铺路石
Stepping Stones

2023
STEPPING STONES
IMPACT REPORT

IMPROVING THE EDUCATION AND GENERAL WELFARE OF

DISADVANTAGED CHILDREN IN CHINA

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Impact Report

Every year, we undertake impact evaluations to collect information about our programs and to assess the impacts produced by our online and offline interventions. In 2023, consistent with previous years' evaluations, 'pre-program' (or baseline) and 'post-program' (or follow-up) survey questionnaires were distributed to a sample of our beneficiaries. Survey questions assessed students' abilities, perceptions, knowledge, skills, and interests both before and after completing our programs. This was done to ensure comparisons could be made, and the impact of our English, Digital Literacy, and Social-emotional Learning programs could be evaluated in more depth.

English Programs

We have been running English teaching programs in China for more than 17 years, serving thousands of children every week. The main objectives of our English programs are to increase students' self-esteem, motivation, and confidence in English, and to better prepare students for their future. The purpose of this impact evaluation is to assess whether these objectives have been met and if there are areas for improvement.

Pre- and post-program survey questionnaires were distributed to a sample of 458 students. The questions in the surveys focused on the student's attitudes towards school, English and other key subjects, and the Stepping Stones program they engaged with. The data that is discussed in this section includes data collected in 2023 from our Home Classroom, Rural Videolink, Rural Individual Volunteering, and Shanghai English Teaching programs.

1

Impacting students' attitudes towards English

To assess whether our objectives of increasing students' motivation and self-esteem in English were met, students were asked their opinions on not only English but other core subjects, as well as their opinions on school more broadly. The students were asked whether they liked English, Chinese, and Maths and whether they thought these subjects were difficult. They were asked to rank their views on a 4-point Likert scale with response choices ranging from 'disliking' to 'liking very much', or from 'difficult' to 'very easy'. Such questions were asked so that changes in students' attitudes towards English throughout the program could be compared with other subjects that did not receive our interventions.

The results show that the greatest improvement in attitudes was towards English in comparison to the other core subjects (see Figure below), which is consistent with the findings from previous years. There was a 2.82% increase in the number of children who expressed a liking for English (from 82.7% to 85.5%) and a 5.51% increase in children who found English easy (from 67.5% to 71.3%). As English is where our interventions are focused, it can be suggested that our programs have a positive impact on students' attitudes toward English. Such positive attitudes can be translated to an increased motivation to work hard, which results in better English attainment and thus improving prospects.

Changes in students' attitudes towards English and other subjects
Pre- and post-program comparison

