THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING ON PSYCHOLOGICAL FACTORS AND ENVIRONMENTAL STIMULI FOR DISADVANTAGED STUDENTS

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Tanika Johnson, April 2018
Abstract

The purpose of this study is to investigate the impact of social and emotional learning on psychological factors that influence disadvantaged students’ environmental responses. Additionally, the study assesses the short-term and long-term outcomes of social and emotional deficiencies that affect inferior academic outcomes and educational achievement gaps.

The research participants of this study were comprised of 45 administrators, educators, school support personnel and related service providers, school counselors, mental health practitioners, rehabilitation professionals, and counseling educators in Tennessee. For this study, the researcher used surveys, facilitated focus groups, administered in-depth one-on-one interviews, generated field notes, obtained audio and video recordings, and gathered transcripts. These sources of data included participants’ perceptions of children’s social competence; social skills; physiological, environmental, curricular and instructional capabilities; and social and emotional events and occurrences. Social and emotional learning significantly impacts the school and community. It is the foundation for solving real-world problems, applying academic and non-academic knowledge, and thriving in an ever-changing society. The recurrent themes within the research study were (a) social, emotional, and cultural support, (b) district-wide and school-wide professional development, (c) parent professional development on academic and parenting skills training, (d) parental connections with community resources and employment agencies, (e) accessibility of resources, (f) increased visibility of community stakeholders, and (g) a community-driven curriculum that incorporates social and emotional learning, as well as 21st century skills and workforce development.
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Chapter 1: Introduction

In this modern era, children must be able to problem-solve in order to engage with peers and adults and to build resiliency and positive mechanisms for coping with negative stressors (Martin et al., 2015). Currently, there is a noteworthy emphasis on the racial, ethnic, and economic disparities that impact cognitive outcomes and academic success. There has also been a lack of focus on improving social and emotional development. With these poor outcomes, it is worth investigating home and environmental factors, school settings, and community influences that affect child development.

These elements greatly contribute to the social and emotional well-being of young children (Martin et al., 2015). Social and emotional development is paramount to a child’s self-concept, emotion regulation, and social relationships. Home and environmental factors such as poverty, single-parent households, and parents lacking a high school diploma all knowingly affect a child’s emotion regulation. For this reason, it is crucial for adults and children to partake in social and emotional learning experiences that enhance positive life achievements. Home, school, and community environments are gateways for offering stimulation and resourceful opportunities to combat the negative impact of poor social and emotional development.

A child’s earliest experiences influence brain functioning, responses to stress, and his or her ability to form trusting relationships with peers and adults (Martin et al., 2015). Throughout the primary grades, the brain undergoes the most growth for social and emotional development. During this time, children are developing their language, as well as fine and gross motor skills; integrating higher-ordered thinking skills; and understanding the emotions of themselves, peers, and adults. Children’s abilities to obtain new knowledge are greatly affected by peer-to-peer and child-to-adult interactions, and by efforts to control instantaneous impulses.
The first three years of a child’s life are critical to his or her development and capacity to experience the emotional or psychological state of another human being (California Department of Education, 2017). It is during this time that a child develops the concept of empathy. Empathy relates to ascertaining an individual’s feelings, understanding the feelings of another person, and reacting empathetically to someone else’s suffering. The entire notion of empathy reveals the social nature of emotion. In part, it connects the feelings of two or more individuals.

It is evident that human life is based on the foundation of relationships. Throughout one’s lifetime, empathy permits the building of solid social bonds. Therefore, there is a linkage between empathy and prosocial behavior. Prosocial behaviors such as helping, sharing, and comforting or displaying concern for others exemplify the development of empathy. The practice of empathy is believed to be associated with the development of moral behavior. One of the most significant ways to encourage the development of empathy in early childhood is fostering a culture of compassion in the classroom environment. This involves aiding children in comprehending the emotions of others in their interpersonal relationships, as well as promoting warm and compassionate interactions among teachers, students, and their peers.

Social and emotional development refers to the shift in a child’s ability to respond and interrelate to his or her social environment (Martin et al., 2015). This development encompasses the many complexities of child development.

Social and emotional development is articulated into temperament, attachment, social skills or social competence, and emotion regulation. Temperament is described as the manner in which a child acts and responds to various situations, parents and parental figures, and unfamiliar adults. Attachment is the emotional bond shared between a child and his or her parents or parental figures. Social skills or social competence relates to the child’s ability to form
connections with others. Emotion regulation refers to the child’s ability to manage his or her emotions and responses to the environment.

Throughout a child’s primary and intermediate years, there are specific milestones that predict the successful attainment of social and emotional skills (Martin et al., 2015). In some cases, children may encounter these milestones earlier on or later in their development. The development of secure attachments is necessary for fostering positive relationships with children and parental figures, reducing social and emotional deficiencies in childhood and adulthood, promoting healthy relationships with peers and adults, and building trusting relationships. Without these trusting relationships, children are at greater risk of developing social and emotional deficiencies. Early intervention is a necessity for repairing social and emotional development. A child’s ethnicity, culture, background, language, and beliefs are major contributors to social and emotional development. With that in mind, it is essential to take into account the impact of stimulating and enriching environments that positively promote child development and growth.

**Background of the Study**

There is a massive amount of evidence that reveals the significant impact of social-emotional literacy and skills on a child’s social, interpersonal, and academic well-being (Karimzadeh, Ajilchi, Oskoei, & Tahmasebi, 2014). Social-emotional literacy and skills generally impact a student’s individual intelligence. Children that exhibit advanced social-emotional skills are more prone to greater academic success and attain an enhanced quality of communication. From this perspective, school systems are major contributors and accountable forces for a student’s failure or success and adjustment to society.
Altogether, schools offer a formal and structured environment for elementary, middle, and high school students to cope with behavioral and educational issues (Karimzadeh et al., 2014), and the most noteworthy preventive programs have their origins in education. Schools are obligated to concentrate on social and emotional factors and center their efforts on the relationship between cognitive skills and literacy in academic achievement. If school districts combine their efforts in elevating academic, social, and emotional learning, they can then attain the utmost and highest success rates in educational and training outcomes.

Social and emotional learning aids students with their adaptations to various changes in globalization, acquisition of lifelong learning skills, and academic attainment (Arslan, 2016). Additionally, social and emotional learning refers to a child’s ability to adequately regulate his or her emotions, enhance problem-solving skills, and form positive social relationships. The aforementioned skills are critical for all school-aged children. Social and emotional learning promotes optimistic attitudes, skills, and behaviors that are required for students to build healthy relationships (with teachers and classmates) and to collaborate effectively. Empathy, respect, cooperation, emotional regulation, self-control, goal setting, and critical thinking and problem-solving skills are paramount to social and emotional learning. Furthermore, social and emotional learning integrates the process of thinking, feeling, and behaving to build self-awareness, control behaviors, and establish accountability for positive decision-making.

**Research Problem**

Pre-kindergarten through second-grade students are impacted by different psychological and social environmental factors that are instinctively a significant component of their lives. Social environments, interactive relationships, and emotional dimensions influence academic outcomes and educational achievement. A significant review of the research contributes to the
development of student and teacher relationships, social environmental factors, and student outcomes. Additional research is warranted on the topics of emotional and environmental risk factors, family risk factors, and individual child risk factors.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to investigate the impact of social and emotional learning on psychological factors that influence disadvantaged students’ environmental responses. Additionally, this study will assess the short-term and long-term outcomes of social and emotional deficiencies that affect inferior academic outcomes and educational achievement gaps.

Positive social and emotional growth is an indicator of cognitive development, academic growth and achievement, and future success in adulthood. School readiness, together with social and emotional health and development, are necessary to combat negative social constructs experienced by disadvantaged students.

**Research Questions**

1) How does students’ social and emotional learning impact psychological factors?

2) How does social and emotional learning influence disadvantaged students’ responses to environmental stimuli?

**Rationale for the Study**

The problem of disadvantaged students having inferior academic backgrounds is a clear indication of the need for social and emotional learning, as well as academic growth and achievement (Elias, White, & Stepney, 2014). These students are at higher risk of academic failure, violence, and dropout. Therefore, it is critical to establish turnaround models that create sustained efforts to improve academic outcomes that are comparable to their same-aged, affluent peers. In the current educational landscape, school systems are more accountable for employing
school-wide changes that devote more time and resources towards increasing resiliency, productivity, accountability, and academic outcomes (i.e., academic performance). School districts are charged with closing achievement gaps and preparing all students for college and careers. Disadvantaged students can no longer be excluded from opportunities afforded to their higher-achieving peers with higher socioeconomic status. There is a reasonable relationship between socioeconomic status, ethnicity, and achievement amongst ethnic minorities and children of lower social classes. It is the disadvantages that are obstructing the academic growth and achievement of these students. In a historical context, there is a broader scope of challenges that are deeply rooted.

**Background of Researcher**

The researcher is a kindergarten through 12th-grade education consultant, special education teacher, Licensed Professional Counselor-Mental Health Service Provider (LPC-MHSP), and National Certified Counselor (NCC). In this capacity, the researcher mentors, coaches, and trains administrators, faculty, and staff on the implementation of social and emotional development programs that reinforce higher student learning outcomes. For this reason, the primary and intermediate school years are the foundation for healthy social and emotional development and positive academic outcomes. During these times, students can form positive or negative social and emotional attachments that gravely impact their cognitive, behavioral, and social and emotional development. The school setting creates a framework for social and emotional interactions that promote growth and academic competencies. It is through these experiences that children develop resiliency or social and emotional barriers. School systems can design pathways for interpersonal and academic success from pre-kindergarten to 12th grade. They can set the stage for early relationships and healthy brain development, school
success, timely interventions, and opportunities to build social awareness in a complex society (Georgetown University Center for Child and Human Development, n.d.).

**Researcher Relationship to Problem**

The researcher recognizes the potential of teacher and student engagement, as well as social and emotional learning, as factors that influence academic achievement (Gehlbach, 2017). If students enhance their proficiencies in social and emotional learning, they will then have a higher inclination to succeed worldwide. Social and emotional learning is best identified as a means for strengthening students ‘outlook in relation to psychological, societal, and environmental stimuli. If students frequently partake in the social perspective-taking process and embrace a detective mindset, then their abilities and skillsets will flourish. Social and emotional learning enables students to develop empathy, understanding, and concern for the outside world.

The researcher has observed a number of children and adolescents who struggle with emotion regulation (Daunic et al., 2013). At the moment, a substantial number of young people exhibit prolonged emotional and behavioral challenges. Throughout early childhood, emotional and behavioral disorders continue to remain consistent. Quite often, these disorders are foretelling of future problems and negative consequences in adolescence and adulthood. Additionally, disadvantaged children, who display emotional and behavioral disorders and struggle to comprehend difficult social situations, are associated with poor self-regulation.

**Definition of Terms (Terms or Phrases Specific to the Study)**

Relating to the impact of social and emotional learning on psychological factors and environmental stimuli for disadvantaged students, the following terms are utilized for the purposes of the research study: social and emotional learning, emotional understanding, emotional recognition, emotional understanding and academic achievement, social and learning
competencies, competency clusters, self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, responsible decision-making, relationship skills, grit, self-control, growth mindset, disadvantaged students, and inferior academic backgrounds. Due to varying definitions in the literature, the following terms are defined below for clarity.

*Social and emotional learning* is broadly defined as a process for acquiring the knowledge, attitudes, and skillsets to detect and regulate emotions, set and accomplish positive goals, exhibit compassion for others, create and sustain positive relationships, demonstrate responsible decision-making, and effectively manage interpersonal situations. Additionally, it comprises a variety of elements such as identifying, interpreting and expressing emotions (Maguire, Niens, McCann, & Connolly, 2016).

