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## The Positive Impact of Social and Emotional Learning

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**The Positive Impact of Social and Emotional Learning**

Alexi Allen

Capstone Project: An Action Research Project

Northwestern College, Orange City, Iowa

### **Abstract**

This action research was inspired by the researcher's own district and classroom. The district has core values and competencies under their mission and vision that include excellence in SEL instruction district wide. The district focuses on teaching the SEL competences and SEL standards to help students graduate and show success in life. Based on classroom observations, the researcher hypothesized that children taught socio-economic skills would display more positive behaviors and greater motivation to complete classroom tasks. The participants in this six-week study included 20 kindergarten students, ages four through six. During the week prior to the intervention, data was tracked over blurting, physical aggression, following directions, and work completion. The next four weeks consisted of instruction around SEL skills using the Second Step curriculum and resources created by teachers in the district. The intervention was intentional on covering the four areas: blurting, physical aggression, following directions, and work completion. To finish the study, data was tracked for one-week post intervention. The study found that adding an SEL intervention into a kindergarten classroom improves the performance of academics and behavior inside the classroom.

*Keywords:* social and emotional learning, behavior, academics, kindergarten

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### **The Positive Impact of Social and Emotional Learning**

Social and emotional learning (SEL) is a crucial component in school districts nationwide (Ng & Bull, 2018). Attention to the socio-emotional well-being of students has significantly grown during and following the COVID-19 pandemic as educators witness the effects of the pandemic on students' mental health, behavior, and academic performance. Fortunately, SEL makes a difference: Ng and Bull (2018) concluded that SEL is a positive contributor to student behavior and academic improvement starting at the early childhood level.

School districts do face various problems when creating action plans to implement SEL (Lawson et al., 2019). Those problems include high costs to curriculum, limited time in daily schedules, and the inconsistency of implementation in the classroom (Lawson et al., 2019). Many early childhood classrooms still fail to include SEL, a deficit impacting the well-being of students, student behavior, and student motivation to complete work tasks (Lawson et al., 2019).

Implementation of SEL programs in school settings can help students foster affective, cognitive, and behavioral skills (Lawson et al., 2019). SEL has a great impact on children during their early years. Ng & Bull (2019) concluded that when early childhood learners have weak socio-emotional abilities, they are more likely to show isolation from peers, disinterest in their teachers, and disconnection from learning activities, all of which can show lower academic achievement. However, it is difficult to find studies within the last ten years analyzing the effects of SEL on a particular grade level, such as kindergarten.

The purpose of this study is to examine the impact SEL has on the behavior and socio-emotional well-being of children ages four through six in a general education kindergarten classroom. The question considered is the following: Does consistent SEL teaching have a

positive impact on student behavior and academics such as work completion at the kindergarten level?

The need for SEL instruction is there in the United States. Eklund et al. (2018) conclude that the SEL standards covering grade levels kindergarten through twelfth grade are behind on implementation. The standards in preschool are evident, and teachers can implement them with fidelity, whereas the grade levels above them show they are significantly behind in this area. Eklund et al. (2018) believe that SEL needs to be studied to help districts adopt and implement SEL standards within districts nationwide.

Ashdown & Bernard (2012) concluded that classrooms with consistent SEL positively impact student behavior and academic skills. Educators can have a lasting impact on student performance if districts can incorporate SEL teaching and learning in the classroom at the early childhood level. According to Ng & Bull (2018), there is an academic performance difference in children who have high SEL abilities and children who do not. Children who have strong SEL skills can engage in tasks within the classroom, whereas children with fewer SEL skills face more difficulties.

This action research project study used instruction and materials that the Boone Community School District has purchased, supplemented with resources created by district teachers. The study took place over six-weeks. The instruction and materials were used in a four-week intervention to analyze the effects on behaviors and completion of work tasks inside a kindergarten classroom. The instruction was guided by the CASEL competencies and the SEL standards in the curriculum, Second Step. The study compares student performance in behavior

and work completion tasks over a one-week period prior to intervention and a one-week period post intervention in a kindergarten classroom with students ages 4 to 6 years old.

The peer-reviewed research articles included in the literature review portion of this paper were drawn from the ERIC (Education Resources Information Center) database, the WorldCat discovery tool through the DeWitt Library, and Google Scholar. The articles were published within the last ten years and located with keywords such as SEL, benefits, instruction, intervention, positive impact, and academic achievement. The peer-reviewed research articles are a guide to understand recent research around SEL impact on behavior and academics.