Stepping Stones' English Teaching Program, 2023 (n = 458)
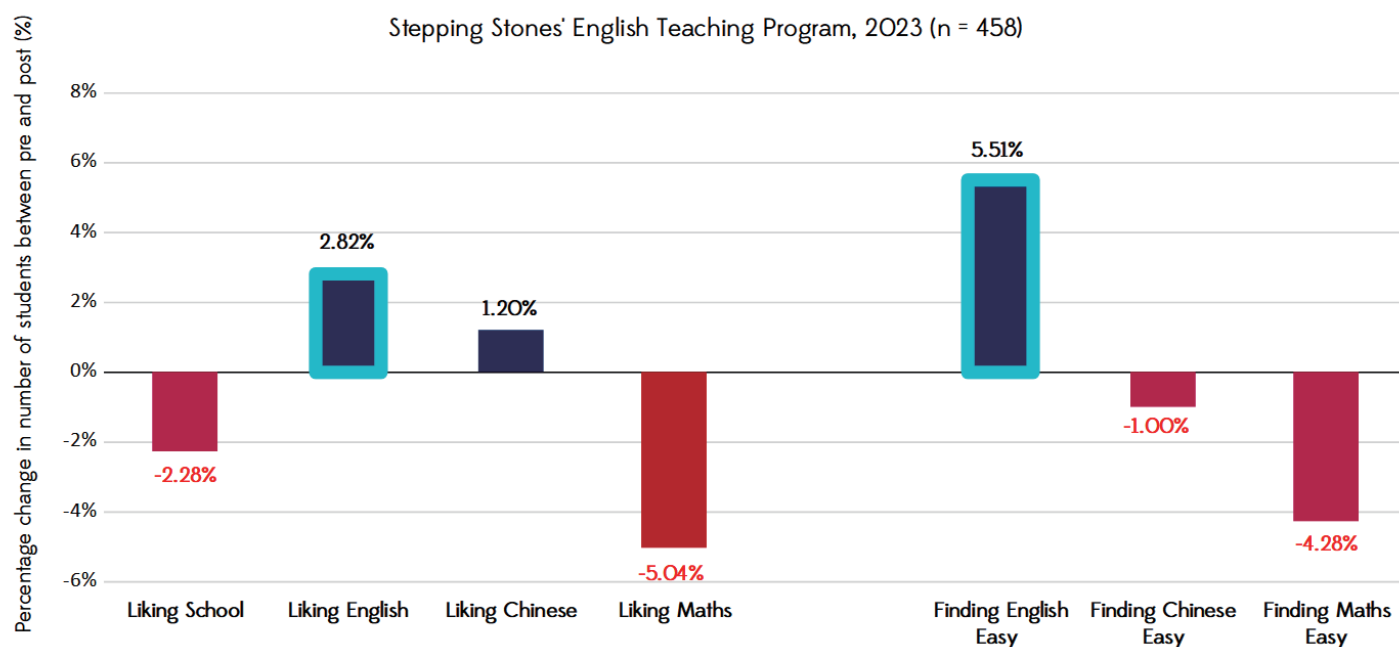
It is interesting to note the significant percentage increase in students finding English easy compared to their other subjects. For English, this percentage increase was 5.51% compared to a decrease in both Chinese (-1.00%) and Maths (-4.28%). This data is encouraging as it shows that more students have an increased positive attitude towards English after our interventions.

Another observation worth mentioning is the percentage decrease of students liking school (-2.28%) and Maths (-5.04%), in comparison to English. This data suggests that while interventions led to improvements in attitudes, subjects that do not receive the same support can lead to a decrease in attitudes. Our students may benefit from extra intervention in Maths or other subjects in the same way that they have benefited in English from our programs.
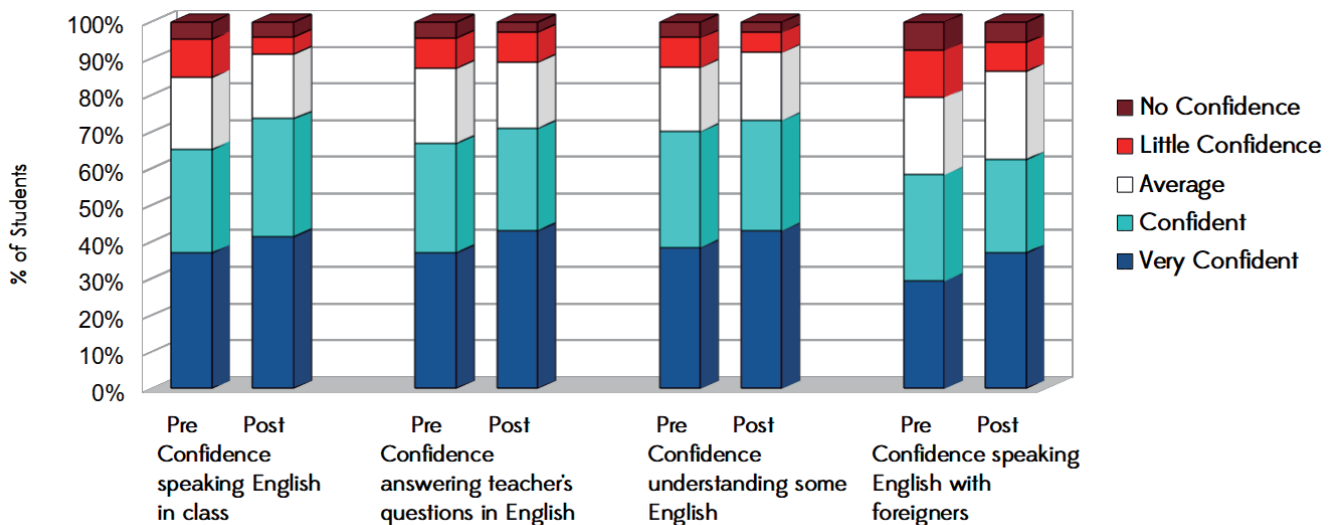
② Increasing students' confidence in English

