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The Impact of Social Emotional Learning in an Elementary Classroom

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The Impact of Social Emotional Learning in an Elementary Classroom

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An Action Research Project Presented
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
For the Degree of Master of Education

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Table of Contents

Abstract	3
Introduction	4
Literature Review	6
The History of Social-Emotional Learning	6
The Basis of Social-Emotional Learning	7
Findings from Past Studies on Social-Emotional Learning	9
Social-Emotional Assessment Resources	11
The Importance of Social-Emotional Learning	12
Implementation of Social-Emotional Learning	14
Methodology	16
Variables	16
Research Site, Participants and Design	16
Measurements Instruments	18
Data Collection	20
Findings	21
Data Analysis	21
Qualitative Data Analysis	21
Quantitative Data Analysis	22
Discussion	24
Future Research	24
Conclusion	26
References	27

Abstract

Social emotional learning is a growing topic in education due to the increase in mental health and behavioral disorders in children and youth (Blewitt et.al., 2021). Taking into consideration students' emotional needs is an important aspect that helps to support students' overall performance at school. This action research study conducted with first grade students not only supported students in their social and emotional needs but in their reading and mathematical skills as well. The researcher used the chosen curriculum to help students to learn about self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision making. The findings of this action research support the literature reviewed that teaching and implementing social emotional learning does impact students overall behavior and academics. The data shows that students of all backgrounds and different abilities are positively impacted by implementing social emotional learning into the classroom. However, the degree to which students are impacted vary from student to student. The findings suggest that most students show progress in improving their academic performance and behavior.

Keywords: social emotional learning, impact, self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, decision making

Social Emotional Learning

Social and emotional learning (SEL) is the process in which people acquire and apply the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary in order to understand and manage their emotions as well as set and achieve positive goals, show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships with others (CASEL, 2021). In 1994 a group of educators, researchers, and child activists met and developed ideas to assist children in becoming positive citizens. These ideas came to be known as social and emotional learning. With the support of the leading organization for social and emotional learning, called the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL), SEL supports academic, social, and emotional learning for all children preschool through high school. SEL is a crucial part of education that is backed by evidence-based research that can transform educational practices. The implementation of Social Emotional Learning within a school district has the ability to positively impact students, teachers, and the community. Social-emotional learning (SEL) and trauma-informed practices should become foundational in our education system. Educators see that many of their students are affected by adverse childhood experiences (ACEs). It is essential that we instill positive childhood experiences that can counteract some of the resulting trauma. Social- emotional learning has the power to create these positive experiences (Sprenger, 2020).

Social emotional learning is known to lead to better academic outcomes and helps with improving student behaviors. The impact of social emotional learning is long-term and even something students will bring with them into the world. It also helps to reduce poverty and improve economic mobility while students' lifetime outcomes are greatly improved by what they learn throughout the use of social emotional learning in their classrooms (CASEL, 2021). Social emotional learning starts a positive learning environment for all students. It includes instruction

and practice of the ideas being taught. Social emotional learning but be implemented with fidelity as well as sequential using the systems in place. Lastly, it offers behavioral support and ongoing mentoring and evaluation for teachers (CASEL, 2021).

Literature Review

The History of Social-Emotional Learning

Beginning in the late 1980s, researchers began sharing the importance of teacher participation in teaching to the issues within society. In 1994 a group of educators, researchers, and child activists met and developed ideas to assist children in becoming positive citizens. These ideas came to be known as social and emotional learning. With the support of the leading organization for social and emotional learning, called the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL), social emotional learning supports academic, social, and emotional learning for all children preschool through high school. Social emotional learning is a crucial part of education that is backed by evidence-based research that can transform educational practices. It is the process of developing a student's social competencies including the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and behaviors the students need in order to make successful choices (Yoder, 2014). The implementation of Social Emotional Learning within a school district has the ability to positively impact students, teachers, and the community. Social emotional learning promotes the development of a child's ability to recognize and manage emotions, build relationships, solve interpersonal problems, and make effective decisions (Yoder, 2014). Social emotional learning and trauma-informed practices should become foundational in our education system. Educators see that many of their students are affected by adverse childhood experiences (ACEs). It is essential that educators instill positive childhood experiences that can counteract some of the resulting trauma. Social emotional learning has the power to create these positive experiences (Sprenger, 2020).

