led us to follow a six-step process of: (i) becoming familiar with the data; (ii) generating initial codes; (iii) searching for themes; (iv) reviewing themes; (v) defining themes; and (vi) write-up. Themes related to the pandemic and its impact on student well-being and PE implementation were pulled, and quotes were analyzed. For this paper, we were only interested in answers related to the question, "How do you think COVID impacted efforts to implement PE in schools in the UAE?". As we became familiar with the data, we found that out of the ten interviews conducted with leaders, nine answered this question about COVID, and six of those interviewees (67%) agreed that the COVID-19 pandemic impacted PE within the UAE schools. The following sections will discuss themes that emerged across the coding of interviews and focus groups related to the pandemic and PE. Because we were concerned with the effects of COVID-19, we focused on a "*theoretical* thematic analysis rather than an *inductive* one" in that the aim was to "address specific research questions and analyze the data with this in mind" (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017, p. 3355, *emphasis in the original*). Based on this, we came up with three themes: (i) the impact of the pandemic on student well-being; (ii) the role of PE in supporting student resilience and well-being; and (iii) the impact of the pandemic on PE implementation.

4.1. Impact of the pandemic on student well-being

First, we explored the pandemic's impact on student well-being and general happiness. Many participants expressed that COVID-19 had a challenging effect on students. For example, one interviewee indicated that the pandemic generally impacted student well-being, focusing on the amount of screen time students are engaging in. The interviewee said that:

> *… it has had a big impact, I think, in terms of how to deal with other people. From a well-being point of view, we are trying our best to limit screen time, because obviously, we realize the impact that can have on students. Specifically, in terms of their health and sleep patterns. Mentally, I think we are aware that some students have been spending an excessive amount of hours confined to their rooms with only a screen as their kind of window to the outside world. So, I think, probably the biggest challenge in education is to bring the students back up to speed.*

Children's screen time was a concern for both educational leaders and students. As one interviewee stated, "from a well-being point of view, we [were] trying our best to limit screen time because, obviously, we realize the impact that can have on students. In terms of their health and sleep patterns."

In our student focus group, students expressed feeling much more pressure to succeed in school during the pandemic than before the pandemic. One of our study participants explained that "everybody wants us to achieve and work hard and do well in school, but they should also consider the pandemic and our mental capacity. I think this is all too much for teenagers." Moreover, an education leader noted that more parents recognize the difficulties that their children are experiencing by stating that:

> *It has demonstrated to the parents how hard this is for their kids, and the challenges they have at home and at school. And the number of challenges that teachers face in order to make everything suitable for our kids. So I think it mirrors all the challenges for all the parts all the sides working in this field.*

These responses reveal the profound impact that COVID-19 has had on students, not only academically but socially, emotionally, and psychologically. For school-aged children and adolescents who had to be isolated and learn remotely, research by Guarino and Santibañez (2021) has found that absenteeism and virtual learning due to the pandemic have harmed students' social-emotional skills, including social awareness, self-efficacy, and self-management. Emotional and psychological conditions, including fear, anxiety, depression, and suicide ideation, have also been observed to impact students more acutely during these unprecedented times (Pedrosa et al., 2020). In the US, the COVID-19 pandemic has led to an increase in levels of anxiety and depression for males and females across the elementary, middle, and high school levels (Demaray et al., 2022). Current findings suggest that students in UAE were also experiencing mental health difficulties due to the pandemic.

However, interviews with educational leaders also revealed that it was difficult for educators to know how students were functioning at home due to the remote learning environment and lack of in-person contact. For example, one interviewee touched on the minimal communication that took place during the lockdown, expressing that:

> *Because at the end of the day, during the pandemic, they were by themselves at home and the communication was the family members living with them, which was minimal. So yes, definitely there was an impact, and it was challenging as well.*

Thus, while the pandemic impacted student well-being, the isolating nature of the pandemic response made it difficult for educators to be aware of these student needs and respond appropriately.

4.2. Role of PE in supporting student resilience and well-being

Given the difficulties related to student well-being during the pandemic, we were also interested in understanding how participants understood PE and its potential role in supporting student resilience and well-being. Participants tended to feel that PE was associated with student resilience and the ability to cope with stressors. For example, one participant stated, "I think of it in terms of well-being or there are a couple of buzzwords, mindfulness, resilience, taking risk, attitude, growth mindset, etc." Another stated, "The purpose of positive education is to ensure the well-being of students and help them develop a love for learning and help them develop life skills needed out of school."