Another of our key objectives is to improve students' confidence and motivation in English. To assess whether this objective was met, the baseline and follow-up surveys included questions that asked students about their confidence levels in speaking and understanding English. Students were asked to rank their responses from 'not confident' to 'very confident'. The figure below indicates a significant rise in the number of students feeling 'confident' speaking English in class (12.59% increase, from 65.33% to 73.56%), answering teacher's questions in English (5.95% increase, from 66.97% to 70.90%), understanding some English (4.33%, from 70.12% to 73.16%), and speaking English with foreigners (7.30% increase, from 58.30% to 62.54%). These percentage increases suggest that our interventions succeeded in making students more prepared and confident to engage in English-speaking situations. They are subsequently more inclined to exert effort in learning English, which can arguably be translated into greater English proficiency.

Students' confidence to speak and understand English
Pre- and post-program comparison

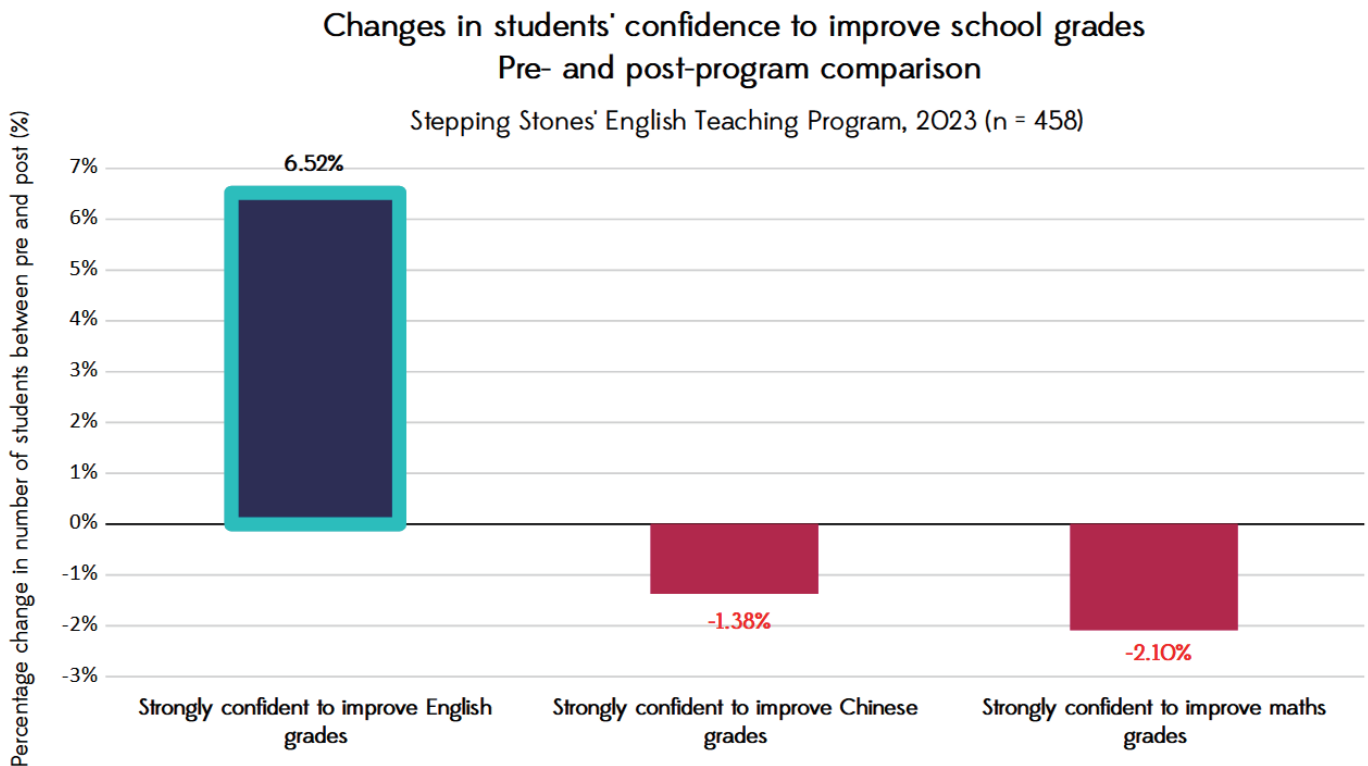Stepping Stones' English Teaching Program, 2023 (n = 450)

3

Building students' confidence to improve test scores

While our lessons are designed to motivate students and enhance their interest and confidence in English, one of our underlying objectives is to better prepare them for their key English examinations.