As school and teachers' knowledge on social emotional learning has grown, more and more schools have begun adopting and utilizing these plans into their classrooms. Schools strive

to develop cardinal virtues in their students which provide a standard of good character (Berkowitz & Bier, 2005). This growth in such education is due to decades of research that indicates that high-quality social-emotional learning helps to improve students' academic performance, mental health, and overall behaviors and character (Bailey et al., 2019). As research and school policies advance, social-emotional learning must advance alongside it. Many schools have found that following a curriculum in instructing social-emotional learning is helpful, other schools are wanting to get on board as well but do not have the resources or funds to do so. Some schools today are creating their own curriculum in order to provide these social-emotional practices to help support students in this area (Bailey et al., 2019).

The Basis of Social-Emotional Learning

Social emotional learning is a growing topic in education. Due to the increase in mental health and behavioral disorders in children and youth (Blewitt et al., 2021), SEL is becoming more necessary in classrooms today. Teachers have made a deliberate effort to cultivate virtues in students' cognitively, emotionally and behaviorally by teaching core values and creating a caring community (Berkowitz & Bier, 2005). The use of SEL supports educators while fostering an interest in learning in students. After determining the need for SEL, teachers are able to determine the best fit program for their students and classroom in order to ensure they are meeting their individual needs. Providing an environment in which students feel successful and encouraged will ultimately help students to reach their full potential and prepare them academically, socially, and emotionally for success beyond the classroom.

Recent findings from studies around stress response have shown that environmental factors such as stress, trauma, and poverty have an effect on brain development and children's capacity to learn and build relationships (Bailey et al, 2019). Further, these can influence

children's ability to focus, recall information learned, self-control, and other factors surrounding needed life-long learning and behaviors. As more teachers, administrators, and school personnel understand more about these findings, they begin to pursue new approaches to support their students in their social and emotional development. As more schools begin to grow in their understanding around the topic, so does the number of schools investing in meaningful social-emotional learning programs (Bailey et al, 2019).

Teachers have responded to this rise by implementing social emotional learning in their classrooms as an effort to support students in their social and academic needs. High-quality SEL programs are shown to help improve students' academic, mental health, and behavioral outcomes. It also aids in supporting the classroom climate and teacher practices (Bailey et al., 2019, p. 53). Emotional success has been found to hold a crucial role in successes centered around social environment and work. Through a student's self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationships, decision-making, and the skills taught with SEL, they are able to develop emotional success (Lubit et al., 2019). The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) determined these skills to be five sets of cognitive, affective, and behavioral competencies that make up SEL (Dusenbury & Weissberg, 2017).

Social emotional learning is focused around strategies for teachers to implement as they see fit in their classroom, all with which are considered to be developmental, flexible, and responsive. In the early years, kindergarten to second grades, students learn about brain power to help students learn to self-regulate and adjust to classroom settings. As children grow, they begin to learn about self-control, empathy, perspective, conflict resolution, and building healthy relationships. School-based programs that are designed to promote student social and emotional development at the elementary school level are proven to be effective at promoting academic

achievement, reducing conduct problems, improving prosocial behavior, and reducing emotional distress (Dusenbury & Weissberg, 2017). When considering an appropriate SEL program, schools are able to utilize the CASEL guidelines to determine if the program meets their needs. These guidelines include determining if they meet target areas of competence, gives opportunities for practice, has a multi-year timeline, offers training as well as supports, provides an evaluation study, and has been shown to have a positive impact on students (Lawson et al., 2019).

When students are encouraged and view themselves as doing well, their self-esteem is increased making them more motivated to learn. Students are able to maintain more of an interest in school when they are motivated and are able to connect their learning to goals. SEL programs support self-esteem and development of a growth mindset, giving students the ability to develop skills necessary to handle difficult situations with social and emotional interactions (Lubit et al., 2019). By implementing universal social and emotional learning (SEL) programs in school settings, it fosters effective, cognitive, and behavioral skills among all children (Lawson et al., 2019).

Findings from Past Studies on Social-Emotional Learning

In a meta-analysis of 213 school-based, social and emotional learning programs in which there were 270,034 kindergarten through high school students, it was found that there was a significant improvement in students' social and academic performance, showing the positive impact SEL programs have on students. The study explored the effects of universal SEL programs and interventions on students' social and emotional skills, their attitudes toward themselves as well as others, social behavior, emotional distress, and their overall academic performance. Throughout the study, the goal was to discover answers to; What outcomes are

achieved by interventions that attempt to enhance children's emotional and social skills? Can SEL interventions promote positive outcomes and prevent future problems? Can programs be successfully conducted in the school setting by existing school personnel? What variables moderate the impact of school-based SEL programs? The study proved that schools should be utilizing effective SEL programs that include professional development around the program as well as proper implementation. Without this, students are less likely to see significant improvements in their social and emotional learning in addition to their academics (Durlak et al., 2011).

