

**The Effects of Social and Emotional Curriculum in the Homeschool Environment:  
A Qualitative Case Study**

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PREVIEW

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### Abstract

Social and emotional learning (SEL) has many benefits to students, and previous studies have focused on public and private, in-person learning environments. The homeschool environment has not been studied to determine the benefits of SEL, including increased academic outcomes. The problem was the poor student academic achievement due to the decline in learning in TK-12 homeschool settings heightened by COVID-19 shutdowns. The purpose of this qualitative case study was to investigate the effect of the addition of social and emotional learning curriculum in the TK-12 homeschool environment on student core curriculum achievement. The research was led by the invest-and-accrue model of conscientious theory and the social-emotional development theory. The first research question focused on the parents' perceptions of students' academic achievement after the inclusion of SEL lessons. The second focused on the reason for the changes in academic outcomes after the addition of SEL lessons. A total of 15 parents, chosen out of convenience, were interviewed on their perceptions of changes in academic outcomes and personal perspective on noticeable changes with the addition of SEL. Interviews were recorded for accuracy and transcribed to identify common themes found within the results. Data were collected, interpreted, ideas defined and coded based upon themes, and represented. Increased personal motivation and interpersonal skills were identified during the research process. Implementation of SEL lessons should begin at all levels of education and should be required by policymakers and school administrators.

*Keywords:* academic achievement, academic success, emotional knowledge, SEL, social-emotional learning, social skills, student growth

**Dedication**

For Josh and Lex, this would not have been possible without your endless support.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

In teaching the whole student, social and emotional learning (SEL) needs to be included as part of the learning process. Homeschool students require extra support in this area of learning due to limited interactions and parental attachment (Baidi, 2019). After the complete shutdowns and closures of the world during the COVID-19 pandemic, children in all learning environments began to struggle socially and emotionally (Çalışkani, 2022). Interactions with others and the outside world were reduced, especially for homeschool students, and some only interacted with close family.

Educating children should encompass all areas of learning; children need guidance in academics, social skills, emotional knowledge, and behavioral development (Nye, 2017). As students continue to learn and develop, so should the students' social and emotional skills. When students are offered the opportunity to grow social and emotional intelligence, finding a balance and understanding how to regulate emotions has been shown to aid in improving academics (Jones et al., 2019). This qualitative case study explored the effects of social and emotional learning in the homeschool environment. Improved academic outcomes after including social and emotional lessons in the homeschool agenda could influence more families and homeschools to include SEL lessons in daily interactions.

The coming sections go into greater depth about the qualitative case study. A qualitative case study allows for the participants to share personal experiences within the study (Bhangu et al., 2023). Background of the problem, statement of the problem, purpose of the study, significance of the study, research questions, theoretical framework, definitions of terms, assumptions, scope and delimitations, limitations, and a summary will be addressed. The

following information gives greater evidence of the reasoning behind the study, anticipated outcomes, and possible challenges within the study.

### **Background of the Problem**

Current research and literature focus on the separate factors of academic achievement, social and emotional learning, and the effects of social and emotional learning on academic achievement. Academic achievement improved when additional social and emotional supports were added to aid in student growth. Haeberlin et al. (2021) suggested programs having more personal interaction produce greater continued academic outcomes for students. The study indicated, with the increased interactions, 94% of students from a smaller, private school setting increased academic progress versus 60% of students from a public school setting. When considering academic success, good study habits (Islam, 2021) and positive learning experiences (Poulou, 2017) should be considered along with understanding the student's current academic levels.

Social and emotional learning adds another layer to academic achievement. As students and teachers learn and grow together in cognitive, social, and emotional areas, stronger relationships develop through shared experiences (Cullen et al., 2017). Student-teacher growth and learning, according to the five core competencies of the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL), allow students to develop the skills and tools needed to ask for help as necessary. Student mental health is also a factor in social and emotional learning. Davenport-Kellogg and Stevenson (2022) reported 12% of children could develop an anxiety disorder, which increases with traumatic experiences such as the COVID-19 shutdowns. Giving students skills and tools for social and emotional learning can be helpful in unfamiliar situations.

The effects of social and emotional learning on academic achievement stem from understanding needs, academic struggles, stress, and social awareness. Studies have shown a correlation between social and emotional learning and academic achievement. Kaşıkçı and Özhan (2021) completed a study which concluded students who had learned social and emotional skills had an 18% change in academics overall. Improving students' competence in the SEL areas of self-awareness, behaviors, and relationships can support greater overall student growth.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The problem was poor student academic achievement due to the decline in learning in a TK-12 homeschool setting heightened by COVID-19 shutdowns (Çalışkani, 2022). School closures affected 138 countries worldwide, approximately 80% of all children, delaying educational growth and creating a gap in mathematics and literacy (Van Lancker & Parolin, 2020). Student achievement was impacted due to a decrease in social and emotional growth and deficits in learning and academics. George et al. (2021) stated after the initial COVID-19 shutdowns, as students began to return to school and learning in fall of 2020, overall math skills gained before the shutdowns were 67% of prior years, and reading skills were at 87% of prior years. A study on students' social and emotional understanding compared to cognitive abilities indicated a 90% positive correlation between the two, meaning the greater the SEL knowledge, the greater the students' cognitive abilities (Hachem et al., 2022). This correlation would indicate by introducing SEL lessons into the homeschool learning environment, student achievement should increase.

