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**Implementing Changes in Family Childcare Programs to Increase Social-Emotional
Development and Decrease Negative Behavior**

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Capstone Project: An Action Research Project

Northwestern College, Orange City, Iowa

Abstract

The purpose of this action research project was to determine if implementing environmental and instructional changes in an-home family childcare program would increase children's social-emotional development as well as decrease negative behaviors exhibited. An assessment of social-emotional skills was conducted prior to the research using the Ages and Stages Questionnaire (ASQ). The researcher observed staff members implement changes in the childcare program over four weeks, with one change each week. Following the four-week implementation period, the researcher conducted three weeks of observations to determine how the changes affected the children's social-emotional development and behavior. A second ASQ assessment was conducted at the end of the research study to determine any changes in social-emotional development over the seven-week research period. Tally marks were gathered to monitor behavior changes before and after implementing changes. The children participating in this study were of mixed ages ranging from one to four years of age. The findings of this research study revealed that average social-emotional development skills decreased after the implementation of environmental and instructional changes occurred. A decrease in negative behavior and an increase in positive behavior were revealed in this research study.

Keywords: early childhood education, family childcare, social-emotional development, negative behavior, positive behavior, mixed-age group

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Implementing Changes in Family Childcare Programs to Increase Social-Emotional Development and Decrease Negative Behavior

Introduction

Over the past few years, the state of Iowa has been pushing for an increase in the quality of childcare programs. The philosophy behind quality childcare is creating and maintaining a safe and healthy learning environment for children while promoting school readiness. Quality childcare includes providing children with meaningful learning opportunities to promote development in all areas. To ensure that children are ready to succeed in school, family childcare programs can promote positive behavior and social-emotional skills that they will need when they begin to attend school and eventually grow into contributing members of their community. "Better emotional regulation skills are associated with better social-emotional competencies, more prosocial behavior, and better peer relationships which are essential as children grow and develop" (Tonge, et al., 2019).

Changing practices in family childcare programs is necessary for the children and staff to enjoy their time in the childcare program more while increasing children's social-emotional development, lessening the children's negative behaviors, and providing a positive learning environment for the teachers and children. "Over time, children experiencing patterns of less teacher-child interactions tend to receive fewer instructional opportunities and positive social interactions than their peers, which may contribute to the documented long-term adverse effects for children who exhibit chronic problem behavior at early ages" (Sutherland, et al., 2018).

Purpose

This action research project aims to implement changes within the family childcare environment to lessen the children's negative behavior and increase their social-emotional skills. When children actively engage in learning experiences, they exhibit more positive

behaviors and social experiences with their peers. Early childhood education is a profession that is in a major nationwide crisis, and creating an environment that is more suitable for the children will allow the educators and support staff to be less overwhelmed and allow the children to have more positive and meaningful learning experiences. Early childhood professionals are experiencing an increase in job responsibilities with strict rules while receiving low pay. According to a recent study by researchers Cumming, Wong, and Logan, nearly 90,000 fewer people are working in the childcare industry in October 2021 compared to February 2020 to obtain higher wages and better benefits from larger corporations (Cumming, et al., 2021).

Scope

The resources compiled for this action research study were gathered from the DeWitt Library at Northwestern College and online through the ERIC files. The studies included in the research were all peer-reviewed scholarly journals published within the last ten years, except for one article published over fifteen years ago. Studies used for this action research project included articles supporting the present study. These resource articles include parent-teacher relationships, teacher-child relationships, classroom environment and climate, teacher's stress, approaches to negative behavior, and teaching methods in early childhood environments.

Thesis

Through research, teachers and childcare providers can provide more meaningful learning experiences in a positive learning environment. When early childhood professionals can hold positive relationships with the children in their programs and the children's families, children will exhibit less negative behavior as they learn. Family childcare programs are not given proper credit for the effort that is applied to maintain a positive learning experience for all students. Challenges such as negative behavior and limited social-emotional development can be seen in home-based childcare programs when they need environmental changes that create a calm and

positive environment and instructional changes that encourage positive teacher-child relationships.

Overview

Early childhood care and education is crucial to every child's development. Children are learning how to maneuver through this big world and are learning new things every day. Childcare professionals should promote a positive learning environment that allows children to grow and develop successfully. Change is often necessary to create this thriving learning environment. It usually takes a teacher stepping back and looking at the whole picture to determine what is needed to make the program more successful. Implementing changes in family childcare programs should allow more social-emotional development and decrease negative behaviors as these changes are made. Successful social-emotional development and positive behavior are important for children to be ready for school. School readiness is part of the push for quality in early childhood programs in Iowa. The inspiration for higher-quality childcare programs focuses on identifying research gaps, best practices, and technologies to support young children, parents and caregivers, educators, and communities (Sutherland, et al., 2018).

Review of the Literature

The research provided in this literature review has been compiled through all peer-reviewed scholarly journal articles. This literature review summarizes previous research on social-emotional development and how it affects the behavior of young children in early childhood learning programs. The literature review includes a discussion about the behavioral overview of young children and the impact created by student-teacher relationships, the classroom environment, and inclusive settings. This literature review will identify the importance of social-emotional development on children's behavior. Identification will also be made

regarding limitations or areas of future research to ensure a complete understanding of the research objective.

Overview of Behavior in Young Children

Early childhood education and care has changed significantly in the past decade. With the higher expectations that are in place for teachers and childcare providers, more stress has been placed on the academic side of early childhood, and children are involved in less social-emotional learning experiences that are necessary for their development. According to research by Karen Wohlwend, a researcher studying the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on early childhood development, play has become an optional, nice-if-we-have-the-time activity that is all but extinct in first grade, vanishing in kindergarten, and endangered in preschool. In contrast, two decades ago, it was considered a staple in the early childhood classroom (Wohlwend, 2023). Play-based learning experiences can provide social-emotional learning opportunities among young children as well as academic learning opportunities, including language and communication, reading, writing, and literacy skills.