*Emotional understanding* entails the ability to recognize and assess emotions. In essence, this is a basic social task (Maguire et al., 2016). Therefore, emotional discrimination, emotional regulation, and cognitive control are critical from childhood to adulthood. A child’s emerging emotional understanding allows him or her to navigate a multifaceted social and academic school environment, and to cultivate prosocial behaviors.

*Emotional recognition* is the ability to ascertain facial expressions with a considerable amount of emotional information (Maguire et al., 2016). Children who lack emotional recognition may misconstrue other children’s and adults’ emotions. These children may unveil externalizing behaviors that interrupt teaching and learning.
Emotional understanding and academic achievement are indicators in pre-school children of prosocial or problematic behaviors that are linked to emotional recognition and appraisal (Maguire et al., 2016).

Social and learning competencies are well defined as the cognitive, effective, and behavioral competencies required for a child and adolescent to succeed in school, work, and life endeavors (Devaney, 2015).

Competency clusters are five clusters that, according to CASEL (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning), include self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, responsible decision-making, and relationship skills (Devaney, 2015).

Self-awareness enables the child to understand his or her emotions and their influences on behavior (Devaney, 2015).

Self-management is the child’s ability to exhibit self-concept during distressing situations, develop goals and attain them, and maintain emotions (Devaney, 2015).

Social awareness is the child’s ability to identify acceptable behaviors in specific settings and empathize with peers and adults (Devaney, 2015).

Responsible decision-making is the child’s ability to adhere to social standards, consequences, and circumstances (Devaney, 2015).
**Relationship skills** refer to the child’s ability to effectively communicate, adequately listen and respond, and negotiate conflict (Devaney, 2015).

**Grit** is the ability to retain interest and persevere toward long-term goals (Devaney, 2015).

**Self-control** is the ability to control behaviors and regulate emotions (Devaney, 2015).

**Growth mind-set** is the certainty that ability can shift and arises from hard work and determination (Devaney, 2015).

**Disadvantaged students** are those whose family, social, or economic circumstances hinder their ability to learn at school (RAND Education, 2017). This research addresses the fact that these students lack the typical necessities and comforts of everyday life (i.e., adequate housing, proper medical attention, and educational opportunities). This places them into the categories of being underprivileged and deprived of a good quality of life.

**Inferior academic backgrounds** refer to students who have historically been classified as ranking lower as opposed to their more affluent peers. As a result, their ability to achieve higher academic outcomes has been diminished. Regrettably, they have been labeled as socially and intellectually inferior to their more well-off classmates.

**Summary**

In summary, social and emotional development is vital to a student’s ability to develop self-confidence, trust, empathy, language usage, and cognitive inquisitiveness (Waltz, n.d.).
There is a major correlation between social and emotional development and academic, social, and emotional success. Social and emotional development is affected by biology, relationships, and the environment. Biology includes the student’s temperament and other genetic influences. Relationships and bonds formed with parents and parental figures, family, adults, and peers are key drivers of social and emotional development. Environmental factors such as toxins, child abuse, poverty, and community violence largely affect social and emotional development. Poverty and sociocultural factors such as gender inequality and low maternal education elevate a child’s danger of biological and psychological risk factors (Tinajero, Cohen, & Ametorwo, 2016). These risk factors may adversely impact brain development and its biological progression, as well as sensorimotor, cognitive, and social and emotional skills. Most importantly, poverty impedes a child’s access to healthcare and education services, auspicious home and community conditions, and opportunities to excel in life. Therefore, social and emotional development is paramount to a student's level of confidence and academic and cognitive achievement.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

**Broad Historical Literature on the Topic**

Poor social and emotional well-being can be evident in an array of negative behaviors, emotions, and thoughts ("The State of Victoria’s Children," 2010). While some children may develop a mental health problem or diagnosis, social and emotional well-being is not an equal comparison. Because of the intricate developmental stages that children encounter from birth to 17, there is not one sole constant measure for every child and adolescent. Positive physical outcomes, positive peer relationships, school readiness, and achievement predict a child’s social and emotional well-being. Childhood and adolescence constitute the early foundation for effectively controlling challenges in adulthood. Hence, children that lack a healthy social and emotional well-being will experience home and environmental difficulties, as well as poor interpersonal relationships and academic achievement. Generally, these children face more negative emotions (i.e., depression, worry, and stress), aversive behaviors (i.e., bullying), and disengagement from the learning environment.

In the growth and development of young children, the first five years are a crucial time (California Childcare Health Program, 2006). During the early years, children develop social and emotional skills that depend upon genes and biology (i.e., physical and mental health, and brain development), as well as environmental and social mechanisms (i.e., family and community, parenting, and childcare). These components positively or negatively impact a child’s growth and development. The first five years of brain development create lifelong learning patterns. Therefore, primary educational institutions must design trusting, secure, and developmentally appropriate classroom environments. Socially and emotionally healthy children engage in learning activities and develop positive peer-to-peer and adult-to-child relationships.
Thus, it is important to take into account a child’s overall physical health, temperament, family stressors, community and environmental pressures, exposure to home and community violence, parent and child relationships, and social supports.

Parents and parental figures that promote economic security, physiological needs, and basic supports are more prone to nurture children in a socially and emotionally healthy environment (“Great Start for Kids,” n.d.). This, in turn, fosters greater growth, development, and stimulation in the home and school settings. Schools and communities are accountable for establishing prevention efforts that improve child growth and development, family support, parent education, quality care, and education. The above-stated factors can elevate the livelihoods of children and adolescents. If a child is able to control personal emotions, understand peers’ and adults’ feelings and needs, and positively communicate with others, then he or she will have a solid foundation for later development (PBS, n.d.). Temperament, cultural influences, disabilities, modeled behaviors, secure relationships, and social interaction all impact social and emotional development.

Social and emotional learning is vital to a child’s welfare, development, educational motivation, and academic learning (Dinallo, 2016). The Collaborative for Academic Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL) has been at the forefront of creating, endorsing, and exploring social and emotional learning from kindergarten through 12th grade public school systems. CASEL has preset plans and strategies for educators to engage in self-reflection, sensory awareness, and relaxation exercises. The overarching goal of social and emotional learning is to eradicate obstacles between academic achievement and accountable school behavior. Social and emotional learning encompasses the process of children and adults applying the knowledge, attitudes, and skills required to comprehend and control emotions, develop and attain positive
goals, feel and display empathy for peers and adults, create and maintain optimistic relationships, and practice responsible decision-making.

CASEL and other social and emotional learning advocates purport that the previously mentioned competencies can be taught with stand-alone, explicit curricula, or through school-wide and classroom interventions that incorporate social and emotional learning tactics into the daily school schedule (Devaney, 2015). Non-cognitive skills and factors also influence academic success. Students’ attitudes, behaviors, and learning strategies can enhance academic success. However, their academic behaviors, academic perseverance, academic mind-set, learning strategies, and social skills are factors that are just as powerful. In a previous study, Carol Dweck and Angela Duckworth argued that grit, self-control, and a growth mind-set are major contributors to academic achievement.

There are five social-emotional learning dimensions (Arslan, 2016). These dimensions encompass self-awareness, social awareness, self-management, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. Self-awareness includes being aware of one’s feelings, accurately assessing competencies, and developing self-reliance. Social awareness involves interpreting other individuals’ emotions, understanding their perspectives and respecting varying opinions, and positively interacting with them. Self-management consists of controlling emotions to perform a task easily, exercising persistence with achieving a goal, maintaining ambition whenever faced with hardships, and continuing to perform. Relationship skills are described as utilizing emotions to successfully communicate, sustaining healthy and cooperative communication, upholding resistance to negative societal pressures, resolving conflicts, and requesting assistance as needed. Responsible decision-making takes into account every possible
decision-making factor, reaching an appropriate conclusion by considering all outlooks and maintaining accountability for choices.

The five dimensions of social-emotional learning competencies encourage students to cultivate lifelong learning proficiencies (Arslan, 2016). They encompass higher-order thinking skills (i.e., problem-solving and critical thinking, academic and professional skills, and life skills). Presently, the above-stated proficiencies are defined by education experts and employers as essential skills for post-graduation and workplace success. With reference to adulthood, social-emotional learning is imperative for young adults. There has been an increasing need for an individual’s hypothetical, reflective, critical, moral, and ethical decision-making processes to expand. Within this process, social-emotional learning becomes an invaluable contribution to skill development. Alternative thinking strategies are also present in the social learning approach. Furthermore, alternative thinking strategies develop from a self-motivated model involving the successful operation of affective, behavioral, and cognitive systems in cooperation. These mechanisms also consist of social competencies. In order to deepen a student’s classroom experience and increase social-emotional competencies, positive behavioral habits, and critical thinking skills, successful implementation of alternative thinking strategies must occur. Moreover, social-emotional learning skills are classified as life skills, which entail critical thinking, coping with life stressors, emotion regulation, and successful communication. They also include improving self-awareness to manage social problems, preventing social differentiation and injustice, and decreasing instances of prejudice.

For over 40 years, critical thinking has been applied in education. It is vital for children, adolescents, and young adults to construct awareness and enhance skillsets that assist with navigating global problems (Arslan, 2016). Critical thinking involves individual learning styles
and self-regulation. It is a self-regulated process of rationalizing and configuring thoughts as an individual. In the process of performing cognitive tasks centered on specific criteria, critical thinking requires students to make a judgment of conclusions by questioning, affirmation, approval, and correction. The student arrives at a decision based on sound criteria—abstractly and systematically—in signifying evidence through interpretation, analysis, evaluation, and inference. Critical thinking involves preparation and an inclination to investigate claims and develop impartial judgments on the premise of well-supported motives (Wade & Tavris, n.d.). It includes the ability to search for flaws in arguments and refute claims that lack supporting evidence. On the contrary, critical thinking is not simply negative thinking. It nurtures the capacity to be inventive and productive in order to produce conceivable justifications for discoveries, contemplate associations, and apply newfound knowledge to a comprehensive range of social and personal problems. Critical and creative thinking are inseparable. In education, the private sector, and everyday life, critical thinking can become a powerful and influential tool. Critical thinkers employ curiosity and rational decision-making skills, engage in discovery and research, develop reasonable information about a topic, and reassess their outlook and opinions about a subject matter. Moreover, critical thinkers are open-minded, flexible, impartial in the evaluation, aware of personal bias, and determined in researching consequences, and they inspect all the details of a focus area. With critical thinking, an individual thoughtfully expresses his or her thoughts about other people’s actions, behaviors, and beliefs. This form of thinking allows individuals to reason with their emotions and feelings (which include a person’s beliefs and actions). On an everyday, consistent basis, critical thinking directly impacts an individual’s beliefs and actions by examining cognitive skills. It occurs by means of expressing individual feelings and psychological states openly or inconspicuously. In this capacity, it creates a critical
connection between intelligence and emotions. Critical thinking is a practical resource utilized to combine an individual’s emotional life with intelligence. Likewise, it permits a child or adolescent to control his or her thoughts, emotions, feelings, and desires.

Critical thinking also takes into account skills such as intensifying solid arguments and utilizing clear strategies when defining and solving problems (Arslan, 2016). It involves unifying information and refining creativity. Moreover, it is a process of undergoing self-controlled thoughts by means of objectives and goals. Critical thinking employs a process of reasoning that warrants a careful investigation of unambiguously stated and obvious truth. It emphasizes questioning beliefs, situations, hypotheses, reasoning methods, actions, and experiences. Critical thinking is based on discussion, classification of thoughts, and evaluation of other people’s thoughts. For example, critical thinking distinguishes verifiable truths and essential information making a distinction between practical information, affirmation, and validation, and determining the precision and certainty of a case. It involves defining the trustworthiness of a source, outlining indistinguishable claims and opinions and untested hypotheses, and disclosing biases. It is about being aware of common misconceptions and inconsistencies and determining the usefulness of an opinion or claim. Critical thinking is a problem-solving technique that reflects rational and purposeful thoughts and emotions. It is a method of thinking about omitted evidence and information in problem-solving.