The achievement gaps created during the COVID-19 shutdowns continue to interfere with student engagement and progress (Çalışkani, 2022). Current research on homeschool

students tends to be sparse, specifically on the effects of SEL and academic achievement.

Defining the correlations could provide evidence for more homeschool families to include SEL in instructional time. In concluding this study, more information was added to the literature on the relationship of SEL and academic achievement, specifically in the homeschool environment. The research provides information on SEL and directs research to the homeschool environment.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to investigate the effect of the addition of social and emotional learning curriculum in the TK-12 homeschool environment on student core curriculum achievement. Understanding the correlation between homeschool students' academic achievement and the processing of social and emotional needs was the aim of this study. A qualitative case study was conducted since case studies focus on the research strategy (Yin, 1981). This qualitative case study included in-depth interviews with the parents of 15 homeschool students in northern California. Interviews took place after the completion of SEL lessons and discussed the students' achievements and behaviors. Using a qualitative case study, the participants shared experiences through personal insights.

This research aimed to identify a connection between the implementation of SEL lessons and improved student achievement in the core curriculum and the homeschool environment. Parents of students at a northern California TK-12 charter school homeschool were contacted to participate. Interactions between the families, teachers, and outside vendors occurred virtually for 17 months after the COVID-19 shutdowns. If positive academic achievement can be correlated to SEL lessons, the families may continue to implement SEL lessons. The information gained from this research could be applied to a greater scope.

### **Significance of the Study**

Identifying a connection between SEL and academic achievement in a homeschool environment could begin to fill a gap in research. Previous studies on SEL or academic achievement and SEL focused on either public or private schools, such as the public school SEL study by Siquera de Souza et al. (2022). Charter school (public school) homeschool environments found in previous studies (Baldi, 2019) need to be more visible and discuss SEL. In defining the correlation between homeschool and SEL, more information is available to the homeschool community to make informed decisions on implementing SEL into regular studies. This information could create positive associations with school and develop new facets to improve student achievement in homeschool.

The information gained from thoroughly researching SEL on academic achievement in homeschool students may lead to implementing required SEL lessons at participants' school site. Knowledge gained will be shared with teachers within the school site and possibly neighboring homeschools for greater implementation within the geographic area to improve student academic achievement. Professional information will be shared with homeschool teachers in the area to aid in students' overall growth and achievement. Workshops and professional training will be available to fellow homeschools and homeschool families who operate independently. The implementation of SEL in more homeschool environments could lead to greater academic achievement and improvement in overall student wellness. Eventually, policy changes statewide could require SEL in homeschool environments to ensure student growth in all areas. When students' mental health and wellness are improved, academics also improve (Hachem et al., 2022).



### **Research Questions**

The parents of homeschool students were asked to implement SEL lessons during regular learning time and then answer ten interview questions about the perceived changes found after the implementation. Interviews completed for the case study allowed parents to share personal accounts within the study (Dobbins et al., 2021). Parent perceptions of students' academic achievement and behaviors led to data defining the results. After completing the lessons and interview, the data collected were explored to answer the following research questions:

Research Question 1: How do stakeholders explain the effect of the addition of social and emotional curriculum on student academic achievement in a homeschool environment?

Research Question 2: Why do stakeholders experience a change in academic achievement in a homeschool environment after the addition of the SEL lessons?

### **Theoretical Framework**

The first theory guiding the research was the invest-and-accrue model of conscientious theory. This theory is based on cost-benefit analysis, meaning once the benefits of actions are identified, the more likely the person is to continue the actions for further success. Hill and Jackson (2016) identified continued future success for students after connections between learning and achievement were identified. Social-emotional development theory was the second theory guiding the research. As a student's understanding of personal and emotional needs increases, the student is better equipped to recognize challenges, leading to greater academic outcomes based on the social-emotional theory (Malti et al., 2018).

Both theories formed the study's theoretical framework aimed to improve academic achievement. The invest-and-accrue model framework guides improved achievement through learning and implementing new behaviors when success is recognized (Hill & Jackson, 2016).