Sociologist Erik Erikson studied children's development and believed children grow and develop in eight psychosocial stages. He believed that when children are pushed into the next stage before they have mastered their current stage, it causes the unmastered stage to carry into the new, higher-level thinking stage (Perolii-Shehu, 2019). Children need each stage mastered before moving into the next stage to allow their confidence and independence to lead their social-emotional skill development. A recent research study that focused on identifying factors that lead to the development of social competence in children, identified that children are more likely to be accepting and understanding of the opinions of their peers and interact with one another more positively when they are afforded these social opportunities during the early childhood years (Perolii-Shehu, 2019). Contrastingly, another research study conducted in 2020 discusses the lack of children's ability to understand and accept the feelings and views of their

peers at an early age when they are in situations in an early childhood learning environment (Pihlainen, et al., 2020). The variance between the two studies is the quality of the early childhood learning environment and the socio-economic status of the families within the programs.

Misbehaviors exhibited in young children can follow them as they grow and develop. The early childhood years are critical years of skills development that children will use for the rest of their lives (Kural & Ceylan, 2022). These lifelong skills include problem-solving, understanding and following rules, and social interactions. Often, when children exhibit negative behaviors in their learning environment, there are underlying reasons for the behavior. Identifying the underlying cause of the misbehavior is the first step in addressing the problem (Kural & Ceylan, 2022). The learning environment, relationships between the teacher and the children and parents, the time children spend at school and childcare, and the children's temperament can all play an active role in children's behaviors.

Children's temperaments can determine how they react to stress in their environment. Young children have three temperament dimensions: negative affect, surgency, and effortful control temperaments (Kural & Ceylan, 2022). Children with a negative affect temperament have an instability of emotions and are more likely to be sad, overwhelmed, fearful, and frustrated. These children may exhibit heightened arousal, low ability to cope, and be threatened if they are in a stressful situation. Children with a surgency temperament are most likely to interact in stressful situations, enjoy intense activities, be sociable, and be impulsive. Lastly, children with an effortful control temperament provide calmer responses to stressful situations and are more capable of regulating their attention, emotions, and behaviors. When considering children's behaviors, it is important to fully understand how children's temperaments can affect their behavior in the classroom. Providing structured learning opportunities that can

encourage less stress within the classroom and methods of coping with the stress can be beneficial to young children in early childhood programs (Kural & Ceylan, 2022).

With the current trends in the United States of both parents working outside the home, the rate of children attending childcare programs prior to attending school is on the rise. According to a previous study conducted in Canada, there could be associations between childcare attendance and the children's academic and social skills over time (Garon-Carrier & Bégin, 2021). As children grow and learn, their temperament changes, allowing them to begin to solve problems and use coping strategies through internalizing and externalizing methods (Maat, et al., 2021). Children who attend high-quality in-home childcare programs or centers tended to show lower math scores than children who stayed home with a family member; however, their problem-solving and social-emotional skills were more developed when attending high-quality childcare programs.

Impact of Classroom Environment

A positive learning environment is essential for young children's meaningful learning experience. The learning environment is divided into three dimensions: the educational atmosphere, teacher-student relationships, and peer relationships (Ingemarson, et al., 2018). Looking into the classroom's physical environment can provide an in-depth look for teachers when they are experiencing disruptions in the classroom. The educational atmosphere, or classroom climate, can be negatively affected when disruption becomes the behavioral norm (Ingemarson, et al., 2018). The learning environment should provide developmentally appropriate learning materials and supplies that will allow students to be engaged with their peers while also having space to move to areas where they can be engaged independently (Obaki, 2017). When children are comfortable in their learning environments, they will be more likely to explore the materials and engage positively and creatively.

Looking more in-depth at the interactions and relationships between teachers and students, studies have been conducted to evaluate the efficacy of improving desired teacher behaviors, reducing negative student behaviors, and increasing positive student behaviors in the social-emotional and behavioral areas (Sutherland et al., 2019). One of the previous studies looked at the idea of the preparedness of the teachers in the classrooms and noted that less prepared teachers were more likely to become overwhelmed and provide less positive coaching and feedback to the students than the teachers who were prepared for the day and offered positive reinforcement and redirection where needed in the classroom.

Discussing behavioral outcomes with teachers was also conducted in another previous research study as well. According to Kural and Ceylan, it was found that “teachers’ classroom management practices play a crucial role in the acquisition of these skills at the school” (Kural & Ceylan, 2022). This provides further proof that prepared teachers are more likely to have fewer negative behaviors in the classroom and more success in instruction time as well as social-emotional and academic growth. “To ensure that children are healthy, adults must support the development of their social and emotional skills, which are of great importance to the children’s education as well” (Alzahrani, et al., 2019).

In the article, *Developing Computational Thinking Ability in Early Childhood Education: Influence of Programming Toy on Parent-Children Engagement*, data was collected and analyzed about the implementation of robotics in the classroom to increase computational thinking in the students. This posed an interest in researching children’s social-emotional behavior by examining the students’ cognition development. The fundamental aspects of this study focused on the learning experiences that the students had and how their environment played a part in the experiences. These environmental factors included real-life surroundings, play-based learning opportunities, and the social-emotional environment (Budiyanto, et al., 2021).