### **Review of the Literature**

This literature review summarizes the research on the effects of social and emotional learning (SEL) in the classroom. The review will discuss SEL curriculum and instruction and how it impacts student academics and behavior.

#### **Social and Emotional Learning (SEL)**

SEL is a key component for early childhood learners as they are expected to control emotions, feelings, and behavior. Schmitt et al. (2017) conducted a study on the effects that positive action can have on early childhood learners' emotional competence and behaviors. The researchers defined social and emotional competence as children behaving in an appropriate way during various social situations and regulating their emotions. Ng & Bull (2018) found that the importance of SEL starts in schools. Children are expected to regulate strong feelings, initiate friendships, resolve conflicts, and make safe choices when they are exploring the community they live in. SEL helps children evaluate, maintain, and control their feelings during everyday life. When children use these SEL skills in their daily lives, they are more likely to experience

life success and can maintain a healthy lifestyle (Ng & Bull, 2018). SEL will benefit early childhood learners inside and outside of the classroom, but many classrooms are missing this learning in their daily schedules (Ng & Bull, 2018).

Researchers have explored teacher knowledge and understanding of skills in regard to SEL (Bridgeland et al., 2013). Bridgeland et al. (2013) conducted a study with three focus groups that explored these questions: Do teachers value SEL in the classrooms? Do teachers believe that SEL will help students achieve in school and in life? What are key components in SEL? The first focus group included teachers from diverse backgrounds and varied levels of experience. The second focus group were teachers who taught pre-kindergarten or kindergarten as well as a mix of middle and high school teachers from the city of Philadelphia. The third focus group focused on teachers in the Chicago area with a mix of elementary, middle, and high school teachers who had experience with teaching SEL.

Bridgeland et al. (2013) found that the first focus group understood SEL and believed that the skills are teachable in districts nationwide. The second focus group knew that SEL instruction was a key aspect of student success and achievement in life. The last focus group expressed that teachers need more professional development and curriculum resources to teach this content to their students. SEL in schools will prepare students for the workforce as these skills relate to real-world situations (Bridgeland et al., 2013). According to Bridgeland et al. (2013), SEL and instruction impacts teachers by showing them how to foster positive classroom climates and their own social and emotional development.

While recognizing that SEL instruction is needed, it has been discovered that teachers have a lack of training in SEL. When proper training or curriculum is present, teachers are

effective in teaching these skills to their students (Bridgeland et al., 2013). Bridgeland et al. (2013) also concluded that when parental involvement is low around SEL, children are likely to have difficulty developing the skills. Parents are starting to understand the importance of this skill in their children's daily lives. SEL skills can impact their learner at both home and school (Denham et al., 2014).

The perspective that teachers have on children's socio-emotional skill development is strong. Blewitt et al. (2021) conducted a study in Australia that explored teacher perspective of a child's SEL development. This study discovered the specific approaches teachers need to take towards SEL skills and what other additional supports may be needed in a classroom setting. The study discusses how SEL is important to the teachers and the development of SEL skills in their students. The study included interviews and in-person focus group discussions. Blewitt et al. (2021) found that teachers in this study believe that SEL should be at the forefront of their planning and preparation for the students in their classroom. The researchers found that teachers have difficulty fulfilling SEL planning and preparation as there are time constraints, lack of educator knowledge, and limited guidance on SEL instruction and incorporation into the classroom.

The positive effects of SEL instruction are seen inside the classroom. According to the qualitative study of Ng & Bull (2018), there are positive benefits to SEL and instruction that takes place consistently inside the classroom. This study included six kindergarten and first grade classrooms from six different schools in Singapore. The research questions included the following: How do situational factors influence the frequency of SEL support in kindergarten classrooms? What types of strategies do teachers use to facilitate SEL in the classroom (Ng & Bull, 2018, p. 341). Ng & Bull spent four hours in each classroom to record instances when

teachers would interact with their students using SEL competencies. These competencies included self-awareness, self-management, responsible decision making, social awareness, and building relationship skills.