Research has shown that social-emotional learning has an influence on students’ attitudes, behaviors, skills, and performance (Arslan, 2016). With reference to these attitudes, the impact of social-emotional learning elevates self-efficacy and efforts towards developing positive outlooks about school and the learning environment. There is a growing amount of evidence that social-emotional learning increases students’ motivation to learn and effectively
cope with school-related stress. With reference to behaviors, social-emotional learning enables more positive social behaviors and a student’s accountability for his or her own learning. Notwithstanding this research, there has been a lack of empirical studies that directly investigate individual differences in social-emotional learning and critical-thinking disposition. Henceforward, it is imperative for researchers to explore the relationship between social-emotional learning and critical-thinking disposition.

The cognitive-social approach integrates cognitive development and social-emotional growth and incorporates belief, self-perception, and prospects of social learning (Karimzadeh et al., 2014). Researchers Mayer and Salovay described emotional intelligence as the ability to categorize emotional perceptions and implications and their relationships. This includes reasoning and problem-solving, as well as coordinating emotions and associated feelings. Additionally, this means managing and interpreting emotions. Emotional intelligence has been referred to as the overall capacity for emotional and social adjustments. Moreover, emotional intelligence has been classified as an assortment of non-cognitive skills, talents, and abilities (i.e., the five intrapersonal, interpersonal, general mood, coping with stress and tension, and adjustment dimensions), which heightens an individual’s capacity to cope with stress, tension, and environmental requirements successfully. From the perspective of the social-cognitive approach, the use of cognitive and communicative skills with children in emotional training management leads to adequate social and relational performance.

The earliest teachings of emotional skills start in the home environment (Karimzadeh et al., 2014). As a result, children enroll in school with varying emotional abilities and proficiencies. School districts experience challenges when educating towards and refining emotional skills. Emotional skills and literacy can be addressed can be intertwined with the
school curriculum. This would lead to more advantageous academic circumstances. Primarily, schools are positioned to adjust and transform a child’s deficiencies and weaknesses in social interactions. With a methodical reflection on students’ social-emotional skills, a child’s academic achievement is more inclined to increase, incidents of problematic behavior are likely to decrease, and the quality of communication management will progress. Moreover, students will be supported as inventive, accountable, and obliging individuals in society. Currently, continuous efforts are being drawn towards improving both students’ and teachers’ emotional and social skills and abilities. By implementing social-emotional programs, schools avert behavioral problems and increase academic success. Evidence-based research has demonstrated that schools with social-emotional interventions have a tendency to enhance social adjustment, limit aggression, strengthen socially acceptable behavior, maintain stress, and advance social-emotional skills.

It is vital for children to build positive peer-to-peer relationships to increase their overall well-being (McKown, Gumbiner, Russo, & Lipton, 2009). Unlike children who are accepted by their peers, socially rejected children are at a considerably higher risk for later adjustment issues (i.e., poor academic performance, school dropout, criminal activity, and mental health disorders). Within the education framework, the occurrence of social problems among school-aged children is startling. Roughly 12% of elementary children are actively rejected by their classmates. With over 39 million school-aged children residing in the United States, this leads to about four million youth struggling with social interactions. These youth are at a heightened risk of failing and dropping out of school. Moreover, these outcomes can lead to conduct and mental health issues. It is important to note that a child’s behavior strongly impacts his or her social acceptance. Therefore, the more that children partake in socially competent behaviors (i.e.,
cooperation, assertiveness, socially acceptable behavior, skillful participation in group performance tasks), the more acceptance is gained from their peers.

There is a relationship between socially competent behavior and peer acceptance (McKown et al., 2009). According to parents and teachers, school-based social competence promotion programs steadily increase a child’s level of social competence. Additionally, these programs boost children’s peer-to-peer acceptance. In order for children to display socially competent behavior, there must be a great number of cognitive, behavioral, and emotional processes working together. For instance, a child’s social-emotional learning skill (SEL) is linked to social behavior. SEL is described as a child’s ability to encode, interpret, and reason about social and emotional information. The skill refers to self-regulation and the ability to center one’s attention and deter impulses. There is a high probability of social behavior and SEL affecting each other bi-directionally. On the contrary, SEL and self-regulation could be antecedents, while socially competent behavior may be perceived as the consequence.

Successful social interactions are best categorized as the ability to read nonverbal cues that signal others’ emotions (McKown et al., 2009). A typically developing child’s ability to understand others’ emotions from facial expressions, the tone of voice, and posture is interconnected with his or her locus of control, self-esteem, peer regard, and achievement test scores. At the same time, greater emotion recognition skill is interrelated with social competence. It is important to acknowledge that children with neurobehavioral disorders, such as learning disorders and autism-spectrum disorders (ASD), encounter difficulties with reading nonverbal cues. These children, along with those with various other disorders, face higher rates of peer-to-peer relationship problems. Similarly, an impaired ability to read nonverbal cues can increase difficulties with peer interaction (for these clinical populations). Generally, the
evidence from typical and atypical populations indicates that the ability to read nonverbal cues contributes to positive social relations.

The likelihood of social success is connected to one’s ability to interpret others’ intentions (theory of mind), the social meaning of language (pragmatic language), and his or her own emotional response to others (empathy) (McKown et al., 2009). In relation to typically developing children, the ability to make mental state inferences is optimistically associated with teachers’ reports of competent behaviors, interpersonal negotiating skills, and greater peer respect. Particularly, pragmatic language skill strongly predicts social actions, behaviors, and functioning. Social functioning increases as children display empathy towards others’ reactions.

It is important to consider that children with ASD regularly exhibit pragmatic language deficits. Moreover, those with learning disorders and attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) also express pragmatic language deficits. There is evidence of lower empathic abilities in children with ASD, ADHD, and learning difficulties. Social problem-solving studies have revealed that the more children can acknowledge social problems (i.e., developing acceptable social goals and producing, appraising, and selecting competent solutions to those problems), the better the outcomes of socially competent behavior. On the contrary, impaired social problem-solving delays social functioning. School-aged children with reading disorders, conduct disorders, and ASDs all show social problem-solving impairment (which leads to the probability of forming poor peer relationships).

In the field of education, there has been increasing attention focused on the effects of social-emotional skills on school-aged children (Karimzadeh et al., 2014). By improving the overall development of children’s social and emotional skills, schools across the globe are able to mend the fragmented components. On the contrary, curriculum developers have struggled
with implementing appropriate methods, instructions, and media for promoting social and emotional skills. Primarily, textbook resources have inadequately instructed students on best practices for executing effective social-emotional skills.

A number of social-emotional problems have centered on attempts to develop students’ academic and social-emotional achievement (Karimzadeh et al., 2014). Occasionally, school-wide administrators have fostered students’ knowledge, mastery, accuracy, and acquisition of social-emotional skills and proficiencies. At present, if schools, teachers, and students are to maintain a high level of success, there must be programs based on increasing social-emotional skills and school effectiveness. In order to capitalize on students’ learning capacities and transform schools to embrace ideal learning environments, it is imperative for teachers to obtain the necessary knowledge to teach social-emotional learning effectively.

Theoretical Lens and Related Theoretical Literature

The theoretical framework applied in the present study primarily integrates Albert Bandura’s Social Learning Theory, while Erik Erikson’s Stages of Social-Emotional Development served as a secondary theoretical framework. Albert Bandura’s Social Learning Theory implies that human behavior is described as constant reciprocal interaction between cognitive, behavioral, and environmental stimuli (Culatta, 2015). The components of observational learning are attention, observer characteristics, retention, motor reproduction, and motivation. Attention includes modeled events, while retention involves symbolic coding, cognitive organization, symbolic rehearsal, and motor rehearsal. Motor reproduction comprises physical abilities, self-observation of reproduction, and accuracy of feedback. Motivation contains external and vicarious drive and self-reinforcement. The Social Learning Theory centered on three distinct components:
1. Observation, imitation, and modeling and self-regulation of actions

2. New behavior versus intrinsic reinforcement

3. Pride, satisfaction, and personal achievement

The Stages of Social-Emotional Development emphasizes two separate components:

1. Social maturation

2. Ego development and social factors

The Social Learning Theory describes children’s abilities to attain social and emotional understanding. It stresses the influences of behaviors through observations and rewards and supports the notion of individuals learning through observing another person’s behavior, attitudes, and outcomes of behaviors. With regard to the Stages of Social-Emotional Development Theory, social and emotional development of children and adolescents continues into the adult years. The socialization process contains eight phases (i.e., psychosocial crises). It is necessary for each child and adolescent to master learning and resolve each crisis to accomplish the subsequent social-emotional phases satisfactorily.

In relation to the first four stages of Social and Emotional Development, children are compelled to resolve one crisis before entering the next level (Huitt, 2008). During infancy, children encounter the trust versus mistrust stage. Throughout this stage, children develop a belief that the environment is responsible for meeting their primary physiological and social needs. As children grow into toddlerhood, they learn more about areas of personal control and free will. They learn to understand regret and sorrow for inappropriately exercising a lack of self-control. With reference to initiative versus guilt, early childhood students engage in action-oriented exploration, applying their imagination and exhibiting remorse for their actions. For the
duration of middle childhood, children grow more confident in their abilities to excel (in comparison to a standard or their peers).

With reference to the conceptual framework, the fundamental structure would involve the impact of social and emotional learning on students’ self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. The central components of analysis would include thoughtful teacher and student relationships and student-to-student relationships. This entails developing students’ commitment to school, as well as supporting academic achievement and creating a safe and well-ordered school and classroom environment. These two entities must stimulate and reinforce positive classroom behavior, emotional, and mental regulation and academic success. Additionally, these environments should promote academic goals, self-discipline, and motivation. Likewise, stress management and structural approaches for persistent learning strategies, achievement of grade level standards, and problem-solving skills are necessary to overcome challenges and foster responsible decision-making. The conceptual framework comprises the impact of social and emotional well-being, social integration and classroom social climate, and academic attainment. Additionally, it incorporates effective learning, instructional styles supporting positive emotions, and cognitive processing.

**Literature (Comprehensive) Related to the Topic**

Social and emotional learning encompasses a child’s self-awareness, social consciousness, decision-making skills, relationships, and self-management abilities (Esen-Aygun & Sahin-Taskin, 2017). Hence, social and emotional learning is significant to a child's livelihood. Without these competencies, children may encounter violence, child abuse, aggression, and maladaptive behavior. In spite of in-school experiences, off-school encounters can influence a child’s self-recognition and acceptance, elevate communication skills and
empathy, avert alcohol and substance use, and deter violence and bullying behavior. Therefore, the school environment is a passageway for cultivating positive social and emotional development and incorporating its benefits into a child's education. Administrators, teachers, teacher assistants, and specialists uphold vital roles in dissuading children from engaging in aversive social and emotional behavior.

It is important for schools to establish social and emotional learning programs that improve teachers' classroom management skills, enhance teacher and student relationships, and aid students with gaining appropriate social skills (Esen-Aygun & Sahin-Taskin, 2017). Teachers are role models for exercising proper problem-solving and anger management skills. Students can imitate these behaviors and overcome social and emotional deficiencies. As teachers display adequate social and emotional learning skills, they increase their social well-being, classroom management, and communication styles. Teachers are at the forefront of helping students develop academic, social, and emotional skills. Well-trained teachers create a classroom climate for students to resolve conflicts, collaborate with peers, and optimistically engage in dialogue.