Early childhood education and care programs should promote outdoor learning experiences. Children thrive when they can be outdoors exploring nature. These experiences provide opportunities for natural curiosities to be explored while promoting social interactions (Tonge, et al., 2019). Outdoor learning environments are important in high-quality learning environments and provide unique learning opportunities for children based on the program they attend. Outdoor experiences are unique to individual programs depending on where they are located and the weather conditions for their region. A study conducted in Australia explains that outdoor learning opportunities are mandated in their country; however, weather restrictions discourage outdoor experiences in the United States if the temperatures are above and below particular limits (Tonge, et al., 2019).

Impact of Student-Teacher Relationships

Negative behaviors in young children are also rising in many educational settings, from in-home childcare programs to preschool classrooms and even elementary schools. There are many theories as to why this is occurring. One idea is the interactions and relationships occurring in the classroom between teachers and students. According to the article, *Reducing Child Problem Behaviors and Improving Teacher-Child Interactions and Relationships: A Randomized Controlled Trial of BEST in CLASS*, “teachers’ interactions with children with problem behavior tend to be less positive than their interactions with children who do not demonstrate problematic behavior, leading to fewer learning opportunities for these children, less time engaged in classroom activities, and missed opportunities for learning critical school readiness skills” (Sutherland, et al., 2018).

Children participating in early childhood education and care programs rely on collaboration with adults to be successful in their learning and development. According to recent research in Washington, children who frequently exhibit negative behavior in early childhood may lack family involvement in the early childhood setting (Kelly, et al., 2022). Young children

thrive on positive relationships that are built with family-professional collaboration. Family involvement in early childhood settings can allow educators and family members to put a positive focus on the children's learning and development. A successful behavior support process could contribute to more effective intervention development and allow for concerns to be voiced when a strong, positive family-educator collaboration is created (Kelly, et al., 2022). This collaboration will provide greater behavioral support for children but is often not understood initially by the children's families.

In addition to family-professional collaboration comes co-caring relationships. Co-caring relationships are relationships in which more than one adult cares for a child. According to research published in *Child and Youth Care Forum* in 2020, co-caring relationships can influence the interactions and experiences of young children in their home and educational environments (Lang, et al., 2020). When teachers and families collaborate regarding the children's best interests, the relationships built between the children and teachers are more positive and stronger. In these relationships, the children are more likely to understand healthy problem-solving and social interaction strategies and stronger development of internalizing and externalizing appropriate behavioral standards (Lang, et al., 2020). This leads to a healthier student-teacher relationship, fewer negative behaviors, and increased social-emotional development. Teachers who seek to provide tools and resources for children to be successful will build educational experiences that will support their academic, behavioral, and social-emotional competencies (Bishop, et al., 2020).

Peer Relationships

The healthy development of children requires opportunities for positive socialization in early childhood environments, which will create successful relationships and interactions among children (Perolii-Shehu, 2019). In their early years, children must develop many skills they will use throughout their lives. These skills include communicating with adults and interacting with

peers in their learning environments, forming positive relationships with others, expressing their emotions, self-regulating, showing empathy, being motivated, and engaging socially (Alzahrani, et al., 2019). Interacting with peers in their learning environments will build healthy relationships as the children grow and develop. During these interactions, teachers can scaffold learning while encouraging social and emotional development.

According to research from 2019, teachers who have negative relationships with their students could cause children to exhibit more negative behaviors in the classroom and therefore create an environment where children dislike interacting with their peers (Alzahrani, et al., 2019). Communication skills must be modeled by teachers and caregivers for young children to develop healthy communication skills. When a teacher creates a negative relationship with a child, it creates a barrier for the child to bridge communication and relationship skills with their peers. Negative peer communication impacts children's social, emotional, and behavioral skills (Alzahrani, et al., 2019).

Inclusive Settings

On the opposing side of the behaviors revolving around social-emotional learning and the effects that come from classrooms is the idea of inclusiveness. Times are changing, and the push for more inclusive classrooms is becoming stronger each school year. This poses challenges for students with additional needs in the classroom and those who do not need extra support. PCB, persistent challenging behaviors, and social-emotional developmental delays are common situations where children may require additional support in the classroom. While teachers and families both have reservations about this new technique in learning, it is believed that with sufficient guidance and support in the classroom, teachers can play a critical role in creating an environment where all students can thrive (Carr & Boat, 2019).

Children in early childhood education and care programs or preschools can periodically engage in persistent challenging behaviors if they are not ready for school or have social-emotional delays (McGurie & Meaden, 2020). Teachers in inclusive classrooms may find this problematic initially; however, the outcome for the children can be much greater when they are provided with social opportunities with children of their age and developmental level. Children with social-emotional delays have a heightened risk of being held in that grade due to their delays (McGuire & Meaden, 2020). According to a research study conducted in 2018, instructional quality is more strongly related to academic outcomes. In contrast, emotional support provided by teachers is strongly predictive of the children's social, emotional, and behavioral skills (McCoy & Wolf, 2018). The most effective teachers for children with social-emotional delays and persistent challenging behaviors interact with the children positively within the classroom setting.

The dramatic play center in early childhood education and care programs promotes social-emotional development through play-based learning—children's natural curiosity to make real-life connections in the dramatic play center. Real-life connections promote social-emotional learning opportunities in which teachers can scaffold children's learning and provide meaningful social interactions. Teachers can model appropriate behaviors and interactions during playtime, allowing children to understand the social connections (Morrow & Rand, 1991). While the dramatic play center yields effective social-emotional interactions, teachers can use any other learning center or opportunity to promote social-emotional inclusion.