Over the past two decades, there has been dramatic growth in understanding children's outcomes in social-emotional learning as well as academics. In a study conducted surrounding child development based on social-emotional and literacy intervention, they utilized the 4Rs Program (Reading, Writing, Respect, and Resolution). Within this program, kindergarten through fifth grade students focused on social-emotional learning and literacy development. The program was characterized as a developmental intervention whose goal was to change the underlying processes in children that resulted in unwanted behaviors. The questions addressed in this study include; What is the experimental impact of the 4Rs Program on 2-year change in third grade children's social-cognitive processes, social emotional symptomatology, aggressive and socially competent behavior, and academic functioning, controlling for key demographic covariates? Building on recent findings demonstrating significantly stronger intervention impacts for families facing more versus fewer poverty-related risks, is the 2-year impact of the 4Rs Program moderated by child-level demographic baseline covariates including child gender, race/ethnic background, family socioeconomic risk, and community risk? Finally, building on evidence from the 1st year of our 4Rs evaluation and other experimental evaluations of universal

school-based prevention programs, is the 2-year impact of the 4Rs Program moderated by children's baseline behavioral risk? The teachers within these schools reported a slower growth in student's aggressive behavior (compared to the control group of schools) but an increase in social competence. They also reported a decline in depression and ADHD symptoms present in their students (Jones et al., 2011).

Social-Emotional Assessment Resources

Research has helped to shape the vision for schools to focus on the whole child through the use of social emotional learning. Children are able to gain the most in school when they are learning how to process emotions as well as interact appropriately in social situations (Herrenkohl et al., 2020). Different social-emotional learning programs demonstrated their ability to increase academic performance and overall competencies while decreasing internalizing and externalizing problem behaviors (White et al., 2018). In one study shared, preschool educators were asked to develop an SEL program after being provided with evidence-based resources. Teachers participated in professional development over several of the resources prior to being asked to put them to use in their classrooms. Prior to starting a program, students were assessed in order to measure their emotional awareness, self-regulation, and problem solving, in a quiet, one-on-one area. Students were also observed in the classroom setting in the remaining SEL skills. The teachers utilized a variety of resources when planning, implementing, and assessing their students (White et al., 2018).

The study of Instructional and Rehearsal Procedures of Preschool Social Emotional Learning by White, shared the different ways they assessed their students in order to monitor their growth in different areas. One assessment was the day/night stroop, in which the test measured students' emotional self-regulation. In this assessment students were shown day and

night cards and were asked to say the opposite time of the day, measuring their executive functioning skills. Another assessment, the truck planning task, addressed students problem solving skills. This measured students' skills of planning while using a toy delivery truck and making deliveries. Students were given very specific instructions prior to getting started and students are able to progress through the assessment as they successfully complete one area. Another assessment, the dimension change card sort (DCCS) was used to assess student behavioral self-regulation. This measured students' skills of listening, concentration, and following directions. Lastly, the affect knowledge test (AKT) was used to measure students' emotional awareness by identifying feelings that match different facial expressions (White et al., 2018).

Overall, the assessments, both pre and post, were found to be successful indicators as to how the students were about to utilize emotional awareness, self-regulation, and problem solving skills. Through the use of the variety of assessments, teachers were able to clearly identify the needs of each student as well as their class as a whole in order to best plan a curriculum fitting for their group. However, the overall outcome of the study was inconclusive as it was determined that additional time was needed in order to say whether or not teachers could successfully develop a SEL program (White et al., 2018).

The Importance of Social-Emotional Learning

For students who are considered to be at-risk, one of the major factors in their early development of behaviors is that they attend a school that has a high number of students with behavioral issues. Therefore, the classroom environment is full of behaviors that the teacher must manage (Bierman et al., 2010). In order to best prepare teachers for classroom management, and the implementation of social emotional learning, it should begin during their teacher education

program. It has been found that social emotional learning competencies can be infused successfully during undergraduate courses in order to and teachers view this topic as important (Waajid et al., 2013).