Ng & Bull (2018) found that children who display strong SEL abilities can sustain engagement in the classroom and finish work tasks. The children in the kindergarten and first grade classrooms who show weak SEL skills have difficulty concentrating and completing tasks given by the teacher (Ng & Bull, 2018). According to Denham et al. (2014), children who can manage emotions, engage in positive social interaction with peers and adults, and maintain positive engagement in the classroom show high SEL skills. There is also validation in the study that children who have high SEL skills have a positive connection to their well-being, mental health, and school success later in life (Denham et al., 2014). Educators should balance the preparation of students academically and socially to enhance these skills using research-based strategies. Ng & Bull (2018) found that this solution will not only reduce behavior problems but will instead promote and enhance academic performance in early childhood students. The two studies have similarities in their findings. Research demonstrates the positive impact of SEL instruction on behavior inside the classroom. Teachers are aware that SEL is a need for early childhood learners.

The three research studies did not have differences in their findings as they all found that SEL is important to student learning and development. The researchers found that SEL instruction is important and should be a top priority in instruction throughout the school day to help students succeed.

### **Social and Emotional Interventions**

SEL interventions are crucial to student success and learning in their early childhood years. Iaosanurak et al. (2016) conducted a study to discover the effects of an intervention based around SEL competencies including self-control, self-motivation, happiness. Iaosanurak et al. (2016) wanted to find if the SEL intervention affects two populations together rather than just the individual populations. The two populations combined, to make a whole group, were male and females in Thai and Cambodia. The quantitative study found that there was a positive increase in the competencies following whole-group instructional setting and no difference along particular gender or cultural demographic groups. Iaosanurak et al. (2016) recommends that SEL interventions be delivered to the whole group to have a better outcome on SEL intervention.

SEL interventions are needed in schools as studies continue to show the positive correlation they have on student success. Goldberg et al. (2019) wanted to discover the effectiveness of interventions that were using a whole-school approach. The study involved activities in the curriculum that were taught to display a positive school environment and support families and the community. The interventions showed small improvements in student SEL abilities. Community involvement was one indicator that increased SEL during the whole school intervention. There are many components needed to help SEL interventions thrive in schools. McClelland et al. (2017) studied the components that SEL interventions need to foster student success. The three findings were that teachers need professional development surrounding SEL interventions, SEL instruction needs to be embed in daily activities, and the instruction needs to engage families.

There are factors that can deter effective implementation of interventions in school districts. Evans et al. (2015) used a qualitative study to identify the intervention components that were needed to help schools succeed. The study found that there was a low delivery of

intervention training, inadequate intervention assessment, lack of intervention clarification in light of questions, and unclear responsibility for implementing the intervention. These problems made it difficult for school districts to implement SEL successfully.

The studies that identified SEL intervention need revealed similar findings. The researchers found that a whole-school approach to SEL interventions is needed, one that involves families and community members, to see positive results.

### **The Impact of SEL on Different Groups**

SEL can influence different groups to different degrees based on exposure, time, and experience with the skills and competencies. Two studies examined the impact of SEL on children who were experiencing homelessness and children who were attending full-day kindergarten. Haskett et al. (2016) used a mixed method approach to determine if homelessness affects the development and status of the social and emotional function in children who are under the age of 7. There were two components to the study: the Brigance Early Childhood Screen II and Ages and the Stages Questionnaire. Haskett et al. (2016) concluded that children experiencing homelessness show low functioning in communication and social skills but do not display social and emotional problems (although parents had concerns based on their child's mental health). Haskett et al. (2016) said that future research should study to what extent children are resilient using their SEL skills when they do not have a home.

The study of children attending a full day of kindergarten showed similar findings. The mixed research study conducted by Carnes & Albrecht, (2012) wanted to learn if there was a positive effect on children who attend a full day of kindergarten. Teachers used four different tests to help them identify student growth or behavior in schools: a social and emotional sub test,

Dynamic Indicators of Basic Literacy, criterion referenced tests, and the Developmental Assessment of Young Children. Carnes & Albrecht (2012) found that when teachers have time to for SEL kindergarten students rarely display social and emotional problems. Literacy scores were increased because teachers stated they had time to teach students skills during a full day of kindergarten.

The two studies show that SEL among different populations led to positive impacts. They validate that SEL is needed in school districts around the nation to help early childhood learners continue to improve as students and have high SEL competence as adults.

### **The Standards and Competencies**

SEL has standards and competencies that are valuable to student learning in the classroom (Lawson et al., 2019). A qualitative research study was conducted that included students in all 50 U.S. states. Eklund et al. (2018) asked the research question: What states are implementing SEL standards? The researchers learned that all fifty states had identified and adopted SEL standards but vary how the standards are implemented. The study found that most of the fifty states do not have comprehensive free-standing K-12 standards in place and that the standards start to lag after preschool (Eklund et al., 2018). Eklund et al. (2018) conclude that future studies are needed on how to highlight and implement free-standing K-12 standards in each state. In the same study, it was founded that SEL programs help promote the five competencies discovered by The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL). CASEL is an organization focused on incorporating SEL and instruction in schools using research, practice, and professional development for teachers. The standards that states are creating and adopting align with the competencies proposed by CASEL (Eklund et al., 2018).