Summary

In early childhood programs within a home setting, children of mixed age ranges are often present in the same learning environment. This can pose additional areas of concern in the children's development. Looking back at Erikson's eight stages of psychosocial development poses the question of whether the children are sufficiently mastering the social

skills of their current developmental stage before being expected to meet the next stage's needs. This poses another challenge for the researchers when conducting their data collection and determining where changes can and should be made to increase positive teacher interactions and relationships with their students to decrease the negative behaviors that they are exhibiting.

Methodology

Research Questions:

Early childhood care and education is essential to children's growth and development. Implementing changes to a learning environment and teacher instruction can benefit children's development when current practices are inefficient. Two questions make up the basis of this research study. Quantitative data collection and analysis methods will be exercised in this study to answer the following questions:

- Can changes in my teaching practices improve children's behavior?
- Can social-emotional development be increased through changes within an in-home childcare program?

Research Site

This action research study will occur in the researcher's registered in-home childcare program, Julia Green's Daycare, in Marshalltown, Iowa. This is a private, for-profit business located in central Iowa. The in-home childcare program is an inclusive learning program that receives private pay and government-subsidized families. The study will be conducted during regular business hours of 7:00 A.M. to 5:00 P.M., Monday through Friday. The socioeconomic level of the families in this program ranges from middle to upper-middle-class families.

The children and staff were observed in the indoor learning environment only. Winter weather prohibited the use of the outdoor learning environment. The indoor learning

environment included learning centers for small group play and a large group learning area. Child-sized furniture was provided throughout the space, and the learning environment had many colorful materials. A separate space was available for infants; however, there were other spaces the infants occupied during childcare business hours. The separate area for infants was primarily used for napping infants in cribs. There were also materials available on a low shelf for infants to explore.

Participants

The participants in this study include fourteen children and three adults from the in-home childcare. The group of children will consist of eight girls and six boys. Of the girls included in the study, there were two one-year-olds, three three-year-olds, and three four-year-olds. Of the boys included in the study, there was one one-year-old, two two-year-olds, two three-year-olds, and one four-year-old. The children were all Caucasian and only spoke English. One student received services through an Individualized Education Program (IEP) for speech, motor development, and learning. All of the children in this study resided with both parents living in the home. Two of the children were siblings.

There were three teachers present during this action research study. The lead teacher had 17 years of early childhood experience in both center and in-home childcare settings. The second teacher had seven years of teaching and early childhood experience. Her experience stemmed from a kindergarten classroom to in-home childcare settings. The third teacher had eight months of early childhood experience. Her expertise included preschool centers and in-home childcare.

Timeline and Plan for Collecting Data

This action research project will occur over seven weeks, beginning on February 6, 2023, and ending on April 7, 2023. Progress monitoring of the children in this childcare program

is conducted quarterly using Ages and Stages through Iowa State University. The Ages and Stages of developmental monitoring will occur the week before the research from February 16-17, 2023, and again after the study concluded from April 6-7, 2023. Reliability was also provided by anecdotal notes and documentation that will be kept in the children's portfolios. Ages and Stages (ASQ) provided validity by documenting children's development.

The research was based on the experience of the teachers and their knowledge of how to use environmental and instructional changes to decrease negative behavior in the childcare program and increase positive social-emotional development in the children. The data collected from this research method is valid and reliable as the teachers will better understand the changes and how they affect the children and classroom environment. The research included various changes to the environment and how teachers respond to situations within the program and lower their expectations of the young children during their learning experiences. As changes were implemented, the lead teacher documented the change and when it began being implemented. The changes were made systematically and occurred over the first four weeks of the research. This allowed the last three weeks to have a complete conversion of all changes for the research. A sudden implementation of all changes at one time could be too overwhelming for the teachers and children, which would not yield accurate results for the research study. The validity and reliability of the data gathered from the observations of the environment were not provided, as many variables could affect the outcome of this data collection method.

Variables

The independent variable is gradually implementing environmental and instructional changes within the childcare program over four weeks. The changes that will be implemented include positive reinforcement of behavior, teacher modeling, student-led activities, and play-based learning. The dependent variable is the children's positive social-emotional development

and decrease in negative behavior. Confounding variables in the research are the children's ages, gender, special needs (IEPs), and the setting. Data collected includes observations of the children in the childcare setting during free play and teacher-led instruction time and Ages and Stages of developmental monitoring and assessments. Teacher interviews will also be conducted through paper copies to provide hands-on perspectives of changes that could be made to change behavior and social-emotional outcomes. This action research study is a quantitative study. An IRB form of exemption was filed, and the data will remain confidential to respect the privacy of all teachers and children included in this study.

Plan for Analyzing Data

Data collected through this research study, using the Ages and Stages Questionnaire, will be analyzed using the pretest and post-test scores in the social-emotional developmental area. The data will be analyzed to determine pretest and post-test score averages and standard deviations. The dependent samples two-tailed t-test will also be completed to determine any social-emotional developmental changes. Tally marks will be used to gather data about the positive and negative behaviors exhibited by the children. The data collected from the tally marks will be entered into graphs to compare changes before and after implementing environmental and instructional changes in the childcare program.

IRB Educational Exemption

An application for exemption was appropriate for this action research project. The Northwestern College Institutional Review Board in Orange City, Iowa approved and granted permission for the study to be conducted. No parent or student interviews were conducted. Observations conducted by the researcher of the children or teachers before and after any research change implementations were visual with written documentation. According to the United States Code of Federal Regulations, as read in the federal code § 46.104, this research

project poses no harm or discomfort to the human subjects and involves everyday educational practices or diagnostic tests (National Archives, 2018). This research was not conducted in a school or public preschool program. The research was conducted in a private registered in-home childcare program; therefore, an application for exemption was necessary.