Social-emotional learning (SEL) entails the development of social, behavioral, and emotional competencies (McKevitt, 2012). Furthermore, SEL interventions aim towards the aforesaid competencies and foster learning environments that are loving, secure, and structured. By elevating students’ social skills and designing SEL classroom settings, students are more likely to raise their academic achievement and heighten their level of engagement, participation, and connection to school environments. Well-planned and properly executed SEL programs have been linked to positive student results. Students’ attitudes (i.e., self-efficacy, teacher
respect, and coping strategies), behaviors (i.e., attendance, disruptions, participation, substance abuse), and performance (academic achievement and critical thinking skills) all improve.

Whenever school systems take the initiative to implement social and emotional development programs, the quality of peer-to-peer and student-to-adult relationships advances, academic achievement soars, maladaptive behaviors decrease, and students excel in classroom environments (Esen-Aygun & Sahin-Taskin, 2017). Throughout the world, social and emotional programs such as You Can Do It, PATHS, First Step, and I Can Problem Solve have benefitted the welfare of students. Teachers are gradually changing their perceptions and recognizing the value in social and emotional learning. Research findings are addressing the association between classroom management and social and emotional learning. In relation to the teacher’s knowledge of social and emotional learning, it is evident that more training is warranted in the social and emotional care of students. Teacher effectiveness programs improve teachers’ viewpoints of social and emotional learning and its influence on social-cultural status. In turn, teachers acquire social-emotional competence that aids with social and emotional development.

Currently, the significance of schools directing their efforts towards social and emotional skill development is extensively recognized (Maguire et al., 2016). It is essential to increase school-based prevention and youth development through organized social, emotional, and academic learning experiences. The acknowledgment that emotions can support prosocial behavior and learning has progressed from the understanding that school buildings are social places and that education is a social process. There is an empirical basis that associates social and emotional learning to academic success. In such social environments, administrators, faculty, and staff center their attention on alleviating problematic behaviors, which consist of both internalizing (i.e., social withdrawal and depression) and externalizing behaviors (i.e.,
aggression and disruption). Any apprehensions regarding problematic behaviors are linked to their long-term impact on the specific child. This would include the hypothetically disruptive effect of externalizing behaviors on the classroom environment.

Longitudinal research has shown that problematic behaviors that progress throughout childhood may evolve into an unchanging demeanor in adolescence (Maguire et al., 2016). Early on, young children exhibiting externalizing behavioral problems are at a higher risk of developing disruptive behavior, juvenile criminal behavior, and other forthcoming behavioral disorders. In order to eliminate the initial onset of problematic behavior, it is imperative to exclusively understand the dynamics and inter-relationship of socio-emotional learning and execute social-emotional learning programs. Within the school setting, classroom behavior is a vital aspect of the day-to-day learning process. Administrators, faculty, and staff are substantially impacted by teaching and learning and interactive relationships. It is the externalizing behaviors that can be the most detrimental to instruction and the learning environment. The aforesaid behaviors can markedly influence a child’s educational attainment. According to research studies, prosocial behaviors are more inclined to predict academic success. There is a strong relationship between externalizing behaviors and poor academic outcomes. As a result, prosocial and problematic behaviors are affected by social and emotional processes. Children that display problematic behaviors have social and emotional deficits.

**Specific Literature Related to the Current Study**

The social and emotional welfare of children and adolescents, their everyday experiences, expressions of feelings, interactions with peers and adults, positive relationships, and resilience are integral parts of their social and emotional development (Nemours Health & Prevention Services, 2009). Emotionally healthy children are more apt to enroll in school ready to access
the learning environment, achieve academic success, attain physical stability, and live productive lifestyles. On the contrary, children with mental health issues or disorders have poor educational attainment, increased involvement with the juvenile justice system, and negative health and social outcomes. In childhood, early interventions promote positive development paths and avert behavioral problems in adulthood. It is critical for children to access the resources and supports that enhance the development of social and emotional skills.

Even the role of the school psychologist has expanded and more often involves critically addressing the needs of the growing number of children with mental health disorders and behavioral challenges (McKevitt, 2012). For school psychologists, related personnel, and staff, there has been a central movement to advance and publicize evidence-based social, emotional, and behavioral interventions. Social-emotional learning (SEL) is defined as the ability to identify and control emotions, resolve problems effectively, and form positive relationships with other individuals.

Many children are bounded by the complexities of social and environments factors (Nemours Health & Prevention Services, 2009). These social and environmental factors can aid or impede their growth and development. Poverty, premature births, low birth weights, parental mental illness, and trauma can influence a range of behavioral problems in children and adolescents. This can lead to poor social interactions and difficulties reaching age-appropriate developmental and cognitive milestones. Children who are victims of trauma can face learning challenges, chronic health problems, behavioral issues, and poor social and emotional competence. In children and adolescents, traumatic events can severely impact brain development. During the early years, caring and reassuring relationships with parents and parental figures can increase quality learning experiences, as well as the continuous promotion of
social and emotional health for optimal development of cognitive skills, emotional well-being, social competence, and physical and mental health. If more school systems, childcare centers, and medical provider offices centered their efforts on encouraging children’s social and emotional health, then there would be a cultural shift in enhancing the health of all school-aged youth and young adults. The individual, community, and society all play a vital role in promoting emotional and behavioral health. At every level, public health policies permit a route for a change.

Summary

Childhood is the most crucial time for nurturing social and emotional development (Nemours Health & Prevention Services, 2009). Prevention and health promotion interventions can heighten long-lasting health and social and emotional well-being. Social and emotional learning must address problems that interfere with childhood and adolescence. These problems must be resolved early on to alleviate aversive social and emotional outcomes. This issue cannot evolve into a nationwide crisis. Stakeholders must invest in the treatment and attainment of social and emotional development programs and resources.
Chapter 3: Methodology

Description of Qualitative Research

For the purposes of this research study, the main type of qualitative research implemented was focus groups. A focus group is defined as a group interview of approximately six to 12 participants sharing comparable characteristics or mutual interests (Department of Health and Human Services Center for Disease Control and Prevention, 2008). The data are descriptive, and the facilitator guides the group based on a predetermined set of topics. The researcher sought to answer two research questions regarding social and emotional learning and its impact on psychological factors. Additionally, the researcher gleaned insights on the effects of social and emotional learning and its influence on disadvantaged students’ responses to environmental stimuli. The researcher methodically utilized a predefined set of procedures to answer the research questions and collect evidence from administrators, educators, school support personnel and related service providers, school counselors, mental health practitioners, rehabilitation professionals, and counseling educators (Family Health International, n.d.). Throughout the course of the research, the investigator acquired information from focus groups and elicited data on the social norms of the aforementioned group of participants, thus generating a wide-ranging overview of social and emotional issues of greater concern to the social groups and subgroups represented. This study included focus groups, face-to-face exchanges, and real-time communication to reveal the thoughts and feelings of initial responses and increase learning and awareness of the research process. Over the course of the research study, the researcher investigated a range of home and environmental, as well as cognitive and psychological factors that impact social and emotional development. In the course of the study, the researcher generated field notes, obtained audio and video recordings, and gathered transcripts. The
aforesaid data allowed the researcher to interpret participants’ perceptions of social and emotional programs and their immediate improvements in mental health, social skills, and academic achievement. Additionally, the researchers assessed the participants’ outlook on the mental health of children and their emotional conditions for learning. Participants discussed their positions on incorporating social and emotional learning into school curricula.

**Research Questions**

1) How does students’ social and emotional learning impact psychological factors?
2) How does social and emotional learning influence disadvantaged students’ responses to environmental stimuli?

**Description of the Specific Research Approach**

The researcher utilized convenience sampling to understand the perceptions of administrators, educators, school support personnel and related service providers, school counselors, mental health practitioners, rehabilitation professionals, and counseling educators (the participants of the study) in relation to students’ school-wide and classroom culture and social contexts within the school environment. In addition, the researcher acquired insights on the participants’ views of students’ dialogue and social practices and the methods by which students interpret their social and emotional responses to the academic setting. The researcher made field notes of participants’ understandings of students’ social and emotional identification of others’ thoughts, feelings, and responses, classroom engagement, and organizational skills that guide classroom activities. Furthermore, the researcher attained participants’ viewpoints of primary students’ interpretation of their worldviews and classroom situations (at the given moment) and their relationships with others in group settings. The researcher examined
participants’ outlooks of students’ abilities to accurately interpret their and others’ social and emotional responses in relation to the class experiences and situations.

**Description of the Study Participants and Setting**

Administrators, educators, school support personnel and related service providers, school counselors, mental health practitioners, rehabilitation professionals, and counseling educators, throughout Tennessee, were selected through convenience sampling. These participants were readily available and selected from the education and mental health sectors, professional organizations, and through affiliation with job-related duties and tasks that correlate with social and emotional learning. The previously mentioned participants were requested to complete a 10-item survey that identifies their knowledge of student communication, cooperation, emotion regulation, empathy, impulse control, and social initiation. Additionally, the concluding survey question solicited participants’ participation in a focus group and further in-depth one-on-one interviews. The participants had firsthand accounts of the research topic and demonstrated variance in their responses to student adversities.

**Data Collection Procedures**

The researcher used surveys, facilitated focus groups, administered in-depth one-on-one interviews, generated field notes, obtained audio and video recordings, and gathered transcripts. These sources of data included participants’ perceptions of children’s social competence; social skills; physiological, environmental, curricular and instructional capabilities; and social and emotional events and occurrences. Participants described their awareness of students’ developmental performance in the areas of communication, gross motor skills, fine motor skills, problem-solving, and personal-social skills. Furthermore, participants discussed students’ behavior (i.e., social skills, inattentiveness, defiance, etc.), emotional regulation (i.e., mood,
thoughts, emotional fluctuations), academics (i.e., educational progress), reasoning (i.e., problem-solving and risk behaviors), and readiness (i.e., understanding of problems and seeking assistance). These three forms of data were collected through surveys, focus groups, one-on-one interviews, field notes, audio and video recordings, and transcripts.

Moreover, participants offered their insights on student growth measures and academic achievement in math, reading, language usage, and science, and their relationship to social and emotional learning. Participants provided their vantage point on literacy achievement (i.e., reading abilities and risks of reading failures) and math sub-skill levels, as well as gaps in student performance and their impact on social and emotional learning.

Social and emotional learning focus groups emphasized participants’ perceptions of students’ abilities to develop the following competencies: becoming aware of and managing their emotions, creating and achieving key interpersonal and academic goals, increasing social awareness and social skills to form and sustain positive relationships, displaying decision-making and accountable behaviors to attain school and life success, comprehending the aspect of communities and the student’s overall well-being, and intentionally teaching skills that employ sound instructional and classroom management practices (Washington State Board of Education, 2016). Social and emotional learning focus group questions included the following:

1. Are you aware of any social and emotional development reforms that promote social and emotional learning in the early stages of development? How would you measure their levels of effectiveness?

2. Do social and emotional development programs promote equity and nurture opportunities for students to achieve social and emotional competencies? How so?
3. With the emerging trends of social and emotional development, what would be the likelihood of those programs reducing or eradicating racial and gender disparities in education?

4. Do social and emotional development programs avert punitive forms of punishment for school-aged children? Please elaborate.

5. What are your thoughts about social and emotional development programs increasing academic achievement, college enrollment, and degree attainment, and productivity in society?

6. Does social and emotional learning advance a student’s ability to integrate thoughts, feelings, and behaviors that lead to optimistic student outcomes and greater life achievement?

7. What are your feelings about teaching social and emotional learning skills? What is the best way to educate students about social and emotional development?

8. In what ways does the curriculum integrate learning and growth, student learning, and social responsibility?

9. Would grit, empathy, social skills, and a growth mind-set describe the key components of social and emotional development?