Several respondents also agreed that PE could lead to student resilience and well-being but that it began at the broader school level, not just with individual knowledge/support of students. For example, one said:

> *I was just thinking of positive education that considers the three areas. The teacher seems to engage, I think, with the community and the individual, and put in support strategies where the students should we say they will flourish in that environment so it's a marrying of traditional approach with positive well-being-based learning that will provide resilience and positive emotion in the students that we come across on a day to day basis.*

Another expanded, "It kind of starts from safety. And if we have positive practices that support and influence these procedures, then that is what leads us to being a happier school then to kind of make well-being our focus."

Based on these responses, it seems that in the UAE, PE is perceived as an approach that can help support student well-being and resilience in the face of stressors. For many, it is viewed as an approach that starts at the broader school level, including creating community and safety, which then leads to well-being at the individual level.

4.3. Impact of the pandemic on PE implementation

Findings from the interviews and focus groups revealed that the pandemic was perceived to impact the implementation of PE in UAE schools. There were several ways that the pandemic, and its associated factors (virtual learning, lack of in-person contact, stress, etc.), were seen as influencing the roll-out and implementation of this effort.

First, respondents reported that the pandemic was such an unprecedented and stressful time for schools that they were focused on simply figuring out how to teach in the virtual environment and respond to student needs in new ways, that PE was not necessarily the main priority. For example, one person stated,

> *Really the entire focus during the COVID period was, you know, how do we make it successful? How do we act? So that's one element. The second element is you know, you don't have people in the class, you don't have people in person. Everyone's on a screen. You know, a lot of people are locked in for a long time.*

The abundance of uncertainty surrounding education during the pandemic and virtual learning was a hindrance to PE implementation.

Others discussed the barriers to implementing PE lessons and approaches within the virtual environment, noting that it is not as conducive to PE as in-person learning. One respondent noted, "the attention span and the memory span for those [positive education] kind of things just kind of went out the window during the pandemic there." Another respondent discussed how virtual learning hindered normal communication processes: "communication processes affected positive education." Indeed, virtual learning does seem to have unique impacts on the implementation of approaches like PE and SEL; a 2021 study found that educators who have received SE support from their school/district perceived less challenge when implementing SEL (Zieher et al., 2021); however, the schools' support of SEL was found to be unrelated to their report of challenges in implementing SEL during distance learning. Therefore, difficulty in implementing SEL during distance learning was found to be a challenge because of the nature of distance learning and the limitations that come with it (Zieher et al., 2021).

Furthermore, respondents feared that the longer the school closures lasted, the more significant the impact it would have on PE efforts in the country. Interviewees argued that while PE provided a support scaffolding for students during the first phase of the pandemic, they were worried that if the school closures were prolonged, the gains made in implementing a whole-school approach to PE before the pandemic would have deteriorated further. In essence, while students (and parents to some extent) were prepared with the basic skills to deal with homeschooling, they were stretched to capacity because schools had just begun implementing PE, and during the pandemic, the focus was on teaching academic material. Some were concerned that while students could use PE skills during the pandemic when they returned to in-school learning, they found that students had difficulty interacting with each other and adults. They also found that some of the learning made around PE concepts was lost because only specific skill sets were employed during the pandemic, and others were neglected. One respondent stated that especially for the younger children once they returned to school, "you need to format them again about living with people … because at the end, during the pandemic, they were by themselves at home, the maximum communication was the family members." Another emphasized the need to get students "up to speed" on PE-related skills:

> *Mentally, I think we are aware that some students have been spending an excessive amount of hours confined to their rooms with only a screen as their kind of window to the outside world. So we, I think, probably the biggest challenge in education is to bring the students back up to speed.*

When asked if they felt PE efforts were successful, interviewees were generally unsure. They expressed that they had been implementing PE in the classroom for about two years (sometimes less) and that students, educators, and parents were being responsive to it before the pandemic. During the pandemic, the effort to implement PE among students and educators remained, but educators found it challenging to continue high-quality implementation virtually during a pandemic. One possible benefit of the pandemic on PE, however, was summarized well by an interviewee:

> *Everyone [has] started to believe that well-being matters, that positive education and well-being education should be in schools more than before" because although "some students [were] isolated for a long time, from society, from communication, [they still manage to] deal with others in a healthy way.*

Not all educational leaders felt that COVID-19 has negatively impacted PE implementation. In fact, one interviewee offered a differing opinion of COVID-19's impact on PE in UAE schools, saying,

> *I would not say that it is a very large impact and that there is a decline in positive learning to education. Possibly in the beginning there was a decline in extracurricular activities, and we do not deny that there was an impact. Communication processes affected positive education, but not significantly. Rather, schools tried to preserve what they had achieved in positive education.*

This response indicates that this participant believed that pre-pandemic PE efforts (a whole-school effort to PE) were preserved, suggesting the resilience of PE to different learning environments. These perceptions are in line with Varghese and Natsuaki (2021), who argue that if schools provide an online SEL program with both flexible asynchronous and synchronous components, this flexibility and the online structure will make SEL training more easily accessible to students.