As can be seen from the Figure below, the percentage of students feeling 'very confident' to improve their English grades increased by 6.52% (from 41.25% to 43.95%), while there was a percentage decrease for Maths (-1.38%), and Chinese (-2.10%). The data yet again highlights the impact that our English programs have on improving students' prospects. This can be interpreted to suggest that when further support is provided for students, this results in improved confidence in their skills and abilities to achieve success in school. Good grades in English are important for students in China, as this will help open doors for their futures, such as through access to higher education.

Changes in students' confidence to improve school grades
Pre- and post-program comparison

Stepping Stones' English Teaching Program, 2023 (n = 458)

Digital Literacy

The key objective of our Digital Literacy Program is to help students develop essential skills and concepts of digital literacy. Our classes are also designed to unleash creativity, encourage communication, develop critical thinking, increase student's confidence and self-esteem, and help them look toward their future with excitement. To assess the value and impact of our program in 2023, evaluations were conducted at many offline and online program sites, distributing 'pre-program' (or baseline) and 'post-program' (or follow-up) survey questionnaires to 133 beneficiaries.

One of the ways that we strive to help students become more proficient and confident in computers and technology is through project-based, coding, programming, and hardware design activities. To assess the impact of these activities, students were asked four questions about their confidence levels in skills related to these activities and asked to rank their responses from 'not confident' to 'very confident'. The figure below compares the baseline and follow-up results of these questions. When compared to the program evaluations from previous years, the results of the 2023 evaluation are even more impressive. They indicate a significant and steep rise in the number of students feeling 'confident' to find information on the internet (275.86% increase, from 21.80% to 81.95%), do graphical programming (183.87% increase, from 23.31% to 66.16%), do hardware gizmos (175% increase, from 23.53% to 64.71%), and share scientific knowledge with their friends or classmates (97.37% increase, from 29.23% to 57.70%).

Students' confidence in computers, programming, and hardware
Pre- and post-program comparison