Social emotional competencies do not only prepare students for participating in learning experiences, but they also increase students' overall capacity to learn (Durlak et al., 2011). Development of students' social emotional skills is vital for school success as well as their successes outside of school, such as at home or in their community. Students' learning is enhanced when social emotional learning is integrated with their academic learning (Elias, 2004). Having these skills is directly linked to students' overall outcome in academics, relationships, as well as their wellbeing. Social emotional learning provides the necessary skills for positive outcomes throughout a lifetime due to the relationships skills being developed and the ability to become more self-aware. Without these skills, students are at risk for physical and mental health issues, relational issues, criminal concerns, among others. Social emotional learning programs have intense societal implications, hence the dire need for these programs to be implemented into classrooms (White & Walker, 2018). It has been found that students who are involved in social emotional learning programs demonstrate an increase in academic achievement, increase social emotional skills, better attitudes towards themselves and others, improved social behaviors, as well as an overall decrease in problematic behaviors and emotional distress (Durlak et al., 2011).

Addressing the social emotional side of students not only helps to improve students' achievement, but also enhances their experiences at school and overall learning environment. With all of the changes in the world, it has become clear that teachers must address how to navigate emotions and solve problems that may arise throughout students' school days or into

their lives outside of school. Therefore, implementing a program that focuses on students' social and emotional skills is necessary. Just as important is properly training teachers in these areas so they are able to follow a program with fidelity and achieve quality results from their instruction (Martinez, 2016).

Through the implementation of social emotional learning, students are able to acquire a number of skills that aid in understanding and managing emotions, achievement of positive goals, to be able to feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, as well as make responsible decisions (DePaoli et al., 2018). Students learn to get along with others as well as how to work with others that may be different from themselves. They become confident in themselves and understand their own emotions and why they may feel different emotions. Students also learn to understand others' feelings along with their point of view. Additionally, students learn to solve problems in a positive manner while also learning to deal with stressful situations or other difficult situations in life (DePaoli et al., 2018). The skills taught through social emotional learning are also known as life skills which can be defined as critical thinking, coping with stress, regulation of emotions, effectively communicating and self-awareness (Arslan & Demirtas, 2016). All of these skills are necessary for students now and later in life. Helping students to develop good social and emotional skills early in life can make a significant difference in their long-term self (Lantieri & Nambiar, 2012).

Implementation of Social-Emotional Learning

Social emotional learning skills are essential and a foundation for children's positive behavior in school (Jones et al., 2014). The Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL) has found three strategies to be beneficial when teaching social emotional learning in the classroom. Direct instruction is the first area identified. Students need to be taught

these skills through whole group or small group lessons in which the skills are modeled for them and they have the opportunity to practice these skills. Another area identified is social emotional learning skills being integrated with academic content as well as being infused within teaching practices. Students tend to benefit at higher levels when the social emotional learning programs are intensive and integrated. Students need the opportunity for these skills to be a part of their daily interactions with their peers and within their culture at school. Practicing social emotional skills should not only happen in the classroom but in other areas around the school such as the cafeteria, playground, and hallways. These skills should extend beyond the school into their homes and communities as well (Martinez, 2016).

Second Step, a violence prevention program, has been utilized in schools to aid in addressing the social and emotional skills of children and youth in grades pre-kindergarten up until middle school. The program seeks to enhance the social environment for children by providing students with social emotional skills (Cooke et al, 2007). In a study determining the effects of implementation of Second Step, it was found that many students showed positive changes in their overall behavior and confidence in how to handle situations. It was also found that there were fewer aggressive behaviors over time, which is the premises of Second Step (Cooke et al, 2007). The implementation of this program was found to be successful in using the broad based approach of Second Steps. The community, parents, and all members of the school staff supported the implementation of this program (Cooke et al, 2007).

Research has identified recommended practices if creating an SEL program. An effective social emotional learning program is reflected using the acronym SAFE: sequenced, active, focused, and explicit (Payton et.al., 2008). Sequence simply focuses on the order in which material is taught to the students. The program should be connected and coordinated in order to

achieve the desired outcome. Active refers to active learning in which instruction, rehearsal and feedback are all components. A program needs to be focused on developing personal and social skills as well as targeting specific social emotional learning skills (White et al., 2017). When social emotional learning programs utilize all of these SAFE practices, it is more likely to impact students' social emotional development such as their self-perception, sense of belonging, positive social behaviors, and overall academic success (Underwood, 2020).