The competencies are self-awareness, social awareness, responsible decision making, positive student beliefs about oneself, and maintaining positive relationships with peers.

SEL competencies and standards need to be in alignment to create strong, positive, classroom environments. Lawson et al. (2019) conducted a study that asked the question: What SEL program is best for elementary use based on the five competencies? The researchers concluded that programs selected for school districts all align with the SEL standards and the CASEL competencies. In a mixed method study, Schonert-Reichl (2017) considered how we can boost teachers' social-emotional competence and help them create the kind of classroom environment that promotes students' SEL. Schonert-Reichl (2017) found that college students attending school to become a teacher or teachers already in the field lack the knowledge of the SEL standards and the five competencies that were created through CASEL. Schonert-Reichl (2017) found that preservice teacher courses are not promoting or defining SEL instruction, making it difficult for educators to know or understand how to teach it to students. Schonert-Reichl (2017) suggests that preservice educators receive instruction around all five SEL competencies that were created by CASEL.

In the three research studies that conducted their research around SEL standards and competencies, there were a few similarities and differences. The studies each found that pre-service and classroom teachers lack knowledge based upon the SEL standards and competencies that were created by CASEL. The three studies highlighted the importance of SEL standards and instructing students around the five competences. Collectively the studies show that some states have adopted SEL standards, while other states or districts have difficulty choosing a program based on the standards and competencies. The study conducted by Schonert-Reichl (2017) found

that teacher knowledge towards the SEL standards and competencies is strong and that the teachers feel comfortable teaching SEL.

### **Social and Emotional Curriculum and Instruction**

A universal SEL curriculum should align to standards and the five CASEL competencies. Lawson et al. (2019) found that using a universal SEL program helps schools promote cognitive skills and behavioral skills in children. This study found that SEL interventions and curriculum improve social skills, attitudes, behaviors, and academic performance in elementary learners. Lawson et al. (2019) discuss how CASEL created a framework that identifies the five competencies to be incorporated into a well-developed SEL curriculum. Lawson et al. (2019) conducted a quantitative research study that asked the question: What SEL program is best for elementary use based on the five competencies? This study happened in the Baltimore County Public Schools. The research compared fifteen different SEL programs that covered all or most of the five CASEL competencies. The process of the research was to implement the SEL curriculum into the classroom and identify which curriculum has the most competencies covered. Lawson et al. (2019) found that all fifteen of the SEL curriculums cover the five competencies, with the curriculum Second Step featured at the top of the list.

SEL programs have a strong impact on student competencies. Kemple et al. (2019) conducted a mixed methods study that asked the question: What is the impact of a primary prevention program on preschool children's SEL competence? This study used ten school classrooms that were in the southeastern part of the United States. The teachers of these classrooms were trained how to use the intervention program Second Step. The study had 37 children: 17 were a part of the experimental group, and 20 were a part of the control group. The

experimental group had an intervention using the Second Step curriculum. The experimental and control group both included pre- and post-interviews. Kemple et al. (2019) found that there was little to no change to the control group who did not receive the Second Step intervention, while the experimental group saw a positive change from pre- to posttest using the Second Step Intervention.

The curriculum that is chosen for districts matters when implementing and having to supplement content. Domitrovich et al. (2019) implemented the curriculum PATHS in a K-3 classroom and discovered that there was a positive impact on student SEL when teachers were able to implement it with fidelity. Although teachers had to supplement with materials that address competencies not covered, the curriculum helps to create a positive school setting while delivering the instruction to students.

The research continues to show that SEL instruction shows a positive correlation on students' SEL skills. Research conducted by Raimundo et al. (2013) examined the efficacy of a social-emotional learning program on SEL competencies. This qualitative study took place in Portuguese schools. Raimundo et al. (2013) found that when universal SEL programs are delivered, SEL competencies in children improved somewhat. Raimundo et al. (2013) and Kemple et al. (2019) have similar findings. The studies found that incorporating SEL curriculum into the classroom will positively impact early childhood learners. The studies conducted by Lawson et al. (2019) and Kemple et al. (2019) both highlight the importance and efficiency of using the Second Step curriculum as it promotes the SEL standards and the five competencies developed by CASEL.