Stepping Stones' Digital Literacy Program, 2023 (n = 133)
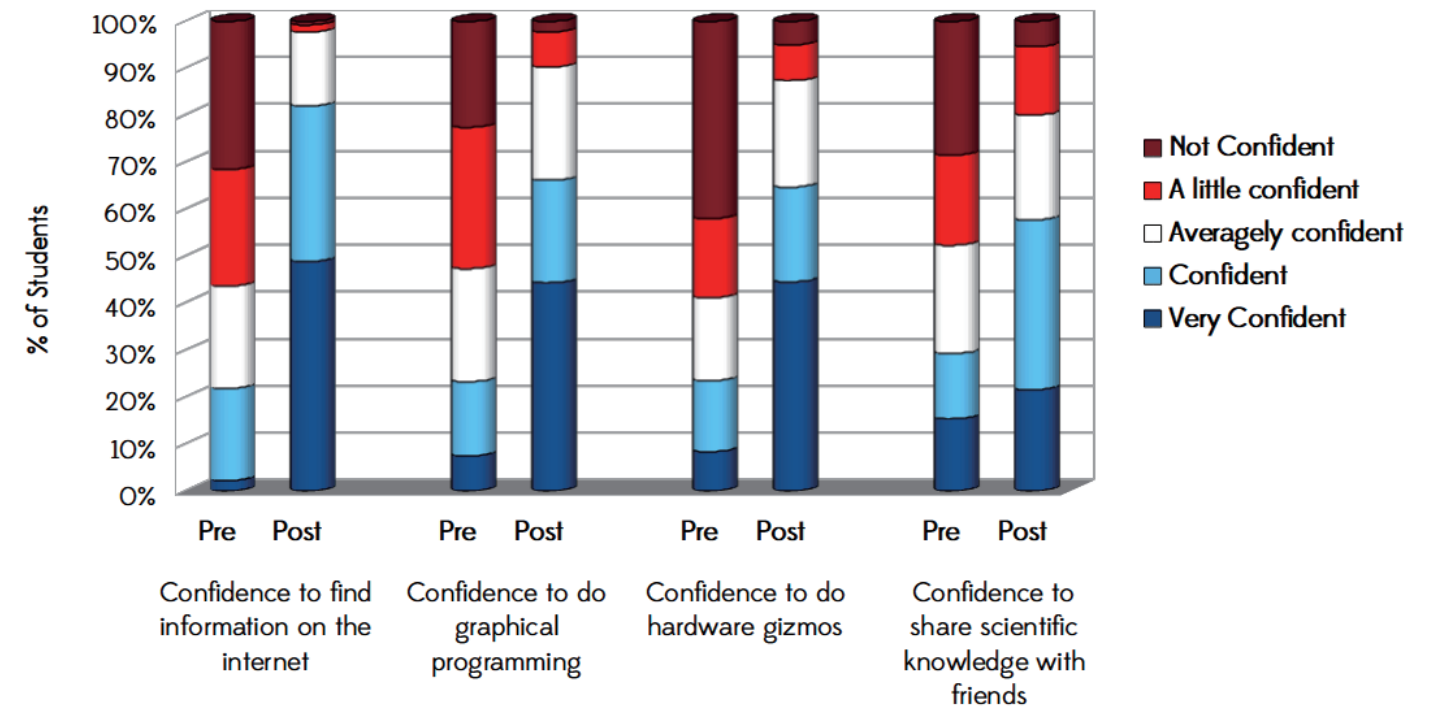
Students were also asked if they like using computers and if they think studying computers will be beneficial in their future endeavours. The data shows increases between the baseline and the follow-up surveys. Across the programs, the percentage of students liking using computers rose by 5.32% (from 78% to 82.5%) and, as can be seen from the Figure below, the percentage of students thinking that studying computers will benefit them in the future rose by 95.24% (from 35% to 68.33%).

Do you think studying computer will benefit you in the future? Pre- and post-program comparison