Methodology

Research Questions

1. What impact does social emotional learning have on academic success?
2. What effects does social emotional learning have on students' behaviors?

Variables

The independent variables within this study are the interventions provided to students in order to teach them social emotional skills. The intervention needed changes depending on the students individual needs and areas they need more focus on. This looked differently depending on the student, however, interventions may include one on one counseling on a specific skill shown as a discrepant for the student, group interventions learning a variety of social emotional skills needed in the classroom, or reteaching of already learned skills. These interventions were provided by the researcher and the school counselor depending on the needs of the student. The dependent variable in this study are the students' academic success and behaviors that are a result of their understanding and practice with social emotional learning.

Research Site

This action research project was conducted within the researchers first grade classroom in the Adel Desoto Minburn school district. Adel DeSoto Minburn is the combination of three growing towns. Our district is located in Central Iowa approximately 20 minutes west of Des Moines. ADM has 5 buildings placed throughout the community. Adel Elementary is located in Adel and houses PK-1 grade multiple section classrooms. Meadow View Elementary is located in Adel and houses 2-4 grade multiple section classrooms. DeSoto Intermediate is located in DeSoto and houses 5-6 grade multiple section classrooms. The Middle School is located in Adel

and houses 7-8 multiple section classrooms. The High School is located in Adel and houses 9-12 multiple section classrooms.

The elementary in which the study was conducted, Adel Elementary, has approximately 400 students in grades preschool through first grade. The class sizes are typically 19-21 students per classroom. For the 2021-22 school year there are 194 first grade students, with 19 of those students in the researchers classroom.

Research Participants

The participants in the study include 10 first grade students in one classroom. Three female and seven male students were selected that the researcher felt best represents the diverse range of achievements within the classroom. Students were selected so that students who are high achieving, those who have learning difficulties, and students with behavior issues are all represented within the study. The researcher worked closely with the school Principal as well as the guidance counselor to ensure that the students selected were a good representation and fit for the study.

Research Design

Previously, students have spent time learning social emotional skills with the school counselor and have been taught the essential skills in social emotional learning. The researchers aim was to aid in this learning by teaching additional social emotional learning lessons daily in the classroom. The researcher began the correlational research design within her own classroom at the beginning of the school year to select appropriate materials to utilize with students in order to continue the learning already in practice with the school counselor. Throughout this process the researcher worked closely with the school counselor as well as the building principal to select the materials that best fit the needs of the students and that aid in what students are learning

during their time with the counselor. The school counselor helped in preparing the classroom to ensure that all students were able to get the most out of this opportunity and that the curriculum closely follows the standard practice already in place with social emotional learning.

The study began after appropriate materials were selected and the participants were identified. The researcher began by teaching social emotional skills daily and aimed to answer the question, “What strategies can be used to teach children skills that will increase their social and emotional competencies?” The researcher spent 4 weeks teaching the skills while monitoring to see which strategies were best for her classroom when teaching social emotional skills. During this time, students completed formative assessments that shared their progress and identified which strategies were best for them.

Measurement Instruments

One of the tools used in this study was the FastBridge Assessment in the areas of early reading and math. FastBridge supports Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS) by ensuring that educators are given the right quantitative data and tools to target appropriate support for each student. The data is given in a timely manner, allowing interventions to start promptly. Through FastBridge, teachers are able to screen students, receive diagnostic data, and progress monitor their students all throughout the program. From this data, teachers are able to pinpoint children’s needs in reading and math (FastBridge, 2020).

A dependent samples *t*-test was conducted to determine if there was a significant change in students’ academic progress following the progress monitoring taking place utilizing the FastBridge system. It was found that a significant change occurred in students’ academic performance in the area of reading. Prior to teaching social emotional learning skills, students were able to read an average of 9 words per minute ($M = 9.31, SD = 4.22$). Following the

teaching and students putting into practice the skills they have learned, they were able to read an average of 13.5 words per minute ($M = 13.53$, $SD = 4.86$), a score much higher than years past. Results of the dependent samples t -test revealed a significant difference between the pre-test and post-test, $t(9) = -2.79$, $p < .021$. In years past, the average change from August to November was 2 to 2.5 points, showing that social emotional learning did in fact have a positive shift in students' academic performance.