10. What are best practices for students to maintain their emotions and interactions in ways that benefit their actions and behaviors and those of others?

11. Within the classroom setting, how often do you observe students exercising attentiveness and their abilities to solve problems? In what ways are these skills exhibited?

12. Within the classroom, how often do you witness students demonstrating competence and autonomy? Please provide specific examples.
13. How could families, schools, and communities collaborate to support the healthy social and emotional development of all children?

14. How can home environments encourage children to be engaged, lifelong learners?

15. How can home environments produce children who are self-aware, caring, and connected to their peers and adults?

16. How can families, schools, and communities partner to increase children’s social and emotional competencies for success in school, college, and career?

17. How can families, schools, and communities contribute to students’ effectively handling the demands of growing up in our modern-day complex society?

18. Should school districts develop policies to support social and emotional development programs? If so, what grade levels should receive the highest levels of interventions and supports?

19. Should social and emotional learning be cultivated into urban, suburban, and/or rural school districts? Please elaborate.

20. How can social and emotional learning create positive school climates?

21. How is social and emotional learning practiced in your school district and classroom?

22. In what ways can students build more social awareness and responsibility?

23. How could a district-wide or school-wide approach to social and emotional learning be beneficial for students?

24. How do effective social-emotional learning frame students’ learning experiences and offer interpersonal, social, and academic success?

25. Who is ultimately responsible for providing support to students that display social, emotional, and behavioral challenges?
Ethical Considerations

The researcher adopted codes and policies that address honesty, objectivity, integrity, carefulness, openness, respect for intellectual property, confidentiality, responsible publication, responsible mentoring, respect for colleagues, social responsibility, non-discrimination, competence, and legality (Resnik, 2015).

Resnik’s (2015) research purports the following:

Strive for honesty in all scientific communications. Honestly report data, results, methods and procedures, and publication status. Do not fabricate, falsify, or misrepresent data. Do not deceive colleagues, research sponsors, or the public. Strive to avoid bias in experimental design, data analysis, data interpretation, peer review, personnel decisions, grant writing, expert testimony, and other aspects of research where objectivity is expected or required. Avoid or minimize bias or self-deception. Disclose personal or financial interests that may affect research. Keep your promises and agreements; act with sincerity; strive for consistency of thought and action. Avoid careless errors and negligence; carefully and critically examine your own work and the work of your peers. Keep good records of research activities, such as data collection, research design, and correspondence with agencies or journals. Share data, results, ideas, tools, and resources. Be open to criticism and new ideas. Honor patents, copyrights, and other forms of intellectual property. Do not use unpublished data, methods, or results without permission. Give proper acknowledgment or credit for all contributions to research. Never plagiarize. Protect confidential communications, such as papers or grants submitted for publication, personnel records, trade or military secrets, and patient records. Publish in order to advance research and scholarship, not to advance just your
own career. Avoid wasteful and duplicative publication. Help to educate, mentor, and advise students. Promote their welfare and allow them to make their own decisions. Respect your colleagues and treat them fairly. Strive to promote social good and prevent or mitigate social harms through research, public education, and advocacy. Avoid discrimination against colleagues or students on the basis of sex, race, ethnicity, or other factors not related to scientific competence and integrity. Maintain and improve your own professional competence and expertise through lifelong education and learning; take steps to promote competence in science as a whole. Know and obey relevant laws and institutional and governmental policies.

The researcher refrained from making inferences about the larger population. Additionally, the research did not draw conclusions or make recommendations based on opinions. Consistency and contradictions of view, reliance on the researcher’s impressions, and interpretations were taken into account. The researcher was involved in all stages of the study (i.e., concept to design, interview, transcription, analysis, verification, and reporting concepts and themes). Additionally, the researcher adhered to respect for privacy established honest and open interactions and avoided misrepresentations. Anonymity, confidentiality, and informed consent were followed to the utmost extent. The research was systematic, structured, and transparent and based on valid conclusions (incorporating supporting evidence).

**Data Analysis Procedures**

This process examined the knowledge of administrators, educators, school support personnel and related service providers, school counselors, mental health practitioners, rehabilitation professionals, and counseling educators concerning students’ experiences, meanings, and relationships. The decoding and reduction process encompassed the following:
1. Utilizing the framework analysis or thematic network analysis
2. Condensing data into key themes and topics
3. Identifying patterns and structures

The research generated a sample of participants to gauge a further understanding of social and emotional development. Additionally, the researcher provided ongoing interpretation of data and identified categories, themes, and explanations arising from the data. The researcher considered both a basic and higher level of analysis to strengthen descriptive accounts of data and to prepare a more interpretative study.

**Summary**

This research study investigated social and emotional skills, attitudes, behaviors, and academic performance. The research incorporated evidence of social and emotional learning into standard educational practice. Furthermore, the reflective practice created practical value to promote child and adolescent development and contribute to the field of social and emotional development.
Chapter 4: Findings

The primary purpose of this qualitative research study was to assess the insights and perceptions of administrators, educators, school support personnel and related service providers, school counselors, mental health practitioners, rehabilitation professionals, and counseling educators in relation to social and emotional learning and development programs, and their direct impact on improving emotional and mental health, social skills, and academic achievement. Moreover, convenience sampling was utilized to measure the participants’ viewpoints on the mental health of children and their emotional conditions for learning. Participants discussed their stances on integrating social and emotional learning into school curricula. The primary and secondary theories established a basis for observation, imitation, modeling, self-regulation of actions, new behaviors, intrinsic reinforcement, pride, satisfaction, personal achievement, social maturation, ego development, and social factors.

Throughout the 10-item survey, focus groups, and in-depth one-on-one interviews, research participants defined their perceptions and experiences with student communication, cooperation, emotion regulation, empathy, impulse control, and social initiation. They described their firsthand accounts of social and emotional learning and unveiled their responses to student adversities. In this chapter, the research findings are founded on the analysis of the following data sources: survey, focus groups, face-to-face exchanges, and real-time communication to disclose the thoughts and feelings of preliminary responses, and advance knowledge and awareness of the research process. The subsequent research questions informed this research study:

1) How does students’ social and emotional learning impact psychological factors?
2) How does social and emotional learning influence disadvantaged students’ responses to environmental stimuli?

Participants’ Background

The research participants of this study were comprised of 45 administrators, educators, school support personnel and related service providers, school counselors, mental health practitioners, rehabilitation professionals, and counseling educators from urban, suburban, and rural Shelby County Schools, Achievement School District, Arlington Community Schools, Bartlett City Schools, Collierville Schools, Germantown Municipal School District, Lakeland School System, Millington Municipal Schools, Tipton County Schools, Charter Schools, nonprofit international educational and professional development organizations, teacher preparation programs, and mental health private practices and agencies in Tennessee.

Participants ranged from 30 to 65 years old; 44 were female, and one was male. With reference to race and ethnicity, 32 African American and two Caucasian participants contributed to the research study. On average, participants had 15 years of administrative experience. All nine administrators possessed prior teaching experience. Additionally, the study was composed of 15 teachers, eight school counselors, nine administrators, four support personnel, two related service providers, and six mental health practitioners, rehabilitation professionals, and counseling educators. Two administrators, two school counselors, and one support personnel reported experience with implementing social and emotional learning within the core curriculum and analyzing the effectiveness of social and emotional development programs.

For reporting purposes and to protect confidentiality, specific nonprofit international educational and professional development organizations were assigned a pseudonym, while
focus group participants and interviewees are identified by number. During the time of the study, one administrator reported the following:

Evaluations of Reflecting on America’s History’s whole-school efforts have captured positive impacts on school climate. Students and teachers reported improvements in how students speak with and respond to one another as they internalize a new set of behavior norms. Teachers reported that their school community responded more constructively to conflict, including increased collaboration to develop a community response, reframing an incident to address it constructively and reacting non-defensively and using behavioral incidents as teachable moments. To have the deepest impact on school and classroom climate, student engagement, and social-emotional learning (SEL), Reflecting on America’s History’s staff works with whole schools in a range of areas, including (a) providing professional development, curriculum resources, and ongoing coaching for teachers who are implementing Reflecting on America’s History’s social studies, history, civics, and English Language Arts content in the classroom, (b) advising on overall course curriculum sequencing in order to realize the greatest impact, (c) providing counsel to the school principal and leadership team on civic and character education and SEL, in the context of local, state, and national standards, (d) facilitating on-site professional development for the whole staff to encourage everyone in the school community to develop a shared set of values and common language, (e) supporting student advisory sessions with resources to explore identity, group membership (and inclusion and exclusion), issues of justice and fairness, and ways of choosing to participate, (f) providing assistance with service learning projects, including frameworks for thinking about the complex issues they are investigating, (g) supporting the
development of student leadership groups, (h) providing guidance in developing new systems of school discipline based on fairness, reconciliation, and restorative justice, (i) providing (or supporting students in providing) sessions for parents and community members on Reflecting on America’s History’s case studies and pedagogical approaches, and (j) recommending speakers (including scholars, civic leaders, writers, activists, witnesses to history, and upstanders) for school-wide speakers’ series (E. Hightower, personal communication, March 5, 2018).

Participants’ Definition of Social and Emotional Learning

During the course of the focus groups and in-depth one-on-one interviews, the researcher requested participants to interpret the meaning of social and emotional learning in academic and non-academic contexts. Participants defined social and emotional learning as the attitudes and beliefs within various subgroups and cultures that determine an individual’s ability to cope successfully with his or her natural environment. Following this discussion, the researcher provided participants with the definition of social and emotional learning. The researcher informed participants that this topic would be the focus of the surveys, focus groups, and in-depth one-on-one interviews. This permitted the researcher to establish the context for the study and allow participants the opportunity to share their outlooks, perceptions, and experiences.

Social and Emotional Learning Survey Results

With reference to students being capable of resolving interpersonal conflicts that arise in academic and non-academic settings, 43 participants responded as follows: 2.3% selected strongly disagree, 37.2% selected disagree, 14.0% selected strongly agree, and 46.5% selected agree. The data suggested that the majority of participants believed that students have the ability to resolve interpersonal conflict. The next highest percentage of participants alleged that
students are not capable of resolving interpersonal conflicts. Concerning whether, in academic and non-academic settings, behavioral and academic expectations are being clearly articulated and addressing students’ individual needs and strengths, 43 participants responded as follows: 2.4% selected strongly agree, 39.5% selected agree, 9.3% selected strongly disagree, and 48.8% selected disagree. Based on the participants academic and non-academic experiences, the majority of the responses were related to behavioral and academic expectations not being clearly articulated and addressing students’ individual needs and strengths. Subsequently, the next highest group of responses revealed that behavioral and academic expectations are clearly articulated and addressed students’ individual needs and strengths. There is a certain level of divergence, to be noted, amongst the participants’ responses to questions 1 and 2.

Concerning social and community teaching practices assisting in developing meaningful relationships between students and adults, 44 participants responded as follows: 34.1% selected strongly agree, 54.5% selected agree, 2.3% selected strongly disagree, and 9.1% selected disagree. Of these respondents, 78.6% expressed the belief that community teaching practices promote open and thoughtful collaboration between students and adults, and promote a broader community impact. Forty-four participants responded to the notion that academic and non-academic settings are able to assist with cultivating students’ social and emotional learning skills as follows: 2.3% selected disagree, 60.5% percent selected strongly agree, 37.2% selected agree. Of these respondents, 97.7% concurred that academic and non-academic settings could foster academic achievement, non-cognitive skills, and 21st-century skills.

Forty-four participants responded to the statement that balancing the needs and behaviors of students is critical to implementing social and emotional learning as follows: 68.2% selected strongly agree and 31.8% selected agree. When implementing social and emotional learning,
100% percent of participants agreed that the needs and behaviors of students should be carefully measured. Forty-four participants responded to the notion that students should be included in the collaborative process of solving problems that arise in the school and home environments as follows: 9.1% selected disagree, 59.1% selected strongly agree, and 31.8% selected agree. Of these respondents, 90.9% approved of students partaking in a collaborative problem-solving approach.