Stepping Stones' Digital Literacy Program, 2023 (n = 120)
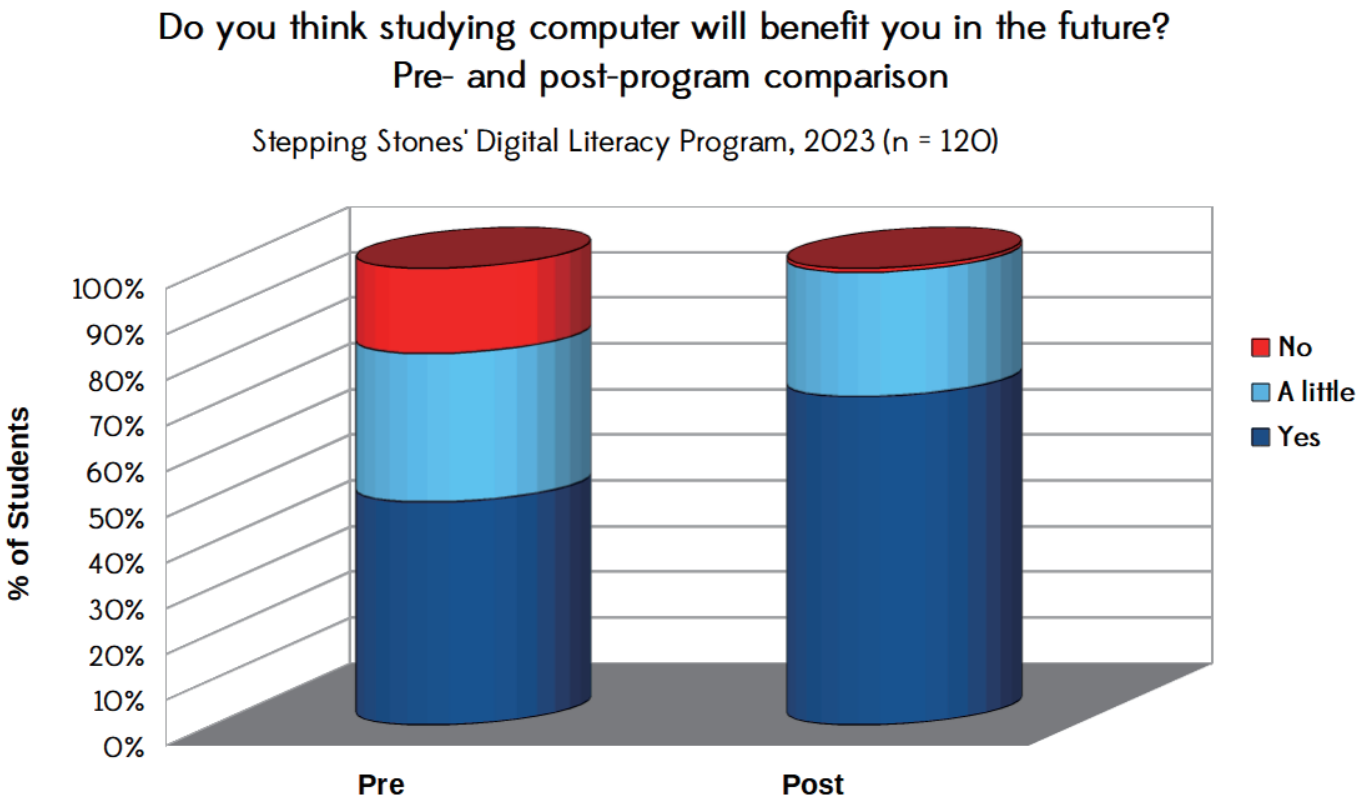
These results are extremely encouraging as they show that more students have more confidence and interest in technology and computer systems and knowledge after our interventions. Students can use the knowledge that they have gained through our classes to further explore prospects that involve computers, programming, and the use of hardware.
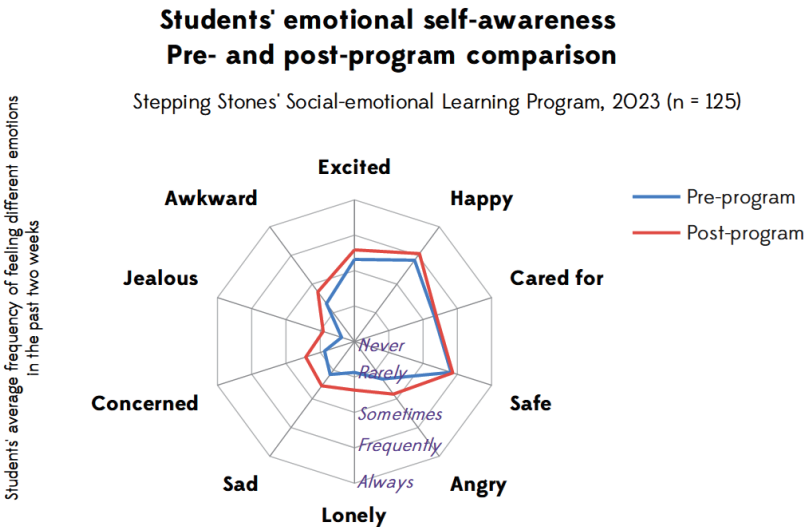
Social-emotional Learning

Through our Social-emotional Learning Program (SEL), we aim to cultivate children's key emotional skills such as self-management, self-awareness, and social-awareness, thereby improving their self-esteem, confidence, resilience, and relationship skills, and enhancing their motivation to learn.

As our SEL program expanded sharply in 2023, evaluations through pre- and post-survey questionnaires were conducted to assess the impact of the program on students' emotional well-being. A sample of 125 students took part in the survey.

1

Growing emotional self-awareness

During the SEL course, our teachers and volunteers conducted many activities focused on developing children's ability to recognise, identify, and express their emotions, whether positive or negative. Particular attention was given to the most negative emotions as many children mistakenly learn that they should avoid, hide, or withhold those emotions. The activities were designed to foster a safe space for expression, where vulnerability was respected. To assess whether our objective of helping students to be emotionally aware of all their different emotions was met, they were asked before and after the program to rank the frequency of experiencing different positive and negative emotions over the past two weeks. They were asked to rank on a 5-point Likert scale with response choices ranging from 'never' to 'always'.