Another dependent sample t -test was conducted to determine the change in students' academic progress in the area of mathematics. It was also found that a significant change occurred in students' academic performance in the area of math. Prior to teaching social emotional learning skills, students scored an average of 5.5 on decomposing numbers ($M = 5.52$, $SD = 2.92$). Following the teaching and students putting into practice the skills they have learned, they were able to decompose an average of 8.2 numbers accurately ($M = 8.22$, $SD = 3.65$). The researcher was not able to compare this to previous years as this was the first year of administering this assessment.

Also used to collect data was SAEBRs, which measures students' social, emotional, and academic behaviors. The SAEBRs teacher observation rating scale is used to assess students' individual behavior scores and is quantitative. FastBridge, the website used to administer SAEBRs, stated that students' success in school is not only measured by their academic achievement but has multiple behavioral domains. As recommended by SAEBRs, the tests are administered after students have been in school for at least six weeks, helping to ensure that the teacher has ample interaction time with their students (FastBridge, 2020). Therefore, the test was one administered once during the window of this action research.

Reliability and Validity of Measurement Instruments

Prior to administering the assessment, the researcher completed the FastBridge early reading and math training as well as SAEBRs in order to become certified. This ensured that the researcher was administering each assessment systematically and with validity. In order to ensure reliability, all students were assessed in a quiet environment that was consistent from student to student. This helped to ensure that each student was given the same opportunity to do their best work by providing this type of learning environment.

Data Collection

As daily teaching around social emotional learning continued, the researcher began a 2 week (10 day) study in which the 10 participants were closely monitored. This is new for our school as social emotional learning has never been formally tracked in our students. The researcher monitored behaviors and the academic progress throughout this time to identify the impact of social emotional learning as well as their use of social emotional skills during this time. The questions being answered were 1) What impact does social emotional learning have on academic success? 2) What effects does social emotional learning have on students' behaviors? The researcher also utilized SABERS as well as FastBridge Assessment to gain information on each individual student.

Data was collected through students' weekly progress monitoring assessments and was recorded on an Excel spreadsheet. After the assessments were completed, all of the data was retrieved and analyzed by the researcher. The reading and mathematical growth of the students was determined by looking at students' scores in August 2021 and November 2021 on FastBridge early reading and math. The researcher also looked closely at the scores of the 10 students selected compared to the other students in the classroom as well as the entire grade

level. The researcher also reviewed the students' scores utilizing SAEBRs and compared the 10 selected students' scores to the rest of the class as well as other first grade students. Lastly, the researcher utilized observational notes to determine the students overall growth in the area of social emotional learning.

IRB Exemption

The application for the Educational Practice Exemption was reviewed and approved by Karissa Carlson for the IRB on September 28, 2021.

Findings

Data Analysis

The researcher is a certified teacher with nine years of experience in the classroom, four of those years being in first grade. The research was collected by the classroom teacher prior to the implementation of Social Emotional Learning in the classroom as well as after six consecutive weeks of this learning taking place. Collecting the data allowed the researcher to answer the research questions; What impact does social emotional learning have on academic success? What effects does social emotional learning have on students' behaviors? The qualitative data collected in this study allowed the researcher to recognize certain behaviors that were concerning and focus on the cause as well as a solution. The quantitative data collected gave the researcher insight into the benefits of social emotional learning.

Qualitative Data Analysis

The qualitative data in this study was collected using anecdotal notes, pre and post implementation. The researcher reviewed the anecdotal notes and categorized them based on students learning to help better understand the benefits of the social emotional learning program being used. Prior to starting the research, ten students were identified. These students included students with behavioral plans from previous years as well as students with minor or no behavioral issues.

Additionally, quantitative data was collected on students' behaviors utilizing SAEBRS on the FastBridge testing system. Students' behaviors were analyzed post-implementation to allow the teacher time to grow relationships with each student and build knowledge on the student as a whole. For students in first grade, the teacher completes the assessment based on students behaviors in the classroom. Out of the ten students identified, 20% of the students were

considered at high risk and 40% were considered at some risk for social, academic, or emotional behaviors. Of these students, 30% are on academic behavior plans and 10% are on behavior intervention teams in which their behaviors are discussed monthly with a group of interventionists, special education teachers, and administrators. Overall, more information in this area needs to be collected in order to determine the impact of social emotional learning on behaviors.

Quantitative Data Analysis

The quantitative data was collected using a dependent t-test in order to track students' academic progress pre- and post- implementation of the program. The researcher utilized one subtest in FastBridge, nonsense words, to watch the growth with each student over time. Students were progress monitored weekly to ensure that adequate growth was taking place, as well as the testing that took place pre- and post- implementation.