With reference to adults considering students’ emotional and academic needs when implementing social and emotional development programs, 44 participants responded as follows: 77.3% selected strongly agree and 22.7% selected agree. One hundred percent of the participants agreed that social and emotional development and academic work can affect a student’s success. With regard to the notion that when incorporating social and emotional development programs, academic and non-academic settings must address commonalities and differences (i.e., race, ethnicity, culture, disabilities, etc.) that exist among students, 44 participants responded as follows: 70.5% selected strongly agree and 29.5% selected agree. One hundred percent of the participants agreed that socioeconomic factors, race and ethnicity, and disabilities influence the behaviors and attitudes of social and emotional development programs.

In relation to being successful and whether students need more opportunities to apply positive social skills, 44 participants responded as follows: 4.6% selected disagree, 63.6% selected strongly agree and 31.8% selected agree. Of these respondents, 95.4% concurred that students need additional opportunities to apply social problem solving, peer negotiation, conflict management, and effective communication. Finally, 43 participants responded to the notion of academic achievement increasing whenever adults are more aware of students’ emotions, culturally grounded beliefs, and backgrounds as follows: 67.4% selected strongly agree and
32.6% selected agree. One hundred percent of participants agreed that academic achievement soars whenever adults are more cognizant of students’ emotions, beliefs, and upbringings. Forty participants responded to the question about willingness to participate in a social and emotional focus group, with 65% selecting yes and 35% selecting no.

During the in-depth one-on-one interviews, study participants referenced school and community partnerships, parent-child collaboration, parental engagement, and a flexible English Language Arts and Mathematics curriculum. One participant discussed, in great length, the need for classroom autonomy and for building a strong social foundation (to enhance interpersonal skills). Another participant stressed the importance of initiatives that involved parent professional development for improving social and emotional skills and academics in the home environment. Both participants contributed varying amounts of informative information. Their opinions and beliefs are deeply reflected in the study.

**In-depth One-on-One Interview 1**

**Interviewer:** What is your knowledge of social and emotional learning?

**Interviewee 1:** Being more aware of a student’s emotions, beliefs, and background enables educators to have more empathy and patience (A. Griffin, personal communication, March 8, 2018).

**Interviewer:** In what ways can social and emotional learning build the foundation for teaching and learning?

**Interviewee 1:** It can help build teacher and parent partnerships. Students can start to feel more included in the school and home environment. Teachers would have more time to engage students in one-on-one conversations (A. Griffin, personal communication, March 8, 2018).
Interviewer: How can social and emotional learning practices help encourage student-centered discipline, teacher language, responsibility and choice, and warmth and support?

Interviewee 1: These practices can help create rules and norms. Teachers would be more sensitive to students’ needs. This will help students to see the compassion adults have for them. Perhaps, this may help them feel responsible and take ownership of their learning (A. Griffin, personal communication, March 8, 2018).

Interviewer: How can educators create an environment that is consistent and embeds social and emotional learning expectations?

Interviewee 1: My classroom rules and norms are as follows: Follow directions first time given. Don’t blurt out. If you don’t have something nice to say, then don’t say anything at all. It’s your choice. Make it a good day or not, the choice is yours. For the first six weeks, every day, we go over them. After every long break, we go over them. Students are supposed to redirect themselves and self-assess (A. Griffin, personal communication, March 8, 2018).

Interviewer: What would be the best practices for formulating partnerships with family members and communities and encouraging engagement, trust, and collaboration?

Interviewee 1: It would be helpful to have more time to make welcoming phone calls and connect more with parents (A. Griffin, personal communication, March 8, 2018).

Interviewer: How could school-wide practices and policies foster a caring, welcoming, and participatory classroom environment?

Interviewee 1: The school should add something to the morning announcements for every student to participate. Students should have to do three things. First, they should say something nice to someone. Do something nice for someone. Write a thank you note. Every child should
be able to participate and feel proud of their actions. Every morning, the principal should walk around to every classroom and say hello (A. Griffin, personal communication, March 8, 2018).

**Interviewer:** Would social and emotional learning positively impact school climate and build citizenship? How so?

**Interviewee 1:** Yes. Students would exhibit social responsibility (A. Griffin, personal communication, March 8, 2018).

**Interviewer:** Could social and emotional learning enhance relationships between students and teachers? How so?

**Interviewee 1:** If I knew more about my students, then I can better judge what type of day they are going to have. I could ask the following: How was your birthday? How was your weekend? With the strict English Language Arts and Mathematics curriculum, I don’t have time to do that anymore. I would like to (A. Griffin, personal communication, March 8, 2018).

**Interviewer:** How can social and emotional learning complement academic learning and provide a well-rounded education for students?

**Interviewee 1:** The two components should not be separated. Technically, they are one in the same (A. Griffin, personal communication, March 8, 2018).

**Interviewer:** In what ways could district-wide or school-wide policies nurture a student’s ability to articulate his or her needs and feelings without blame and judgment? How could administrators and educators help students increase their self-esteem and form healthy relationships?

**Interviewee 1:** School districts should encourage students to make positive choices. This should happen on a daily basis. Rules should not set students up for failure but teach discipline
and restraint. Administrators can be more present and learn students’ names, interests, and habits (A. Griffin, personal communication, March 8, 2018).

**In-depth One-on-One Interview 2**

**Interviewer:** What is your knowledge of social and emotional learning?

**Interviewee 2:** During my undergraduate and graduate programs, I had several classes that incorporated social and emotional learning. While working with children, I observe ways in which social and emotional learning can be implemented (J. Henderson, personal communication, March 9, 2018).

**Interviewer:** In what ways can social and emotional learning build the foundation for teaching and learning?

**Interviewee 2:** If you have an understanding of how individuals learn, from a social and emotional concept, then you have to take that knowledge into the classroom. You have to incorporate different variations in teaching. Whenever you are teaching students, or they are attempting to learn concepts, social and emotional learning is important. Teachers must be familiar with social and emotional theories. This can help with not taking away from the students’ learning experience. By making use of weekly communication applications, emails, and phone calls to parents, it will help with informing parents of how their children are progressing. The greatest thing is for teachers to foster that environment. Parents will feel more involved. Teachers can ask, “What can we do to increase your level of involvement?” (J. Henderson, personal communication, March 9, 2018).

**Interviewer:** How can social and emotional learning practices help encourage student-centered discipline, teacher language, responsibility and choice, and warmth and support?
**Interviewee 2:** Within a social and emotional learning perspective, in a classroom setting, students are inclined to be more aware. The theories approach these concepts. This will impact the community (J. Henderson, personal communication, March 9, 2018).

**Interviewer:** How can educators create an environment that is consistent and embeds social and emotional learning expectations?

**Interviewee 2:** Whenever educators and students are more aware of how they best receive information, it reduces the need for an authoritative type style of teaching in the classroom. Teachers can express, “I’m here for you. I want to help you.” The student will feel more comfortable to provide the teacher with feedback that would be helpful for their learning style (J. Henderson, personal communication, March 9, 2018).

**Interviewer:** What would be the best practices for formulating partnerships with family members and communities and encouraging engagement, trust, and collaboration?

**Interviewee 2:** The best practices would be making weekly phone calls or sending progress updates through email. Schedule school-wide initiatives to give parents an opportunity to be more involved in their child’s education (J. Henderson, personal communication, March 9, 2018).

**Interviewer:** How could school-wide practices and policies foster a caring, welcoming, and participatory classroom environment?

**Interviewee 2:** Practices and policies should allow students the opportunity to use their voices and provide feedback for a healthier classroom and school-wide environment (J. Henderson, personal communication, March 9, 2018).

**Interviewer:** Would social and emotional learning positively impact school climate and build citizenship? How so?
**Interviewee 2:** Class-wide modeling would allow students to go into the communities and help organizations that decrease worldwide hunger and maintain the safety of the elderly (J. Henderson, personal communication, March 9, 2018).

**Interviewer:** Could social and emotional learning enhance relationships between students and teachers? How so?

**Interviewee 2:** Yes. Teachers can foster an environment where students are not afraid to speak up. They would feel empowered to share their best methods for learning (J. Henderson, personal communication, March 9, 2018).

**Interviewer:** How can social and emotional learning complement academic learning and provide a well-rounded education for students?

**Interviewee 2:** Academics or learning is only one aspect of teaching and learning. If you start teaching students about the social and emotional components of learning, then it will improve their academic and life skills (J. Henderson, personal communication, March 9, 2018).

**Interviewer:** In what ways could district-wide or school-wide policies nurture a student’s ability to articulate his or her needs and feelings without blame and judgment? How could administrators and educators help students increase their self-esteem and form healthy relationships?

**Interviewee 2:** By utilizing the guidance counselor, he or she can check in with students each term. This will help students with filing a grievance or expressing their needs. There are some schools that keep a suggestion box outside of the office. Students can easily write out their suggestions and place them in the box. Educators and administrators can acknowledge their feedback. This will provide students with the sense that their voices are being heard. Also, positive peer feedback is good. Schools could incorporate peer mediators and peer groups. This
can increase a student’s self-esteem. This helps students resolving conflicts themselves without a dominating force. Whenever addressing students’ feelings, administrators should proceed with caution. It’s all about tactfully responding to students (J. Henderson, personal communication, March 9, 2018).

Themes

The researcher identified seven major themes that supported social and emotional learning. These themes included social, emotional, and cultural support; district-wide and school-wide professional development; professional development in academic and parenting skills training; parental connections with community resources and employment agencies; accessibility of resources; increased visibility of community stakeholders; and a community-driven curriculum that incorporates social and emotional learning, and 21st century skills and workforce development. The implementation of these themes propels social and emotional skills, competencies, approaches, and school and community impact.

Research Question 1. How does students’ social and emotional learning impact psychological factors?

Theme 1: Social, emotional, and cultural support. Social, emotional, and cultural support is associated with the connections and relationships amongst school and community. Parents, students, educators, administrators, and community stakeholders have an investment in the social and emotional learning and cognitive development of each typically and non-typically developing student. From an academic standpoint, focus group participant 4 discussed the Expeditionary Learning (EL) philosophy and comprehensive school reform (Focus group participant 4, personal communication, March 5, 2018). This new way of approaching learning allows students to excel in urban, suburban, and rural school districts. Students are interacting in
cooperative groups, engaging in independent discussions, and inquiring about the learning process. This is a shift from the previous Reading Street and Journeys’ curriculum. Focus group participant 5 mentioned the integration of Head Start programs into the pre-kindergarten classrooms (Focus group participant 5, personal communication, March 5, 2018). This creates a smoother transition for parents and children and increases the acquisition of social and emotional skills. Focus group participant 5 teaches her students about courtesy and manners, effectively interacting with peers and adults, and displaying their social skills and emotions in healthy ways.