5. Recommendations for PE implementation

Based on our findings and a review of the literature, we suggest three recommendations for enhancing the implementation of PE in the UAE, and RAK in particular. Because PE is already being implemented in several emirates in the UAE, if it were to be rolled out country-wide, it would need to be better tailored to be culturally appropriate to the UAE's society. It would have to be a whole school endeavor and not just something in one subject, such as Moral Education.

First, the pandemic spotlighted human well-being and the need for connection, support, and meaning. The pandemic particularly impacted students as they abruptly shifted from learning in person with peers and teachers to remote instruction, which was often isolating and fatiguing. This highlighted the need for school-based support, like PE, that will promote student resiliency. However, PE cannot simply be about imparting knowledge, but must also generalize into applied behavior change and skill development. Moving forward, it will be important that PE efforts ensure they are not only teaching skills, but helping students apply those skills to deal with stressors as they occur. Additionally, all PE efforts should ensure they have a way of identifying students who may need additional mental health support that surpasses that addressed through PE.

Second, it is essential that a "whole school approach" to PE is embraced. This means that not only does PE focus on students but also on the adults that surround them, including teachers, school staff, and parents/families. Wrap-around PE that touches all these individuals is more likely to lead to the transmission of knowledge and support at home. As the pandemic revealed, when students are engaged in remote learning or otherwise not face-to-face at school, it is critical that parents/families can support youth who may be struggling. When students, teachers, and parents buy into PE, students will be better prepared to handle unforeseen stressful experiences and events at school and home.

Third, research on the uptake of new interventions or the ways systems change to accommodate new practices, also referred to as implementation science (Bauer & Kirchner, 2020), has consistently shown that new school programs are more sustainable and effective if particular factors of the system are taken into consideration when designing implementation plans (Bertram et al., 2015). These factors, which Bertram et al. (2015) refer to as "drivers of implementation," are vital pillars of any plan to implement a new program. Specifically, when implementing any new program, such as PE, schools should be concerned with leadership (both technical and adaptive strategies), training and coaching to improve competency, and organizational structure that supports the implementation of change (including systems for data-based decision-making) when planning implementation. Based on our findings, we suggest that schools (both public and private) in the UAE could use these drivers strategically to implement PE in sustainable and comprehensive ways. This would require government buy-in, dedicated school leadership and accountability, and resource allocation. It is critical to support full implementation in public schools with fewer resources, as research suggests that students with strong social-emotional skills can better deal with unpredictable, significant stressors, like the pandemic, when they present.

6. Study limitations & future directions

We acknowledge that there were several limitations to the current study. First, because of the pandemic, school closures, and travel restrictions, the original aims of the more extensive research study could not be fully accomplished. In particular, we were unable to recruit participants from schools with varying degrees of PE implementation fidelity (low, moderate, high) and from public and private schools. This prevented us from comparing our findings across these different implementations and school contexts. In the future, gathering data from these varying school contexts and a larger pool of participants will be important. Additionally, PE was only introduced in many schools in

the UAE and RAK shortly before the pandemic hit; this meant that schools, teachers, and students had limited exposure to the framework before disruptions to learning occurred. Moving forward, we would be interested to understand perceptions of PE and its impact on students after they have been exposed for longer. Language and translation barriers were another limitation; some education leaders were not fully fluent in either English or Arabic (the language of researchers), limiting understanding of research questions and answers, and at times recordings had unintelligible sections that could not be transcribed accurately.

7. Conclusion

In conclusion, this research study suggests that PE is overall well-received and believed to have the potential to promote student well-being and resilience, but the COVID-19 pandemic thwarted that implementation effort. This manifested in many ways, including interrupting a new initiative in many schools' very early stages of implementation. The move from in-person learning to virtual contexts inhibited educators' ability to understand how students were faring and led to PE implementation that was often perceived as less effective in the online format. However, the pandemic also highlighted the importance of promoting student coping skills and resiliency to navigate stressors and unexpected life events appropriately. The value of PE may not have been fully realized until students were called on to cope with significant stressors and difficulties associated with the pandemic. PE leaders would do well to leverage this unexpected outcome of the pandemic to build further buy-in and support for a comprehensive roll-out and integration of PE into private and public schools across the country. Indeed, we see signs that the UAE is already committed to these changes; as part of a more holistic strategy toward citizen wellness, the UAE became the first country in the world in 2022 to reduce the work and school week to four and a half days. The reason for this change has been to increase happiness and well-being and flexible working capabilities across the kingdom. In fact, schools have not had to make any changes to their curriculums. These new directions show that the kingdom is moving ahead with its wellness plan and that PE promises to become central to the integration of a kingdom-wide focus on wellness.