Data Collection

Qualitative data collection methods were used in this research study to gather the necessary data for analysis. The first step in the data collection process was assessing the children with the Ages and Stages-Social-emotional Questionnaire (ASQ-SE:3). The initial ASQ: SE-3 assessment data was collected on February 16 and 17, 2023. This data collection provided the baseline data to determine any social, emotional, or behavioral changes in the children as environmental and instructional changes were implemented within the in-home childcare program. These assessments were completed and placed in the children's portfolios for review and comparison at the research study's conclusion.

Also, on February 16 and 17, 2023, additional qualitative data was collected from the teachers through interviews and surveys. The questions presented to the teachers were open-ended and administered with a paper copy that will be kept in the file for the study. Following the children's assessments and collecting data from the teachers, a list of environmental and instructional changes that should be implemented was compiled. The feelings and perceptions of the teachers are valuable in this research study as they can provide information on how the environment is viewed from the teacher's perspective and provide an opportunity to get an accurate understanding of the need for the research study.

The four changes were implemented over the first four weeks of the research study. One change per week was implemented between February 20, 2023 and March 17, 2023 to prevent the children from becoming overwhelmed. Anecdotal notes were taken each of the four weeks during the changes in the environment and instructional approaches. The four changes that

were implemented included: positive reinforcement of positive behavior with all teachers having the same expectations and method of approach, teachers modeling appropriate voice level, word choice, and classroom behavior, transitioning to child-led learning activities, and a focus on play-based learning.

The next three weeks of the research study, March 20-April 5, 2023, were used for observations of the classroom environment, teachers, and children that included the use of anecdotal notes. These observations captured data involving social-emotional skills as well as the behavior of the children in the program. Documentation was obtained that monitored the environmental and instructional changes being implemented into the program and how these changes impacted the children and teachers.

The last installment of the data collection process occurred on April 6-7, 2023. The ASQ: SE-3 assessment was completed again with the children for comparison to the assessments conducted at the introduction of the study. In addition to completing the assessments, the teachers were provided with a second survey to gauge changes in the children's social, emotional, and behavioral skills. All data collected from the research participants, including observation data, anecdotal notes, interview results, and personal information will be kept in a file with the sole purpose of the research study. This information will all remain confidential and securely stored.

Findings

Data Analysis

The data collected over the seven weeks showed increased social and emotional developmental scores for six children and decreased social and emotional developmental scores. Seven weeks does not seem to be a long enough time to yield an accurate representation of the impact of the implemented new strategies. Four weeks were spent implementing the changes, which allowed three weeks to observe the childcare program's

children and teachers. Table 1 provides statistical data representing the pretest and post-test scores of the children as well as their average pretest and post-test scores.

Table 1

Student progress data averages and standard deviations.

Student	Pre Test Scores	Post Test Scores					APA Write-Up
1	175	250	Pretest mean	210	Pretest standard deviation	49.369653	(M=210, SD=49.37)
2	280	285	Posttest mean	150.7142857	Posttest standard deviation	106.1359278	(M=150.71, SD=106.14)
3	225	255					
4	215	260					
5	275	285					
6	140	30					
7	140	40					
8	190	60					
9	165	65					
10	135	80					
11	220	55					
12	245	255					
13	145	50					
14	210	140					

Dependent samples t-tests were conducted to determine whether there were significant differences in the children’s social and emotional developmental scores through the Ages and Stages Questionnaires with changes to the childcare environment and instruction from the childcare staff. A baseline assessment revealed that the children scored an average of 210 (M=210, SD=49.7) on the social-emotional area of the ASQ assessment. The children participated in a seven-week intervention in which changes were implemented in the childcare learning environment, and the teachers revised their instructional approaches with the children. A second ASQ assessment was then conducted after the intervention. The children scored an average of 150.71 (M=150.71, SD=106.14) in the social-emotional assessment area in the post-test. Results of the dependent samples two-tailed t-test reveal a slight decrease in the difference between the baseline and final assessment, $t(13)=2.34, p<.036$. The intervention of

social-emotional changes in the childcare program decreased social-emotional development scores.