### **The Benefits of SEL on Academics and Behavior**

Social and emotional learning, academics, and behavior have positive correlations to each another. In one study, Ashdown and Bernard (2012) conducted a mixed research study in Melbourne, Australia that asked the question: Can SEL instruction help develop and benefit SEL skills, academics, and well-being in young children? The study included participants from a low socioeconomic school: four teachers and one hundred students from kindergarten and first grade classes. Ashdown and Bernard (2012) used questionnaires and numerical data to help identify the effects that SEL can have on the students. Ashdown and Bernard (2012) found that there was a positive effect on the competencies and well-being of the first-grade students. There was a reduction in behavior and an increase in reading achievement scores using the Independent Text Reading Level assessment. Ashdown and Bernard (2012) suggested that the research follow the students into future grade levels to see if there is a continued positive correlation between SEL instruction and the reduction of unwanted behavior and increase in academic scores.

SEL can assist at-risk children in improving life skills that assist them throughout life. Daunic et al. (2013) suggest that SEL growth and academic learning do not occur together but are somehow connected. The researchers conducted a quantitative study in North Central Florida that asked the question: Does integration between SEL and literacy have a positive effect on children at risk? There were eighteen classes that were included: eight were part of the treatment group and ten were part of the control group. SEL lessons were incorporated into a small group setting two to three times a week for twenty minutes long. The curriculum implemented was called SELF. Daunic et al. (2013) found that SEL instruction improved executive function, behavior, and school-related competence. The researchers found that there is a positive correlation between literacy instruction and SEL instruction among high-risk children.

A curricular element has been missing from schools in the United States of America and has been showing negative consequences to children, schools, and communities (Bridgeland et al., 2013). According to Bridgeland et al. (2013), the missing piece is SEL instruction in schools. One reason for the absence may be teacher beliefs about SEL. Bridgeland et al. (2013) conducted a mixed research study that included interviews and numerical data to answer this question: Do teachers believe that SEL will help students achieve in schools and in life? There were three groups, but the second group that took place in Philadelphia included pre-kindergarten and elementary school teachers along with a mix of middle school and high school teachers. This study focused on SEL and how it helps students achieve in life and school. The study discovered that teachers do believe that SEL will help students achieve in schools and in life. Teachers know the importance of SEL and believe SEL should have a great emphasis in school districts. (Bridgeland et al., 2013). Bridgeland et al. (2013) found that SEL is a key part of the solution to achievement in life. The researchers found that SEL boosts academic scores, engages student academic interest, improves behavior, prevents bullying, and enhances the school climate.

The three studies do not differ in results. The researchers and their studies all found that SEL has a positive impact on student behavior and improves academic achievement and scores. The difference in research would be that the studies were conducted in different parts of the world and at different grade levels. The different environments of the studies do not influence the results: SEL can help students improve in various environmental situations and grade levels.

In conclusion, SEL has shown positive effects on student behavior, academic behavior, and well-being. The studies show that there is a need for teacher professional development around SEL and the instruction piece to accurately incorporate the learning into their daily

schedules. In other words, SEL should be implemented into the daily lives of early childhood learners, and educators should be prepared to do so well.

### **Methods**

The action research plan will be described in this section by identifying the variables, intended research site, research participants, and length of time for data collection.

**The intended question for this action research is the following:** Does consistent social and emotional teaching and learning have a positive impact on student behavior and academics?

### **Participants**

This action research study was in a kindergarten classroom with 20 students participating in an SEL intervention. The classroom was located in Boone, Iowa. The elementary school consists of one transitional kindergarten, three kindergarten, and three first grade classrooms. In this district, 48% of students are female and 52% of students are male. There are 30% of students eligible to receive free and reduced lunch.

The research participants are in one of the kindergarten classrooms that include 20 students. The students are in the age range of 5 to 6 years old. There are 12 girls and 8 boys included in the research. The class is predominately white, with two students who are Hispanic, and one that is Asian. The students in the kindergarten classroom had access to attend preschool through the district or a Head Start program in the community. The school district is a Title 1 school, and 7.49% of the population is considered low socioeconomic status.