**Theme 2: District-wide and school-wide professional development.** Successful learning outcomes comprise early learning, supportive relationships, and safe and secure classroom environments. School districts and administrators have the capacity to create nurturing school settings that promote independence, analytical thinking, and positive peer-to-peer relationships. Within Shelby County Schools, administrators have a mandated, grant-funded curriculum and observation tool, called Teachstone CLASS, for pre-kindergarten students (Focus group participant 3, personal communication, March 5, 2018). Many educators, outside of pre-kindergarten teachers, are not aware of this observation tool. Teachstone CLASS assists teachers, teacher assistants, and parents with fostering social and emotional learning, and is required by the National Head Start Association and Tennessee Department of Education. One of the teacher observation domains is social and emotional support. This considers class-wide and student interactions. Pre-kindergarten teachers and teacher assistants are trained on Teachstone CLASS and receive observation scores. Kindergarten through second grade has incorporated the class requirements into the Teacher Evaluation Measure (TEM) addendum. Some states have included Teachstone CLASS for all of their grades’ state observations.
For the 2017-2018 school year, the Tennessee School Counseling Association adopted and implemented a social and emotional learning pilot program (Focus group participant 6, personal communication, March 5, 2018). “This program was founded on the social and emotional learning standards of well-known national organizations. Basically, we revamped all of our social and emotional learning standards. To my knowledge, this change has been enacted into law. By 2019, all of Tennessee schools will be required to launch these new standards. There’s a significant shift in social and emotional learning. My hopes are that social and emotional learning will extend beyond suburban school districts. Students need a good home life and positive social and emotional development.”

**Theme 3: Professional development in academic and parenting skills training.**

Academic partnerships, amongst parents and educators, can enhance student learning outcomes and achievement. Parents can benefit from academic and social and emotional toolkits that encourage the sharing of academic information on student progress. Traditional methods of collaboration may not capture the magnitude of innovative methods for home and school partnerships. Focus group participant 4 stated that parents need the skillsets to teach their children in the home setting (Focus group participant 4, personal communication, March 5, 2018). Last year, her school implemented Academic Parent Teaching Themes (APTT). Teachers were able to provide parents with tools and strategies for teaching children at home. It was an eye-opening experience. The downside was motivating more parents to become involved in this initiative. Focus group participant 6 discussed the Second Steps curriculum (Focus group participant 6, personal communication, March 5, 2018). It teaches early learners and school-aged children up to grade eight about self-restraint, self-regulation, and social and emotional learning skills. During the fall of 2017, her school implemented this curriculum. This has been
another component of teaching children and parents about conflict relationship, relationship building, and self-control. The exercises can be utilized in the home environment. Low-income schools can purchase the curriculum with Title One funds.

**Theme 4: Parental connections with community resources and employment agencies.** Community resources and employment agencies have the capacity to build partnerships and promote the health, welfare, and learning of students and adults. These partnerships can increase the likelihood of parents engaging more with community resources and effectively managing the health-related needs of their children. By maximizing community and employment resources, parents are put in a better position to support their children with adapting to school environments, maintaining regular attendance, earning higher grades and test scores, and exhibiting improved behavior in the home and school environment. At the forefront of this work are parents and students who are becoming more humane citizens. This includes building in these opportunities for intellectual rigor, emotional engagement, and ethical reflection. These partnerships are able to alleviate the many inequities that low-income parents and families encounter (Focus group participant 2, personal communication, March 5, 2018). As a community, we must recognize that parents and children are not always receiving the support needed within their home environment. Partnerships can provide an opportunity for families to get a consistent form of support. It’s all about increasing productivity and ascertaining support to deal with real-world conflicts and challenges. (Focus group participant 1, personal communication, March 5, 2018).

**Research Question 2.** How does social and emotional learning influence disadvantaged students’ responses to environmental stimuli?
**Theme 5: Accessibility of resources.** Older adults, as well as racially segregated individuals and communities, encounter higher rates of accessibility challenges to community resources and employment opportunities (Health and Places Initiative, 2014). These limited resources include recreational amenities, shopping centers, educational facilities, and healthcare agencies. Accessibility of community resources can be categorized through the density and diversity of obtainable resources, potential route options (i.e., connectivity), proximity of residents to resources, and mobility. A reduction in community resources leads to unintended effects on health, healthcare resources, and behaviors that promote healthy behaviors. Focus group participant 7 expressed a great deal of distress stemming from restricted resources within the school district (Focus group participant 7, personal communication, March 10, 2018). She elaborately discussed her ventures with locating non-profit and for-profit agencies to provide her middle school students with social, emotional, cultural, and community resources. According to participant 7, children are desperately in need of varying activities to enhance their academic and social and emotional experiences. Recently, the school has implemented a GREAT Program in which a local police agency implements a character education curriculum to sixth-grade students. On every Monday, sixth graders learn the skills to appropriately respond to authority and advocate for their social, emotional, and cultural needs. The students embrace the officers and the program. Per focus group participant 7, the school needs additional outside visibility.

**Theme 6: Increased visibility of community stakeholders.** The disproportion in resources has vastly impacted poverty-stricken communities. Furthermore, the inequity in the distribution of educational and community resources significantly affects poorer neighborhoods. Therefore, the visibility of community of stakeholders is critical to creating pathways for higher academic achievement, college admission and retention, and career opportunities. Focus group
participant 8 emphasized the need for school, parent, and community connections (Focus group participant 8, personal communication, March 10, 2018). “It’s important to make these connections early on in the lives of children and parents. There’s a race for educating and training students to become productive citizens. The teachers and school counselors cannot accomplish this task by themselves.”

**Theme 7: Community-driven curriculum that incorporates social and emotional learning and 21st-century skills and workforce development.** Twenty-first-century skills encompass problem-solving, intelligence, collaboration and teamwork, cooperative learning skills, motivation, drive, and ambition, and oral communication skills. Outside non-profit and for-profit entities have the ability to influence student learning outcomes and workforce readiness positively. According to focus group participant 7, some community agencies have their own personal agendas for providing community-driven curriculum (Focus group participant 7, personal communication, March 10 2018). For these entities, it becomes more data-driven and less student-focused. This disparity occurs more in predominantly African American schools and communities. As a result, students of color fail to receive those 21st-century skills and workforce services. These companies are receiving federal dollars for data collection. Our students do not need to be statistics in their data collection.

**Discussion**

Two essential questions framed this research:

1. How does students’ social and emotional learning impact psychological factors?
2. How does social and emotional learning influence disadvantaged students’ responses to environmental stimuli?
The theoretical framework was derived from surveys, focus groups, and in-depth one-on-one interviews, and revealed the following characteristics.

1. Social, Emotional, and Cultural Support: Social, emotional, and cultural factors are intertwined. Specifically, emotional and cognitive processes inform a student’s impressions of situations that shape behavior. The aforementioned factors contribute to attention spans, decision-making, and teaching and learning. Students who display healthy social, emotional and behavioral adjustment are more prone to achieve academic success.

2. District-wide and School-wide Professional Development: This level of professional development supports administrators and educators and builds leadership capacity. Both administrators and educators improve their abilities to be equipped with social and emotional learning, data-informed decision-making, and the allocation of resources to involve parents and community leaders.

3. Parent Academic Professional Development and Parenting Skills Training: The overarching impact of professional development for parents in academic and parenting skills training is the implementation of evidence-based strategies for promoting responsiveness and sensitivity, modeling and practicing social and emotional and academic skills, enhancing emotional communication and discipline, bridging gaps, and reducing barriers.

4. Parental Connections with Community Resources and Employment Agencies: Community and employment agencies are in a position to build connections and provide parents with opportunities to increase their basic, economic, and information literacy skills. These entities can offer guidance on adapting to change and growth, managing the
complexities of the work environment, and applying sound reasoning and judgment to evaluate and synthesize complex home and work situations.

5. Accessibility of Resources: The accessibility to resources can transform the teaching and learning experience, improve academic achievement, and promote systematic educational change. Schools and communities need more access to early learning resources and long-term community engagement activities and local partnerships with businesses and corporate leaders.

6. Increased Visibility of Community Stakeholders: Community stakeholders can empower policy-makers to revitalize low-income and disadvantaged communities, promote children’s cognitive and academic skills, nurture the development of social and emotional skills, and enhance communication skills.


Summary

Social and emotional learning significantly impacts the school and community. It is the foundation for solving real-world problems, applying academic and non-academic knowledge, and thriving in an ever-changing society. Students, parents, and educators need the necessary skills to progress in rigorous academic content and 21st-century workplace environments. Social and emotional learning can no longer serve as a disparaging barricade to thriving in a knowledge-driven, global society. All students must be afforded these opportunities. It begins
with those who have the ability to hold school systems and communities accountable for academic achievement and growth, and workplace and career advancement.
Chapter 5: Findings

The purpose of this qualitative research study was to construct a theoretical framework based on surveys, focus groups, and in-depth one-on-one interviews with administrators, educators, school support personnel and related service providers, school counselors, mental health practitioners, rehabilitation professionals, and counseling educators. The theory developed provides an account of best practices for social and emotional learning. The theoretical framework revealed the following characteristics:

1. Social, Emotional, and Cultural Support: Social, emotional, and cultural factors are intertwined. Specifically, emotion and cognitive processes inform a student’s impressions of situations that shape behavior. The aforementioned factors contribute to attention spans, decision-making, and teaching and learning. Students who display healthy social, emotional and behavioral adjustment are more prone to achieve academic success.

2. District-wide and School-wide Professional Development: This level of professional development supports administrators and educators and builds leadership capacity. Both administrators and educators improve their abilities to be equipped with social and emotional learning, data-informed decision-making, and the allocation of resources to involve parents and community leaders.

3. Professional Development Academic and Parenting Skills Training: The overarching impact of professional development in academic and parenting skills training is the implementation of evidence-based strategies for promoting responsiveness and sensitivity, modeling and practicing social, emotional, and academic skills, enhancing emotional communication and discipline, bridging gaps, and reducing barriers.
4. Parental Connections with Community Resources and Employment Agencies:

Community and employment agencies are in a position to build connections and provide parents with opportunities to increase their basic, economic, and information literacy skills. These entities can offer guidance on adapting to change and growth, managing the complexities of the work environment, and applying sound reasoning and judgment to evaluate and synthesize complex home and work situations.

5. Accessibility of Resources: The accessibility of resources can transform the teaching and learning experience, improve academic achievement, and promote systematic educational change. Schools and communities need more access to early learning resources and long-term community engagement activities and local partnerships with businesses and corporate leaders.

6. Increased Visibility of Community Stakeholders: Community stakeholders can empower policy-makers to revitalize low-income and disadvantaged communities, promote children’s cognitive and academic skills, nurture the development of social and emotional skills, and enhance communication skills.

Broader Theoretical Issues

This qualitative research study will be utilized as a resource for integrating social and emotional learning into the general curriculum and for preparing students for academic, career, and workforce development. Participants provided their outlooks for students to obtain a high-quality education that seamlessly integrates social and emotional learning, and prepares students for real-world challenges. Additionally, participants contributed their ideas and perceptions of state, district, and school policies that could strengthen the growing body of social and emotional learning research. Specific strategies must include the voices of districts’ and of schools’ greatest commodities—these would be the voices of the students.

Implications

This qualitative study focused on how to increase social, emotional, and cultural support; district-wide and school-wide professional development; parent academic professional development and parenting skills training; parental connections with community resources and employment agencies; accessibility of resources; visibility of community stakeholders; and a community-driven curriculum that incorporates social and emotional learning, and 21st century skills and workforce development. The implications for the aforementioned research offer a broader understanding of the successful integration of social and emotional learning skills within the general curriculum and academic success. This study has added to the partial collection of social and emotional learning empirical research. The data gathered from surveys focus groups, and in-depth one-on-one interviews have implications for numerous educational stakeholders (i.e., policymakers, administrators, educators, school support personnel and related service providers, school counselors, mental health practitioners, rehabilitation professionals, and
counseling educators). Moreover, the implications of this study will deepen the knowledge of social and emotional learning and academic achievement.

**For policymakers.** It is necessary for policymakers to take a vested interest in social and emotional learning, and ratify bills to allow flexible funding for the administrator, educator, and parent-professional development and training programs. Specific support should be geared towards early learning and funding for low-income schools and neighborhoods. Social and emotional learning must be a major priority for pre-kindergarten programs and elementary schools. These federal funds would be greatly needed for children to succeed in today’s society.