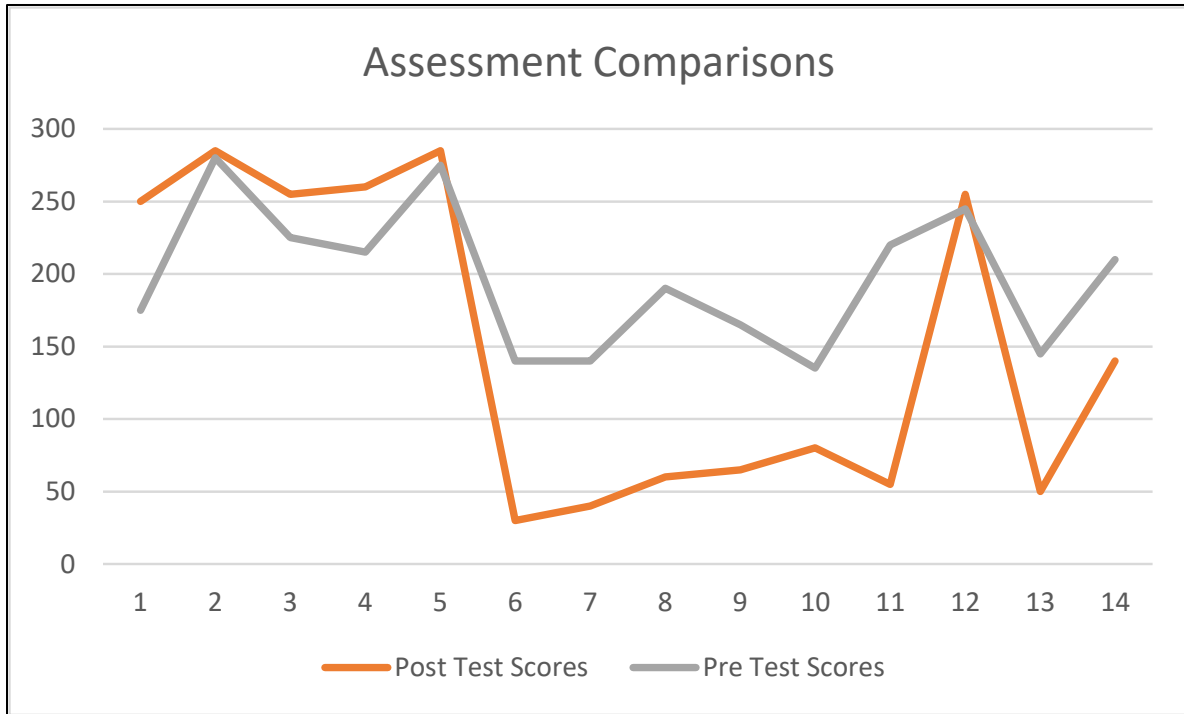
Table 2

Dependent Sample T-test

t-Test: Paired Two Sample for Means		
	<i>Variable 1</i>	<i>Variable 2</i>
Mean	197.1428571	150.7142857
Variance	2437.362637	11264.83516
Observations	14	14
Pearson Correlation	0.780675983	
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0	
df	13	
t Stat	2.338003837	
P(T<=t) one-tail	0.018011098	
t Critical one-tail	1.770933396	
P(T<=t) two-tail	0.036022197	
t Critical two-tail	2.160368656	

Figure 1

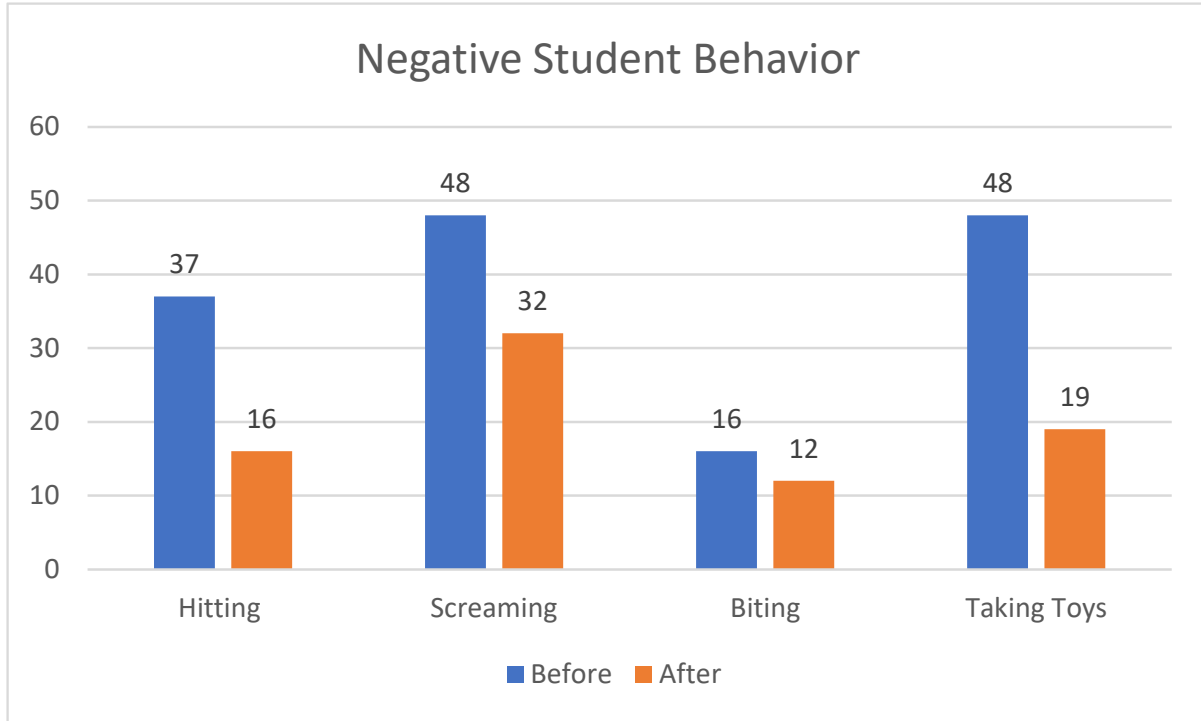
Comparison of student assessment scores



To assess children’s behavior, quantitative data was collected using visual observations in the childcare area. The researcher recorded each child’s positive and negative behaviors before and after implementing the environmental and instructional changes. Tally marks were gathered from the visual observations. A decrease in negative behaviors was revealed. The negative behaviors observed for this research study were hitting, screaming, biting, and taking toys. Other factors were not included when observing the negative behaviors exhibited in the classroom. It was not determined if a negative behavior from one child influenced a negative behavior reaction from another child, resulting in two negative behavior tally marks. Figure 2 compares the negative behaviors before and after the changes were implemented.