### **Data Collection**

The researcher collected quantitative data. The quantitative data have independent and dependent variables. The independent variable is the social and emotional instruction that the class will receive. The dependent variables are the behavior seen and the completion of academic work. There is also data that was collected prior to and after the intervention. This data tracked blurting, physical aggressions, following directions, and work completion. The SEL data was tracked from Monday through Friday for eight hours a day.

The intervention implemented was Second Step curriculum and resources the teachers of the district have created over time based on student need. The data collection was executed during a six-week period. The pre-data was collected for one week. The intervention was implemented for four weeks, and the post data was collected for one-week post intervention. The data was collected on an observation checklist using Student 1-20 as the identifier to keep student names safe when tracking and showing data results.

The rubric was based on a 3, 2, 1 scale for each category. In the blurting and following directions tab, the student received a 3 if they had 0-5 reminders. The student received a 2 if they had 6-11 reminders. The student received a 1 if they had 12 or more reminders in that category throughout the day. If a student received a 3, they were considered proficient in that area: in a kindergarten classroom it is normal behavior for children at this age level to receive a few reminders throughout the day. The physical aggression and work completion categories were based off a 3, 2, 1 scale. If the student had 0 physical aggressions, they received a 3. If the student was aggressive once, they received a 2. If the student was aggressive more than once, they received a 1. In the work completion category, the students had to complete all work to receive a 3; if they did not complete 1-2 assignments, they received a 2; and if they did not

complete more than 2 assignments, they received a 1. After data was collected on an observation checklist, the data was transferred to an Excel spreadsheet.

The data was analyzed based on the Chi-Square Test of Association. The data is split into four different categories: blurting, physical aggression, following directions, and work completion. The research was intended to show if there is a positive change between the pre- and post-intervention data collection.

### **Ethical Considerations**

The action research conducted is considered exempt from the IRB process because according to federal code 46.104, though completed in an educational setting, the research will pose minimal risk to the participants, and the research involves normal education practices that already take place in a school setting (Legal Information Institute, n.d.). The research will not include interviews with parents or children.

## **Findings**

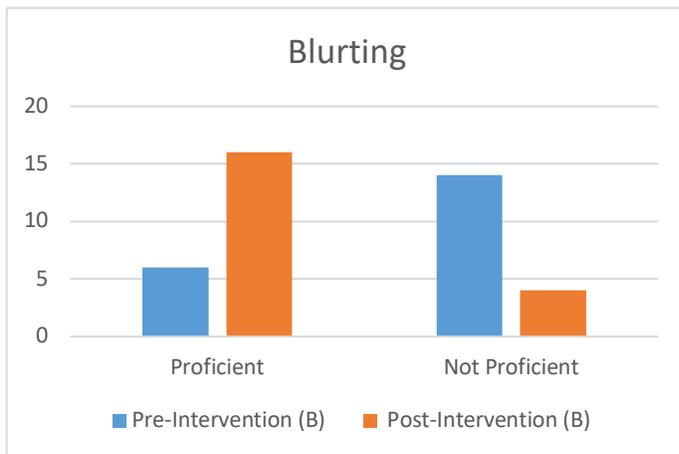
### **Data Analysis**

Quantitative data was collected using a Chi Square Test of Association to see the students' pre-intervention scores compared to their post-intervention scores at the end of the six-week intervention. This data was taken to show the growth in student behaviors including blurting, physical aggression, following directions, and completion of work tasks inside the classroom. Data was collected one week prior to the intervention and one week post intervention.

Of the 20 students studied, the pre-intervention data showed that six of 20 students were proficient in not blurting aloud in the class. There were 19 students who were proficient in showing no physical aggression towards other students. There were four students who were proficient in following directions and six students who were proficient in work completion tasks.

After the intervention, 16 were proficient in blurting, 19 proficient in physical aggression, 10 proficient in following directions and 12 in work completion tasks. Figure 1-4 shows the data results for the pre-intervention and post-intervention data. Shown in Figure 1 is blurting, Figure 2 shows physical aggression, Figure 3 shows following directions and Figure 4 shows work completion.