Social-emotional development theory lends to improved academic outcomes when personal needs and challenges are easier to recognize. Therefore, students can request help when needed (Malti et al., 2018). Combining the two frameworks supports allowing students to gain personal and emotional knowledge and learn how to request help when needed, and after seeing the success of requesting help, continuing efforts to follow those steps repeatedly.

The frameworks relate to the different areas of the study through the open-endedness of the conclusions. As a qualitative case study, the theoretical framework set a guide for measuring progress in the study but not setting exact definitions (Algozzine & Hancock, 2017). The framework did not define positive outcomes, but clarified how positive outcomes would be obtained. Research questions relating to achievement correlated to both theories as social and emotional understanding leads to students asking for help as needed, and recognizing improvement and repeating the action relates to the invest-and-accrue theory (Hill & Jackson, 2016).

Stakeholders perceived changes in the homeschool environment related to students' social and emotional development through changes in attitude and behaviors in response to positive outcomes recognized by the student (Hill & Jackson, 2016; Malti et al., 2018). Open-ended interview questions allowed parents to share thoughts and experiences and explain the student academic and behavioral changes. The academic and emotional changes identified by the parent differed for each student, and analyzing the data to recognize themes in the observed changes allowed for an accurate interpretation of results. A broad understanding of academic success and change in a student's environment is created through the theoretical framework's unrestricted terms. The subsequent Chapter 2 includes the frameworks and the correlation between academic success and learning environment.

### Definition of Terms

The following terms are defined for the purposes of use in this research. The terms may have alternative meanings. Definitions listed below are in reference to the use and related to this research.

*Academic achievement* is defined as increased knowledge and academic performance by a student (Ozyildirim, 2022).

*Academic habits* are defined as improved physical activity and eating habits leading to an overall healthier lifestyle (Alshammari et al., 2022).

*Academic success* is defined as a student's growth and improved academic function while attending school (Haeberlein et al., 2021).

*CASEL core competencies* are defined as the five lessons created by the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning. The lessons include self-awareness, self-management, responsible decision-making, relationship skills, and social awareness (Huynh et al., 2019).

*Social and emotional learning (SEL)* is defined as learning in the domains of social and emotional experiences (Cullen et al., 2017).

*Social awareness* is defined as supporting the well-being of others and being considerate to people around us (Clark et al., 2022).

### Assumptions

Yin (2017) described assumptions in a qualitative case study as the control over the situation the researcher has whereby the study focuses on the questions. The first assumption in this study was the interview responses collected through the data instrument provided complete and thorough responses from the participants. Participants answered honestly and with complete

understanding was the second assumption of this study. Finally, the last assumption was the participants were honest about the number of SEL lessons completed by the student to net the outcomes. The assumptions need to be defined to have a complete and honest understanding of the impacts of SEL on academic achievement in the homeschool environment (Yin, 2017).

### **Scope and Delimitations**

Scope in a qualitative case study investigates a real-life scenario in an all-encompassing method (Yin, 2017). The scope of this research included interviews with the parents of 15 charter school homeschool students from northern California who agreed to complete SEL lessons alongside regular core curriculum. Lessons were provided by the student's parent rather than a teacher or outside source. The parent completed lessons with the student over 4 weeks. Students receiving the lessons from parent educators ranged from transitional kindergarten to Grade 12.

Delimitations are the parameters of the study participants and the characteristics (Algozzine & Hancock, 2017). The delimitations within this study included a small group of 15 participants to be interviewed from one charter school homeschool in northern California, and the lessons were instructed by the parent. The defined group limited the transferability since the sample size was smaller, leading to fewer participant experiences. Being a charter school homeschool limited the transferability to private, individual homeschool families who operate independently from the public school system (Algozzine & Hancock, 2017). Finally, the parent was the primary educator in the SEL lessons, limiting the transferability to other homeschools with credentialed teacher-led lessons. The delimitations were created out of convenience and accessibility.

### **Limitations**

Any factors beyond the researcher's control which affect the study's outcomes are defined as limitations (Algozzine & Hancock, 2017). One limitation of this study was the participants could decide to share only the information with which they were comfortable, and only the participants had control over the answers. A second limitation was the results of the interviews did not have statistical backing, meaning the results were more objective (Algozzine & Hancock, 2017). Finally, the time frame of this research did not accurately depict the abilities of SEL lessons on a student if given the whole year to learn and develop while continuing to learn core academics. The limitations may have affected the study's dependability as the results may not have been completely accurate based on the parents' openness to share and the limited time available to fully process the curriculum to indicate an impact (Algozzine & Hancock, 2017). Transferability may have been impacted due to the limited information and the need for more statistics to apply the data collected to other school types.

Bias is found within research, even though researchers try to minimize bias by operating independently (Jacob & Foth, 2019). For teachers, professional learning opportunities create bias in the connection between academic improvement and SEL lessons. Students' information was kept confidential to minimize bias, and a nonhomogeneous group was used for study purposes (Jacob & Foth, 2019). Any information shared beyond the interview questions which could affect the outcome was kept in a password-protected, online notes application. Retaining additional information maintained the equity of the study and researcher.