Figure 2

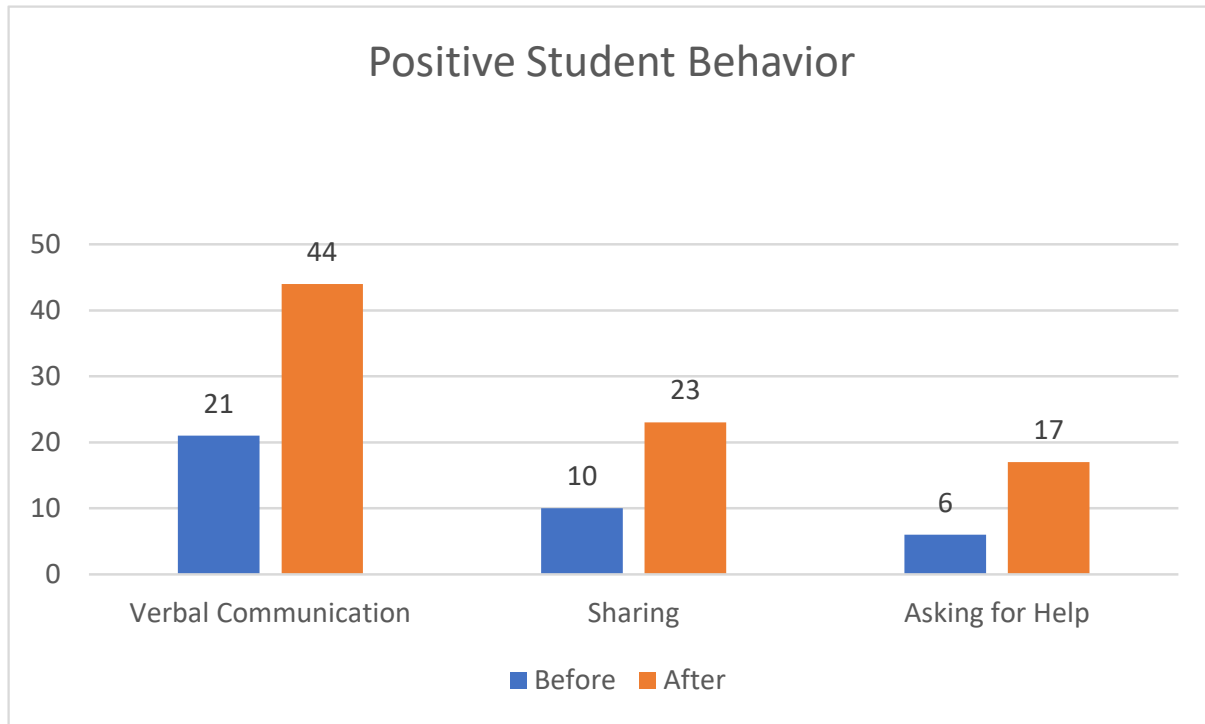
Comparison of negative student behaviors



During the visual observations of the childcare area, tally marks were gathered of positive behaviors before the implementation of changes, and an increase in positive behavior was revealed. The positive behaviors observed for this research study included verbal communication initiated by a child, sharing of toys and materials, and a child asking an adult for help. Figure 3 compares the positive behaviors before and after the changes were implemented.

Figure 3

Comparison of positive student behavior



In review, quantitative data collected during the visual observations and anecdotal notes were entered into a spreadsheet to be analyzed. Two-tailed t-test samples were completed to show the average social-emotional skills before and after implementing the program changes. As the researcher observed the children's positive and negative behaviors, tally marks were gathered. These results were organized by specific behavior, such as biting, hitting, screaming, taking toys, using verbal communication, sharing toys, and asking an adult for assistance in conflict resolution. These results were then graphed to compare children's behavior before and after the changes were implemented within the childcare program. Separate graphs were created for the positive and negative behavior comparisons. When analyzing the data, the researcher was looking for an increase in social-emotional development scores, an increase in positive behavior, and a decrease in negative behavior.

Discussion

Summary of Major Findings

The action research study of implementing environmental and instructional changes within an in-home childcare program resulted in a decrease in average scores of the Ages and Stages Questionnaire pretest and post-test scores. The data collected in this study may not be significant enough to support the research questions. There were varying results in the data that was collected during the study. Eight children, including a four-year-old female with special needs, all showed decreased social-emotional development scores. These eight children were of both male and female genders and varied in age. On the other hand, six children showed increased social-emotional development scores. The six children with increased social-emotional developmental scores were also of both male and female genders and varied ages.

Behavioral outcomes before and after the environmental and instructional changes were implemented showed an increase in positive behaviors and a decrease in negative behaviors. The negative behaviors included biting, screaming, hitting, and taking toys from other children. These behaviors each decreased by 25% from the research's beginning until the study's conclusion. The positive behaviors included using verbal communication to explain the child's wants or needs to others, sharing toys and materials, and asking an adult for help to solve a conflict. The positive behavior results doubled for verbal communication and sharing, while the results tripled for asking an adult to help resolve a conflict.

Impact on Teaching and Learning

In relation to teaching and learning, the results from this study provide data that encourages children to engage in positive learning experiences with their peers while adults facilitate learning through a play-based approach. These approaches will encourage strong, positive relationships between the children and adults in the childcare program. Social-emotional skills will continue to develop through play-based learning with teacher facilitation; however, these skills take time to develop and may not be observed in a short time frame, such as the seven weeks of this research study.

Alignment to Research

The children in this research study ranged in age from one to four years of age. It is possible that with a sizeable mixed-age group, the results may not be reflected as those in previous research studies. A positive learning environment and positive engagement during adult instruction are generally proven to yield positive results in social-emotional development, according to an article written by (Ingemarson, et al., 2018). The results from this study do not match previous research in this content area. Social-emotional skills develop at different rates for children, which should be considered when analyzing the data in this study. According to research by Sutherland, negative behavior and the consequences that follow it can result in missed opportunities for social-emotional learning with peers (Sutherland, et al., 2018). Children should be afforded opportunities that focus on positive behavior and social-emotional development.