*Figure 1*



*Figure 2*

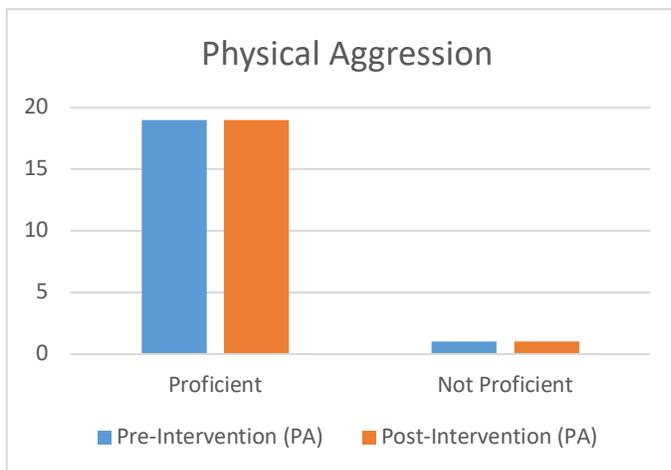


Figure 3

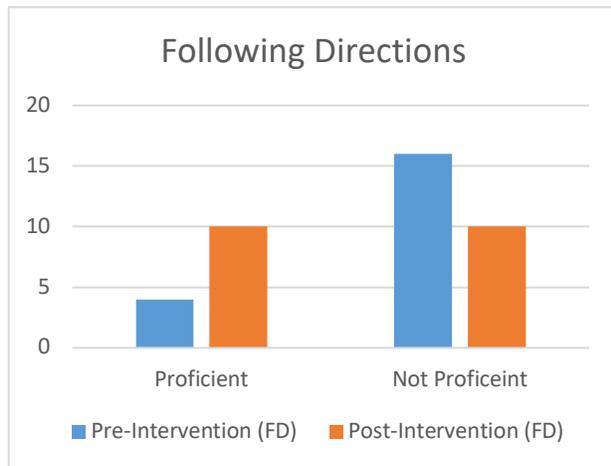
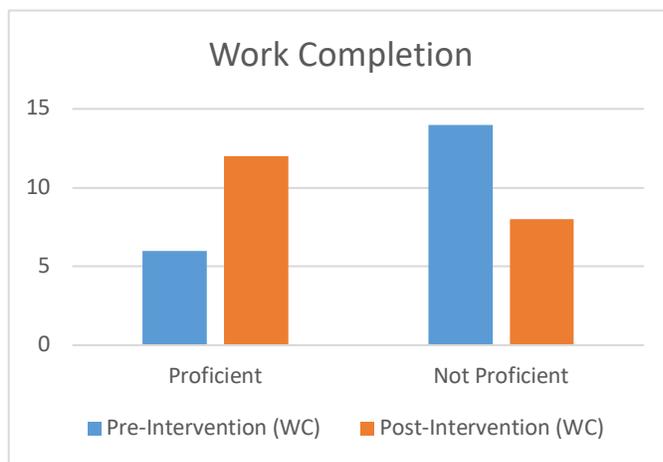


Figure 4



Following the intervention of the SEL instruction to the 20 students in the kindergarten classroom, the students were observed using the same checklist/rubric to track blurting, physical aggression, following directions, and work completion. A Chi Square Test of Association was conducted to determine the statistical difference in student proficiency in the four categories following the SEL intervention. Results of the chi-square test of association revealed a significant difference in three of the four areas tested.

The difference in blurting was  $\chi^2(1, N = 25) = 10.101$ , p-value is .001482 (see Figure 5). There was no difference in the physical aggression category as the chi-square test says the

difference was 0 and the p-value is 1 (see Figure 6). The difference in statistical value for following directions was  $\chi^2(1, N = 25) = 3.956$ , p-value is .046703 (see Figure 7). The last category included work completion with a statistical difference of  $\chi^2(1, N = 25) = 3.6364$ , p-value is .05653 (see Figure 8). Students showed SEL skill improvement in three of the four areas after SEL interventions were put into place—the areas of blurting, following directions, and work completion.

Figure 5

	Proficient	Not Proficient	Marginal Row Totals
Pre-Intervention	6 (11) [2.27]	14 (9) [2.78]	20
Post-Intervention	16 (11) [2.27]	4 (9) [2.78]	20
Marginal Column Totals	22	18	40 (Grand Total)

Figure 6

	Proficient	Not Proficient	Marginal Row Totals
Pre-Intervention	19 (19) [0]	1 (1) [0]	20
Post-Intervention	19 (19) [0]	1 (1) [0]	20
Marginal Column Totals	38	2	40 (Grand Total)

Figure 7

	Proficient	Not Proficient	Marginal Row Totals
Pre-Intervention	4 (7) [1.29]	16 (13) [0.69]	20
Post-Intervention	10 (7) [1.29]	10 (13) [0.69]	20
Marginal Column Totals	14	26	40 (Grand Total)