As can be seen from the figure below, there is a significant increase in the frequency of "negative" emotions (angry, lonely, sad, concerned, jealous, and awkward) that were reported to be felt by students after the program. By comparison, the frequencies of positive emotions (excited, happy, cared for, and safe) felt by students have remained relatively steady across the pre- and post-surveys. This data suggests that the program has helped children become more aware of their most negative emotions, which are usually the ones they struggle the most to express, acknowledge, and understand. Enabling them to recognise and label accurately those negative emotions is an essential prerequisite to fostering their emotional self-regulation and directly aligns with the program's objectives.

Students' emotional self-awareness
Pre- and post-program comparison

Stepping Stones' Social-emotional Learning Program, 2023 (n = 125)

Students were also asked to evaluate their ability to understand their own emotions and those of people around them. The figure below indicates a rise in the number of students rating 'high' or 'very high' their ability to understand both their own emotions (6.60% increase, from 84.13% to 89.68%) and other people's emotions (29.63% increase, from 43.12% to 56%). These results yet again highlight the impact that our SEL programs have on improving students' emotional awareness. When children can better identify their feelings, they are subsequently more inclined to express their negative emotions in healthy ways other than having emotional meltdowns, shutdowns, or disruptive behaviour.

Students' self-assessment of their ability to understand emotions
Pre- and post-program comparison

Stepping Stones' Social-emotional Learning Program, 2023 (n = 125)
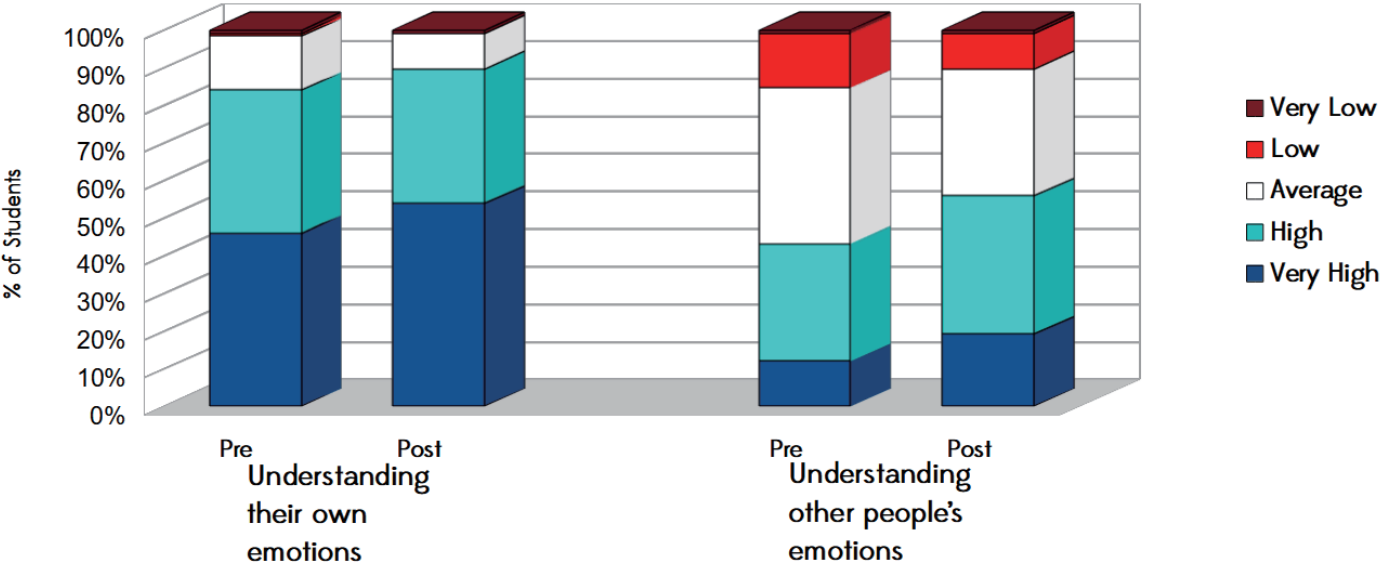
② Enhancing emotional self-management

In addition to helping children better understand their emotions, a key objective of our SEL program is to improve their ability to effectively regulate stress and emotions and appropriately express strong feelings, whether alone or with others.