It was found that the total number of nonsense words adequately could be read per minute utilizing the FastBridge testing system. The pre-implementation scores are shown in column 2 and post-implementation is shown in column 3. Of the ten students selected, 80% showed improvement in their reading scores while 20% showed a slight decrease utilizing one subtest of FastBridge. One student showed significant improvement in their reading score, while another student showed slight improvement. At the beginning of the study, 40% of these students were considered at risk, according to FastBridge, due to their low number of words read per-minute. Following the post-implementation test, only 10% of students were still considered at-risk but showed an increase in the score overall.

The dependent samples *t*-test conducted determined there was a significant change in students' academic progress following the progress monitoring taking place utilizing the

FastBridge system. Prior to teaching social emotional learning skills, students were able to read an average of 9 words per minute ($M = 9.31$, $SD = 4.22$). Following the teaching and students putting into practice the skills they have learned, they were able to read an average of 13.5 words per minute ($M = 13.53$, $SD = 4.86$). Results of the dependent samples t -test revealed a significant difference between the pre-test and post-test, $t(9) = -2.79$, $p < .021$. The social emotional learning skills in practice increased student scores over the time period given.

Also collected, utilizing the dependent t -test, tracked students' academic progress pre- and post- implementation of the program in the area of mathematics. The researcher utilized FastBridge EarlyMath in order to watch the growth with each student over time. The dependent sample t -test conducted determined the change in students' academic progress in the area of mathematics was significant. Prior to teaching social emotional learning skills, students scored an average of 5.5 on decomposing numbers ($M = 5.51$, $SD = 2.92$). Following the teaching and students putting into practice the skills they have learned, they were able to decompose an average of 8.2 numbers accurately ($M = 8.22$, $SD = 3.65$). The researcher was not able to compare this to previous years as this was the first year of administering this assessment.

Discussion

Summary of Major Findings

Taking into consideration students' emotional needs is an important aspect that helps to support students' overall performance at school. Implementing social emotional learning lessons and interventions that support students' emotional needs help all students develop positively emotionally as well as academically. This action research study conducted with first grade students not only supported students in their social and emotional needs but in their reading and mathematical skills as well. The researcher used the chosen curriculum in coincidence with the school counselor to help students to learn about self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision making.

The findings of this action research support the literature reviewed that teaching and implementing social emotional learning does impact students overall behavior and academics. The data shows that students of all backgrounds and different abilities are positively impacted by implementing social emotional learning into the classroom. However, the degree to which students are impacted vary from student to student. The findings suggest that most students show progress in improving their academic performance and behavior.

Further Research

In further studies, it would be beneficial to extend the length of the study to allow for more data to be collected. It would be beneficial to the researcher to have more data points to compare, especially from the start of the year to the end. It could also be beneficial to compare a classroom utilizing social emotional learning strategies as well as those that are not in order to track if it's truly social emotional learning playing a role in students' progress. The more data the

researcher is able to collect, the more conclusions that can be drawn about the overall impact of social emotional learning on students.

It would also be beneficial to have more data points to collect in the area of behavior. Where SAEBRs is a great resource, the one data point collected is not enough to draw a conclusion on the students overall performance or the impact of social emotional learning. More research needs to be conducted to find another suitable test to determine these impacts or more data from SAEBRs over the course of the year.

Lastly, collecting information from parents of the participants could lead to some beneficial findings as they have different experiences with their children at home. It would be beneficial to see if the impacts of social emotional learning continued for the students as they returned home each night, over the weekends, or on extended breaks. Researchers could utilize SAEBRs to develop appropriate questions to ask parents to gain beneficial information on each student. Over time, this could create a great partnership between teachers and parents.

Conclusion

Social emotional learning has the opportunity to support all students by offering them a tool to utilize when feeling certain emotions and to give teachers the resources to help their students in a way that is supportive. Each year students struggle to manage their emotions, and often teachers have a difficult time handling these emotions within their own classrooms without needing to involve the school counselor. Through the implementation of social emotional learning, students will be able to deal with their emotions in a productive way and teachers will look forward to developing a deeper understanding of how they can best utilize the skills within their classrooms. Not only are students' emotional needs met, but they are able to progress academically in a positive way. Overall, this action research has shown the need and importance of social emotional learning in schools.

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