Limitations of the Study

Two limitations to this research study were discovered during the research project. During this research study, the children were only limited to indoor play due to winter weather, which included frigid temperatures and wind chills. This study was conducted at the end of winter when children were already limited with outdoor play and learning experiences. Physical activity was limited to yoga, dancing, and indoor obstacle courses.

A second limitation of the study was identified with staff and children's illnesses. While all the children are enrolled full-time in this childcare program, and the three staff members are scheduled with full-time hours, full-time attendance was not maintained by four children and two staff during the research study. These changes in attendance due to health could have resulted in changes in the children and staff's energy level, focus, and mood, affecting the overall ability to have positive interactions. When teachers are not feeling well, the reactions to children's behaviors may be altered. These limitations can all affect the outcome of the research data.

Further Study

There is a significant amount of potential for future research on this research study topic. Future research and continuation of this study would be effective. Seven weeks is a short period to make observations that could yield significant results in social-emotional development and behavioral changes in young children through changes to the program's environment and adult instruction. According to the article, *The Effect of Social-Emotional Competence on Children's Academic Achievement and Behavioral Development*, "Children need a long time to develop these skills, so teachers must develop children's social and emotional competence every day through the use of various activities" (Alzahrani, et al., 2019). In this regard, it is noted that seven weeks is not a significant amount of time to assess changes related to social-emotional or developmental changes in children. Researchers could use the additional time to continue observations of exhibited behavior among the children and gather tally marks for each behavior. Additional time for the children to become acquainted with the changes in the program could provide different results in posttest social-emotional development scores.

A second future research possibility would be to monitor the behavior of individual children and find correlations between the children's social-emotional developmental pretest and posttest scores and the positive and negative behaviors they exhibit. Determining whether the children's social-emotional development increases and negative behavior decreases simultaneously. According to Kural and Ceylan, it is important for teachers to determine the desired and problematic behaviors of a child and to understand where the child is developmentally (Kural & Ceylan, 2022). The results from this research will help researchers determine if a child's social-emotional development level influences the behavior the child exhibits.

One last potential future research possibility would be to evaluate how an in-home childcare program with only one staff member would navigate these changes effectively. In this

study, three staff members were present for most of the study, and the staff members all managed the children and assisted with implementing changes for the study. Referring once again to the previous study by Kural and Ceylan, it was discussed that “educators’ knowledge and attitudes towards misbehaviors of children differ from each other” (Kural & Ceylan, 2022). One staff member in an in-home childcare program may find the changes yield different results because he or she is implementing them alone and can adjust the changes and observations of the children without needing to discuss the details with the other staff. When multiple staff members work with a group of children, they must all remain equal in their thoughts and actions regarding their development and behavior.

Conclusion

Early childhood care and education is a crucial part of every child’s development. Children are learning how to maneuver through this big world and are learning new things every day. Childcare professionals should promote a positive learning environment that allows children to grow and develop successfully. Change is often needed to create this successful learning environment, and it often takes a teacher stepping back and looking at the whole picture to determine what is needed to make the program more successful. When looking at the changes needed within a childcare program, teachers and educators should understand that social behaviors develop as a result of the learning environment, in both physical and social factors (Obaki, 2017). Implementing changes in family childcare programs should allow more social-emotional development and decrease negative behaviors as these changes are made. Successful social-emotional development and positive behavior are important for children to be ready for school. School readiness is part of the push for quality in early childhood programs in Iowa.

The literature review of this study explored a detailed overview of behavior in young children. This includes the expectations placed on teachers and childcare providers to achieve

higher academic levels at a younger age and understand young children's social-emotional developmental stages. To achieve successful social-emotional development and positive behavior in young children, a deep look into the impact of the learning environment must be completed. Identifying strong areas in the learning environment and areas that need improvement is essential to creating a healthier environment. Strong, positive relationships between the children and the teachers are also essential to a successful learning environment that promotes social-emotional development and positive behavior. These child-teacher relationships that are built in the childcare program will result in children increasing the relationships that they have with their peers. Overall, inclusive settings can also add to the social-emotional development of young children. "Classroom communities are built when children feel welcomed and included in the classroom environment by their teacher and peers because of their strengths, in celebration of their uniqueness, and in acceptance of their challenges" (McGuire & Meaden, 2020). Alternative learning opportunities can be experienced when children are exposed to different situations and are afforded opportunities to learn from them.

In the review of the research study, it was found that the average post-test social-emotional development scores were lower than the average pretest scores. This could be due to a short research period that did not allow the children and staff adequate time to adjust to the changes in the childcare program. This was not the expected outcome, as literature from the previous research study by Perolii-Shehu presented findings that proved positive environmental and instructional approaches increased social-emotional development; however, a more extended period was needed for the children to develop these skills (Perolii-Shehu, 2019). The other discovery was that the changes to the environment and instruction resulted in a decrease in negative behavior and an increase in positive behavior. As stated by Obaki in previous research, thoughtful school and classroom environmental design can shape children's self-

esteem and sense of belonging. When children develop these skills, they will interact openly with their peers in positive social interactions (Obaki, 2017).

Through the data collected and analyzed in this research study, it has been determined that continuing to create opportunities to promote positive changes in behavior and social-emotional development should remain a priority for all in-home childcare programs. Early childhood in-home professionals should understand that children's social-emotional development has levels to master and that the children need to master each stage of development before they can move to the next developmental level. According to previous research written by Perolii-Shehu, this stage progression will allow their confidence and independence to lead their social-emotional skill development (Perolii-Shehu, 2019). Further investigation into how social-emotional development influences children's behavior should be conducted.

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