**For administrators.** Administrators must implement a district-wide and school-wide vision for successfully implementing social and emotional learning skills into the general curriculum. Social and emotional learning and core subjects should not be taught in isolation. The unique integration of both would lead to strong school-wide cultures and higher academic success. There should be a commitment from all stakeholders to reform traditional forms of teaching and learning and incorporate school-wide practices of social and emotional learning and core subjects.

**For educators, school support personnel and related service providers, and school counselors.** Teacher preparation, ongoing social and emotional support, and professional development and training programs can enhance social and emotional learning competencies and reduce disruptive and aggressive behaviors that deter the positive impacts of teaching and learning. Furthermore, social and emotional learning will afford school professionals and students the ability to build rapport, form close bonds, and relationships, and foster a myriad of social, emotional, and academic gains.
For mental health practitioners, rehabilitation professionals, and counseling educators. These professionals can effectively model safe, caring, and empathetic relationships that engage teachers, caregivers, parents, and students. Additionally, they are able to assist these individuals in building a repertoire of skills to advance social and emotional learning skills. The positive effects of the modeling and facilitation of these aforesaid skills lead to fewer conduct problems and disciplinary actions, as well as improved classroom engagement and grades.

Recommendation for Future Research

This research was conducted with a relatively small subset of the general population. As a result, it may not be entirely feasible to generalize the findings to larger groups of students and public and private institutions. The qualitative research study supports additional efforts to replicate the social and emotional learning results. Forthcoming discoveries could potentially benefit the broader body of social and emotional learning research. It is recommended that future research measure the impact of high achieving schools sharing resources with less advantaged educators and students, and evaluate social and emotional learning skills and academic achievement outcomes. Moreover, further research could focus more intensely on the social and emotional and academic perspectives of students residing in low-income and poverty-stricken environments. Impending research could clarify the number of opportunities that students need to have for engaging in social and emotional development programs in order to improve positive relationships and increase academic success.

Summary

This qualitative research study evaluated the perspectives of administrators, educators, school support personnel and related service providers, school counselors, mental health practitioners, rehabilitation professionals, and counseling educators in relation to students’ social
and emotional learning competencies and academic achievement. These competencies included but were not limited to comprehending and self-regulating emotions, developing and obtaining positive goals, displaying genuine concern and empathy for adults and peers, maintaining and sustaining positive adult to the student and peer-to-peer relationships, and engaging in the practice of responsible decision-making. The recurrent themes within the research study were social, emotional, and cultural support; district-wide and school-wide professional development; professional development in academic and parenting skills training; parental connections with community resources and employment agencies; accessibility of resources; increased visibility of community stakeholders; and a community-driven curriculum that incorporates social and emotional learning and 21st century skills and workforce development. The participants’ all-encompassing reactions and responses offer greater insights for building positive social and emotional learning skills, academic success, and career and workforce development.
References


Georgetown University Center for Child and Human Development. (n.d.). *Research findings about the importance of social and emotional health*. Retrieved from https://www.ecmhc.org/tutorials/social-emotional/mod1_1.html


Appendices

Appendix A: Informed Consent

Introduction

My name is Tanika Johnson. I am a Student in the Department of Education at Carson-Newman University. I am working with my dissertation chair and faculty advisor, Dr. Mark Gonzales, on a research study about social and emotional learning. We would appreciate your permission and voluntary participation in this research study.

Purpose

This study will investigate the impact of social and emotional learning on psychological factors that influence disadvantaged students’ environmental responses, as well as assess the short-term and long-term outcomes of social and emotional deficiencies that affect inferior academic outcomes and educational achievement gaps.

Benefits

There is no personal benefit for taking part in this study. However, we hope that the results of the research will contribute to the general knowledge base of social and emotional development.

Risks/Discomforts

- Breach of Confidentiality: A possible risk for any research is that confidentiality could be
compromised. That is, people outside the study might get hold of confidential study information. We will do everything that we can to minimize this risk.

- Participant names will be used as part of the identification of social and emotional learning perceptions. There will not be any names reported. We will discard the participants’ names upon identification of categories, groups, and themes.

Confidentiality

We will keep your data as confidential as possible. For the publication and presentation of results for this study, we will not use individual names or other personally identifiable information.

To help protect confidentiality, we will not report any participants’ names. Once categories, groups, and themes have been identified, then each participant’s name will be discarded.

Compensation/Payment

Participants will not receive payment or any other compensation for taking part in this study.

Voluntary Participation

*Participation in this research is completely voluntary.* If you do not wish to participate, then you may withdraw or opt out at any time. Any refusal to participate will not result in any consequences.

Questions

You can ask questions about this study at any time, now or later. You can talk to me, my dissertation chair and advisor, or someone else at any time during the study. You can contact me, Tanika Johnson, at 901-443-7353 or tmjohnson@en.edu, or you can contact Dr. Mark Gonzales at 512-577-0311 or mgonzales@en.edu.

If you have any questions or concerns about your rights and treatment as a research subject, you may contact:

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Appendix B: Social and Emotional Learning Survey

The Social and Emotional Learning Survey captures the perceptions of parents, educators, school counselors, administrators, related service providers, other school personnel, and mental health service providers. As you respond to the statements below, consider students’ social and emotional competencies and how these competencies influence their social interaction with peers and adults. Please use the scoring guide to rate your impressions of students’ social and emotional learning skills.

1 = Strongly disagree
2 = Disagree
3 = Agree
4 = Strongly agree

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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
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<tr>
<td>A. Students are capable of resolving interpersonal conflicts that arise in academic and non-academic settings.</td>
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<td>B. In academic and non-academic settings, behavioral and academic expectations are clearly articulated and address students’ individual needs and strengths.</td>
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<td>C. Social or community teaching practices assist in developing meaningful relationships between students and adults.</td>
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<td>D. Academic and non-academic settings can assist with cultivating students’ social and emotional learning skills.</td>
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<td>E. Balancing the needs and behaviors of students is critical to implementing social and emotional learning.</td>
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<td>F. Students should be included in the collaborative process of solving problems that arise in the school and home environments.</td>
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<td>G. Adults should consider students’ emotional and academic needs in implementing social and emotional development programs.</td>
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<td>H. When incorporating social and emotional development programs, academic and non-academic settings must address commonalities and differences (i.e., race, ethnicity, culture, disabilities, etc.) that exist</td>
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among students.

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<td>I. In order to be successful, students need more opportunities to apply positive social skills.</td>
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<tr>
<td>J. Academic achievement increases whenever adults are more aware of students’ emotions, culturally grounded beliefs, and backgrounds.</td>
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**Optional:** Would you be willing to participate in a focus group on social and emotional learning?

____Yes  ____No
Appendix C: Tables and Figures

Students are capable of resolving interpersonal conflicts that arise in academic and non-academic settings.

43 responses

Figure 1. Interpersonal Conflicts in Academic and Non-academic Settings.
In academic and non-academic settings, behavioral and academic expectations are clearly articulated to address students’ individual needs and strengths. 43 responses

*Figure 2. Behavioral and Academic Expectations.*
Social or community teaching practices assist in developing meaningful relationships between students and adults.

44 responses

Figure 3. Social or Community Teaching Practices.
Academic and non-academic settings can assist with cultivating students’ social and emotional learning skills.

43 responses

Figure 4. Cultivation of Students' Social and Emotional Learning Skills.
Balancing the needs and behaviors of students is critical to implementing social and emotional learning.

44 responses

Figure 5. Students' Needs and Behaviors.
Students should be included in the collaborative process of solving problems that arise in the school and home environments.

44 responses

Figure 6. Student Inclusion in Collaborative Problem-solving.
Adults should consider students’ emotional and academic needs in implementing social and emotional development programs.  

44 responses

*Figure 7. Students' Emotional and Academic Needs.*
When incorporating social and emotional development programs, academic and non-academic settings must address...s, etc.) that exist among students.

44 responses

*Figure 8. Social and Emotional Development Programs in Academic & Non-academic Settings.*
In order to be successful, students need more opportunities to apply positive social skills.

44 responses

Figure 9. Application of Positive Social Skills.
Academic achievement increases whenever adults are more aware of students’ emotions, culturally grounded beliefs, and backgrounds.

43 responses

Figure 10. Academic Achievement and Emotions, Cultural Beliefs, and Backgrounds.
Would you be willing to participate in a focus group on social and emotional learning?

40 responses

Figure 11. Focus Group Participants’ Voluntary Participation.
Appendix D: Focus Group Questions

1. Are you aware of any social and emotional development reforms that promote social and emotional learning in the early stages of development? How would you measure their levels of effectiveness?

2. Do social and emotional development programs promote equity and nurture opportunities for students to achieve social and emotional competencies? How so?

3. With the emerging trends of social and emotional development, what would be the likelihood of those programs reducing or eradicating racial and gender disparities in education?

4. Do social and emotional development programs avert punitive forms of punishment for school-aged children? Please elaborate.

5. What are your thoughts about social and emotional development programs increasing academic achievement, college enrollment, and degree attainment, and productivity in society?

6. Does social and emotional learning advance a student’s ability to integrate thoughts, feelings, and behaviors that lead to optimistic student outcomes and greater life achievement?

7. What are your feelings about teaching social and emotional learning skills? What is the best way to educate students about social and emotional development?

8. In what ways does the curriculum integrate learning and growth, student learning, and social responsibility?

9. Would grit, empathy, social skills, and a growth mind-set describe the key components of social and emotional development?
10. What are best practices for students to maintain their emotions and interactions in ways that benefit their actions and behaviors and those of others?

11. Within the classroom setting, how often do you observe students exercising attentiveness and their abilities to solve problems? In what ways are these skills exhibited?

12. Within the classroom, how often do you witness students demonstrating competence and autonomy? Please provide specific examples.

13. How could families, schools, and communities collaborate to support the healthy social and emotional development of all children?

14. How can home environments encourage children to be engaged, lifelong learners?

15. How can home environments produce children who are self-aware, caring, and connected to their peers and adults?

16. How can families, schools, and communities partner to increase children’s social and emotional competencies for success in school, college, and career?

17. How can families, schools, and communities contribute to students’ effectively handling the demands of growing up in our modern-day complex society?

18. Should school districts develop policies to support social and emotional development programs? If so, what grade levels should receive the highest levels of interventions and supports?

19. Should social and emotional learning be cultivated into urban, suburban, and/or rural school districts? Please elaborate.

20. How can social and emotional learning create positive school climates?

21. How is social and emotional learning practiced in your school district and classroom?

22. In what ways can students build more social awareness and responsibility?
23. How could a district-wide or school-wide approach to social and emotional learning be beneficial for students?

24. How does effective social-emotional learning frame students’ learning experiences and offer interpersonal, social, and academic success?

25. Who is ultimately responsible for providing support to students that display social, emotional, and behavioral challenges?
Appendix E: In-depth One-on-One Interview Questions

1. What is your knowledge of social and emotional learning?

2. In what ways can social and emotional learning build the foundation for teaching and learning?

3. How can social and emotional learning practices help encourage student-centered discipline, teacher language, responsibility and choice, and warmth and support?

4. How can educators create an environment that is consistent and embeds social and emotional learning expectations?

5. What would be the best practices for formulating partnerships with family members and communities, and encouraging engagement, trust, and collaboration?

6. How could school-wide practices and policies foster a caring, welcoming, and participatory classroom environment?

7. Would social and emotional learning positively impact school climate and build citizenship? How so?

8. Could social and emotional learning enhance relationships between students and teachers? How so?

9. How can social and emotional learning complement academic learning and provide a well-rounded education for students?

10. In what ways could district-wide or school-wide policies nurture a student’s ability to articulate his or her needs and feelings without blame and judgment? How could administrators and educators help students increase their self-esteem and form healthy relationships?