Figure 8

	Proficient	Not Proficient	Marginal Row Totals
Pre-Intervention	6 (9) [1]	14 (11) [0.82]	20
Post-Intervention	12 (9) [1]	8 (11) [0.82]	20
Marginal Column Totals	18	22	40 (Grand Total)

Discussion

The action research study results indicate that implementing an SEL intervention is successful in improving kindergarten students' performance in academic and behavioral areas. The baseline data shows several students proficient in the areas of blurting, physical aggression, following directions, and work completion. The researcher collected data one-week prior the intervention. The numerical results were scored and graphed. (See Figures 1-4.). The pre-intervention results show that 30% of students are proficient in controlling their blurting, 95% of students did not engage in physical aggression, 20% of students could follow directions, and 30% of students completed work tasks in the given amount of time.

The intervention was implemented for four weeks. During this four-week period, lessons were taught on blurting, physical aggression, following directions, and work completion. The curriculum used was Second Step and resources created by teachers in the district. These were taught to students in a large group setting for 15-20 minutes daily. There were various quotes or skills that were used to remind students of their learning throughout the four-week period. The teacher used quotes from the story "Wordy Birdy" written by Tammi Sauer; these would remind students not to blurt. The teacher used quotes such as "hands to self, or "keep our hands glued to our side" when talking about physical aggression. The teacher and students used a visual chart as a reminder to follow directions. The chart had students stop, think, and act before completing a direction the teacher had given them. The teacher used a visual timer to help students know time frames when work needed to be completed.

After the intervention was implemented for four weeks, data was collected again to see if there was a positive change in student academics and behavior at the kindergarten level. The study indicates that 80% of the students made growth in showing control over blurting in front of the class. In the physical aggression category 95% of students were proficient in both the pre-intervention data and the post-intervention data. 50% of the students were proficient in following directions at the end of the action research study, and 60% completed work tasks that were given inside the classroom. The students successfully completed the six-week intervention by engaging in SEL instruction daily with fidelity. The study results should encourage future and present teachers to implement SEL into their classroom to positively benefit their learners.

The data from this action research study supports the findings of the literature review presented in this paper showing that SEL has a positive impact on student academics and behavior.

### **Limitations of the Study**

This study has potential limitations. One of the limitations includes the size of the study. There were only 20 students who participated in this action research study. During the study one student moved to another school district and another student was added to the classroom. Another limitation in this study was that the teacher was the only classroom who was implementing this intervention in the classroom. Related arts teachers and other classroom teachers were unaware of the strategies used to remind students of desired behavior. The last limitation that took place was that student attendance varied due to sickness throughout the intervention. Absences could have impacted data results throughout the six-week intervention.

**Further Study**

Further study in SEL and the effects it has on academics and behavior is needed. The data that was collected in this study was from a small district in central Iowa. The classroom had only 20 kindergarten students, and the study took place in one of 16 classrooms at the early childhood level in the district. As reviewed in the literature, it is important to look at the impact of SEL in a larger study size rather than just in a small-group setting. The study could be replicated in other states around the United States, among varying demographics, and in different size districts or grade levels.

The study could also compare a control vs. experimental group. The study in this paper had one group as the experimental group and did not compare data with a control group. The control group would not receive the SEL intervention while the experimental group would receive the SEL intervention used in this study or one the instructors choose to implement. Given the correlation of the intervention with positive impact on student academics and behavior shown in this study, it would be intriguing to compare the results from two groups during the same period.

Another suggestion for future study is that the interventions continue, and the researcher follow students from the kindergarten grade level to high school graduation and beyond. The intervention could change over the years but would still be implemented as an intervention. The research could be tracked from year to year to see if SEL intervention continues to have a positive impact on students' academics and behavior throughout their K-12 years and into adulthood.

**Conclusion**

The purpose of this action research project was to determine if an SEL intervention had a positive impact on student academic and behavior performance of students ages four through six. The SEL intervention focused on four core areas: blurting, physical aggression, following directions, and work completion. The materials used for the SEL intervention were Second Step curriculum and resources created by teachers in the district.

SEL is a critical component of daily student learning. Students need help in supporting how they can manage their emotions while showing success in other areas throughout the school day. Research highlighted in the literature review shows that children need SEL interventions in their daily lives to show success inside and outside of the classroom. This study aligns with the literature: implementing SEL interventions into a kindergarten classroom correlated with improved academic and behavioral performance.

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