### **Chapter Summary**

This qualitative case study aimed to investigate the effects on the academic achievement of TK-12 charter school homeschool students after the addition of SEL lessons within daily

learning. Current literature focuses on academic achievement, social and emotional learning, and the effects of social and emotional learning on students in public or private in-person learning institutions (Cullen et al., 2017; Kaşıkçı & Özhan, 2021; Ozyildirim, 2022). Defining how the objectives translate to a public charter school homeschool, where the parents educate the students daily and define the outcomes, is essential for the homeschool community nationally and abroad. Outcomes defined in this study could lead to more professional knowledge for teachers and parents in the homeschool environment and possibly improve student outcomes academically. Research questions sought to define the changes stakeholders found after the addition of SEL lessons and why stakeholders believed the changes occurred. Possible positive outcomes in the study were indicated through the invest-and-accrue model of consciousness theory and social-emotional development theory (Hill & Jackson, 2016; Malti et al., 2018). The scope and limitations of the study shared the small group being studied and how the group size and timeline might affect the overall study outcomes.

The following two chapters will provide a detailed literature review and the methodology and design. A literature review will use recent articles to connect the invest-and-accrue model of consciousness theory and social-emotional development theory to the growth of students who receive SEL lessons (Hill & Jackson, 2016; Malti et al., 2018). Together the theories indicate the student's prospective growth and academic improvement due to greater knowledge in all areas. The methodology and design chapter will explain the reasoning supporting the qualitative case study design and further provide information on conducting the research and analyzing the data.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

Limited interactions and parental attachment create a deficit for homeschool families, and homeschool students struggle more in social and emotional learning in comparison to in-person school counterparts (Baidi, 2019). Following the COVID-19 pandemic and shutdowns, students began to struggle even more in all areas of learning, including socially, emotionally, and academically. Homeschool students' interactions with family members and peers were reduced consequently, including some students only interacting with family members within the home. Children need guidance and education in all areas of growth and development, including academics, social skills, emotional knowledge, and behavioral development (Nye, 2017).

The problem was poor student academic achievement due to the decline in learning in a TK-12 homeschool setting heightened by COVID-19 shutdowns (Çalışkani, 2022). The purpose of this qualitative case study was to investigate the effect of the addition of social and emotional learning curriculum in the TK-12 homeschool environment on student core curriculum achievement. This study aimed to determine participants' perspectives on whether student academic outcomes would improve when including SEL curriculum in the homeschool workload.

Current literature focuses on academic achievement factors, social and emotional learning, and the effects of social and emotional learning on academic achievement (Cullen et al., 2017; Kaşıkçı & Özhan, 2021; Ozyildirim, 2022). The literature review establishes many factors and areas of development and learning which can affect academic performance. When students are taught new tools and methods of social and emotional concept areas, all-around growth is seen. This concept of thriving in all areas after the addition of new social and emotional tools and methods adds to the correlation between social and emotional learning and

academic achievement (Kaşıkçı & Özhan, 2021). A gap in the current literature on how adding social and emotional learning would affect the more solitary homeschool environment has been identified. There are indications the addition of social and emotional lessons will give homeschooled students more positive academic outcomes (Kaşıkçı & Özhan, 2021). However, in brick-and-mortar school sites, the lessons are typically given by a classroom teacher. In the homeschool environment, lessons are taught by the parent who is acting as the daily educator. Also, studies looked to identify if all areas of student development are improved through the lessons (Jiang et al., 2022) and if the effects mimic brick-and-mortar student counterparts.

This literature review addresses the invest-and-accrue model of conscientiousness theory and social-emotional development theory and how the theories relate to the study's theoretical framework and students' academic achievement (Hill & Jackson, 2016; Malti et al., 2018). More succinctly, the review focuses on academic achievement factors, including habits to improve achievement and success. There is also a focus on social and emotional learning in conjunction with CASEL core competencies (Ahmed et al., 2020), student-teacher growth, and student mental health (Stark et al., 2021). Finally, the review explores the effect of social and emotional learning on academic achievement (Kaşıkçı & Özhan, 2021), along with analyzing a personal understanding of needs and academic struggles and using social and emotional skills to understand stress and social awareness (Clark et al., 2022; Lemberger-Truelove et al., 2020).

### **Literature Search Strategy**

This literature review was conducted in the following search databases: ProQuest, ERIC, ACE OneSearch, and EBSCOhost. Keywords used when searching for the information (Bowden & Purper, 2022) included *social and emotional learning*, *SEL*, *social skills*, *emotional knowledge*, *academic achievement*, *academic habits*, *academic success*, *CASEL core*