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Implementation process of a manualised program: implications for research and practice

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Background

Socioemotional development strategies are an important way of empowering individuals to choose healthy behaviours. Scientific evidence shows that the earlier socioemotional learning/management issues are addressed, the better the outcomes.

Given the socioeconomic situation of the Azores - the region of Portugal with the highest poverty rates – as well as its archipelagic nature, the development of socioemotional skills is an important way to empower people and communities to choose healthy behaviors. In addition, these skills also serve as a lever to break the vicious cycle of poverty.

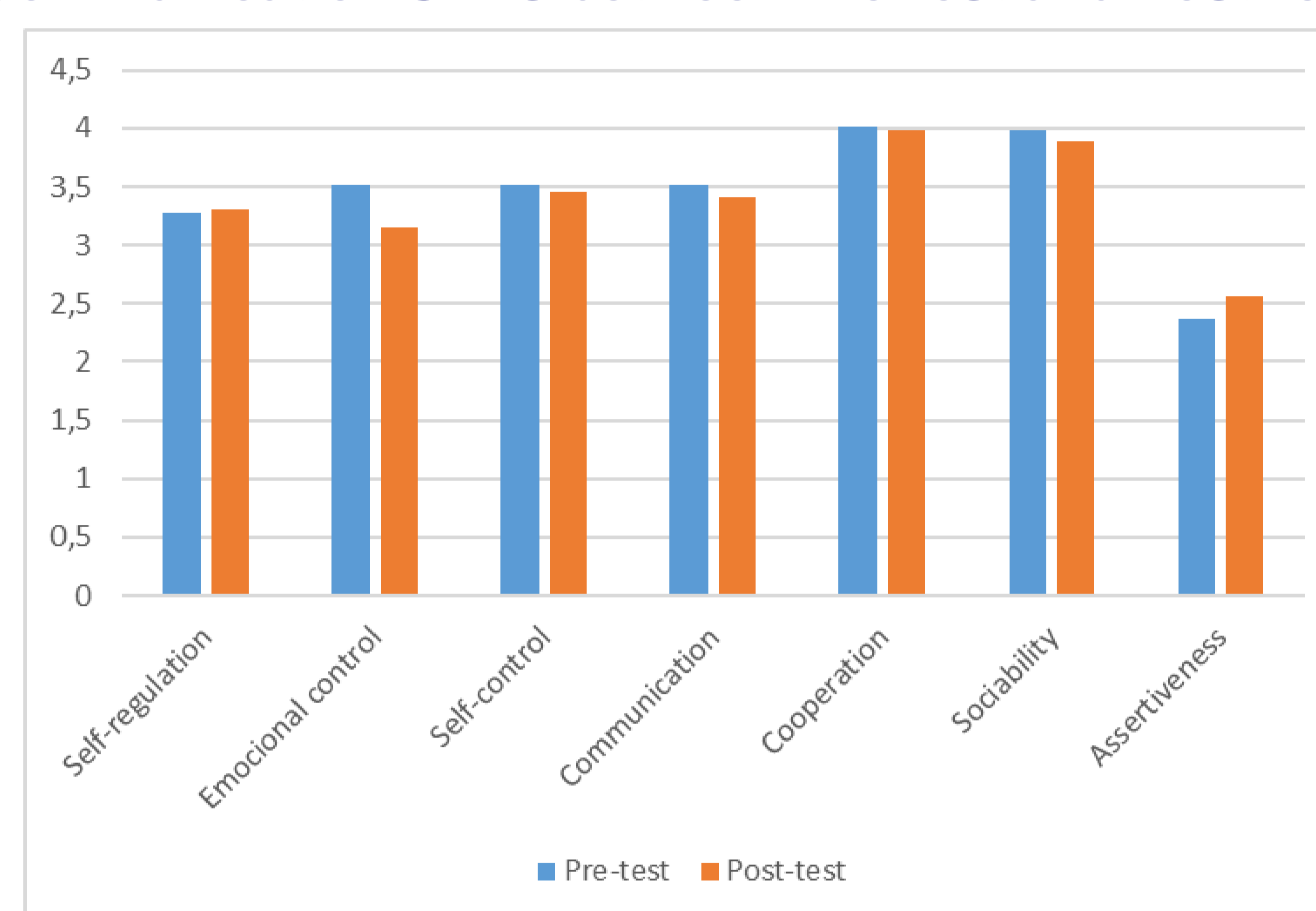
“Calmly – Learning to Learn your self” is based in the SEL Model (Social Emotional Learning) corresponds to a typology of programs that promote the integrated and interrelated development of cognitive, emotional and social skills, grouped into a structure of five major domains, namely: Self-knowledge, Self-management, Social Awareness; Interpersonal Relationships and Responsible Decision Making.

Methods

The program “Calmly– Learning to Learn Yourself” focuses on the development of children’s socio-emotional skills and positive relationships. Regarding its effectiveness, it has been listed in the Xchange prevention registry as “Further studies recommended”. Consequently, the program’s implementation is subject to evaluation and a monitoring system that ensures data collection to assess its effectiveness.

“Calmly” was implemented by adequately trained facilitators in primary schools (3rd-year classes), over the course of a school year, in Ponta Delgada, the largest municipality in the Azores and the one with the most socioeconomic vulnerabilities. The program involved 19 classes, covering 320 children, in a classroom setting, with the presence of each teacher. Data from pre- and post-test were analysed using IBM SPSS version 28 allowing to explore interactions between pre-post gains and group conditions.

Fig. 1 - Comparison of Children's Reports of Self-Regulation and Communication Skills between Pre-Test and Post-Test



Results

Although the data collected for the scientific evaluation by Maia University, is not yet available, we can present some preliminary results (Fig.1):

- The most significant improvements were observed in assertiveness;
- There was a slight decline in perceived communication, self control, cooperation and sociability’ skills;
- The other skills remained relatively stable, with no statistically significant changes;

Overall, the results suggest that, although some changes were significant, their intensity was limited (Coelho et al, 2025). These results are consistent with previous studies (Coelho, et al., 2023).

Despite having undergone adaptation and customization for the required age group, the adjustments to the territorial, social and linguistic context did not prove to be fully appropriate. Although the Azores are an integral part of Portuguese territory and share some characteristics, we believe there are unique aspects that must be taken into account, including the ultraperipheral context.

Discussion

This study provides preliminary evidence suggesting that the “Calmly – Learning to Learn Yourself” SEL program may be effective; however, the findings should be interpreted with caution, as they are based on only partial and initial results. Further analysis and research are required. Additionally, although “Calmly” was designed for a specific region and target audience, and adapted to different developmental stages, certain weaknesses were identified regarding contextual and linguistic specificities. It should also be noted that the intervention support materials could not be modified due to copyright and funding constraints. Furthermore, the high cost of these materials resulted in reduced access for the target group.

Nevertheless, the positive trends observed reinforce the importance of expanding universal interventions to promote social and emotional learning (SEL) in Portuguese schools by integrating SEL into curricula and everyday practices. This is in line with recent literature, which highlights the need for research into how SEL programs may produce varying benefits among different groups of children (Coelho et al., 2023; Osher et al., 2020; Simmons et al., 2018).

References

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No conflict of interest.