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Competing Interests

There are no competing interests.

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Notes

[1]Other approaches are character education; growth mindset; resilience and mental toughness; coaching and mentoring; mindfulness and other contemplative practices; well-being practices; restorative justice; school-wide positive behavior support (SWPBS) and positive behavior for learning (PBL); trauma-informed positive education (TIPE) (Slemp et al., 2017).

[2]While several international universities have branch campuses (the Paris-Sorbonne University; New York University, and the Rochester Institute of Technology Dubai) in the UAE, its central state-sponsored higher educational institutions, which are free to UAE citizens, are the United Arab Emirates (UAE) University, Zayed University, and Higher Colleges of Technology (HCT). Other private institutes include the Khalifa University of Science and Technology (KU), American Universities of Sharjah, American University of Dubai, Sharjah University, Ajman University, Abu Dhabi University, and Al Hosn University. In 1992, the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research (MOHESR) was established but in 2016 it was combined with the MOE.

[3]These include the Abu Dhabi Centre for Technical and Vocational Education and Training (ACTVET) and the Emirates National Schools.

[4]The reshuffling was aimed at preparing for the post-COVID-19 environment and saw the merging of several ministries, the reallocation of powers and responsibilities, and the transformation of 50% of government service centers into digital platforms.

[5]The other focus areas are innovation, tolerance and co-existence, youth, climate change, and future skills for youth.

[6]The program was supposed to cover three areas: (i) happiness was to be included in the policies, programs, and services of all government bodies and at work; (ii) happiness and well-being were supposed to be promoted as a community lifestyle; and (iii) happiness measures and benchmarks were to be developed (UAE, 2021).

[7]In 2019, the UAE adopted the National Strategy for Wellbeing (NSW) 2031 and connected it to the UAE Vision 2021 and the UAE Centennial 2071. NSW 2031, which has three primary levels – individuals, society, and the country - and 14 dimensions and nine strategic objectives, aims to “make the UAE a world leader in quality of life through a number of strategic objectives and initiatives” (Emirates News Agency, 2019, para. 2). NWS 2031 calls for “enhancing people’s wellbeing by promoting healthy and active lifestyles, promoting good mental health and adopting positive thinking” (Emirates News Agency, 2019, para. 4) that will be monitored through the “National Wellbeing

Observatory." The national well-being framework envisions three levels (a flourishing country, connected communities, and thriving citizens) across 14 dimensions.

[8]In 2017, KHDA partnered with the Government of South Australia and undertook its first-ever "Dubai Student Wellbeing Census" (DSWC) for all students in Grades 6 – 9 (Years 7 – 10). In 2018, the Census was extended to students in Grades 10, 11, and 12 (Years 11, 12, and 13).

[9]The Sheikh Saud bin Saqr Al Qasimi Foundation was instrumental in providing support for us to connect with individuals from within its network who were appropriate and interested in being interviewed. Potential participants will be emailed by the researchers and asked if they are interested in participating in the study.

[10]For this particular article we do not use any document analysis conducted.

[11]These included education policy experts, school administrators, NGO employees/leaders, or teachers with expertise in SEL/PE. These interviews took place at their place of employment (in a private room) or at the Al Qasimi Foundation offices (in a private room). Before the interview began, written consent was obtained, and all interviews were recorded.

[12]For educational leaders, our inclusion criteria were that they had to have: (i) worked in the UAE in the past 24 months; (ii) experience or knowledge related to education and/or SEL/PE in the UAE; (iii) been 18 or older; and (iv) speaks/understands English or Arabic.

[13]For teachers, the study inclusion criteria were that they had: (i) worked as a teacher in a K-12 school in the UAE at the time of study enrollment; (ii) some (even if limited) knowledge and experience implementing SEL/PE in the classroom; (iii) been 18 or older; and (iv) speaks/understands English or Arabic.

[14]For students, the inclusion criteria were that they were: (i) current students in attendance at one of the case studies schools; (ii) between the ages of 8 and 17 years old; (iii) comfortable speaking in groups and sharing opinions; (iv) has participated in at least two lessons/activities related to SEL/PE; and (v) speaks and understands English or Arabic.

[15]In public schools, PE is taught under the Moral Education Curriculum. It is important to note that although we did not have access to public schools, we had access to students who attended public schools in RAK.

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