In the pre- and post-surveys, many questions were asked to examine the extent to which students are able to manage their emotions and handle difficult situations. They were asked to rank the frequency of being able to cope with different emotional situations over the past two weeks.

As can be seen from the figure below, there is an increase in the frequency of student's ability to handle all the different situations after the program, especially regarding expressing emotions through language, complimenting others' accomplishments, and respecting others' opinions even if in disagreement. The smallest increase was reported in the ability to pull themselves out of a bad mood, which includes strong, negative, and disruptive emotions like frustration, anger, and embarrassment.

While these results suggest that our interventions succeeded in making students more able to manage emotions, they also imply that children would greatly benefit from additional support in helping them self-regulate negative emotions. In fact, among the wide range of social-emotional skills, the ability to regulate one's reactions to negative emotions and impulses is arguably the most difficult to master, especially for children as it requires time and practice to develop. Consequently, more activities and advanced courses in emotional self-regulation will be added to our curriculum and offered to next years' students.

Students' emotional self-management
Pre- and post-program comparison

Stepping Stones' Social-emotional Learning Program, 2023 (n = 125)
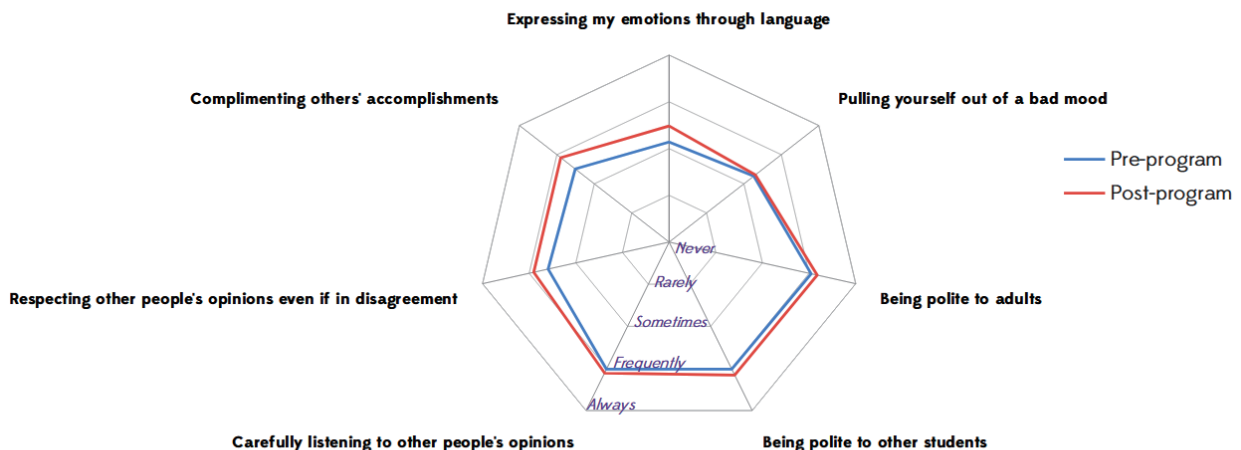
Students' average frequency in the past two weeks (self-assessment)

We are extremely encouraged by the results of the 2023 impact evaluation. Not only do they show that after our interventions more students are skilled, confident, and interested in English, computer systems, and technology, but also that they are more able to understand and manage their own emotions. In many ways, the results are consistent with previous years' evaluations, which suggest that our interventions continued to have a positive impact on our beneficiaries and contributed to our mission of improving education for disadvantaged communities in China.

Our Mission

To improve the education and general welfare of disadvantaged children in China.

Our Vision

Equal access to a quality education and general welfare for all children in China.

Our Program Objectives

- To increase students' confidence and self-esteem.
- To optimise students' access to better quality education and work opportunities in the future.
- To connect communities to promote inter-cultural understanding.
- To promote responsible and high impact volunteering.

Our Values

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