FAMILY FUNCTIONALITY AND SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING SKILLS FOR MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENTS: A PREDICTIVE CORRELATIONAL STUDY

by

Elisabeth Anne Chapman

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

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APPROVED BY:

Maryna Svirska-Otero, Ed.D., Committee Chair

Richard Jensen, Ed.D., Committee Member

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this non-experimental, quantitative, predictive correlational study was to determine if there was a predictive relationship between family functionality, based on the linear combination of expressiveness, cohesion, conflict, and social-emotional learning skills for middle school students. The findings of this study provided data to better understand the extent to which home life impacts the ability of middle school students to apply social-emotional skills at school and can provide educators with data to use as a baseline in understanding and evaluating the current levels of a child's social-emotional learning skills. The research observed 80 middle school students, Grades 6-8, who were enrolled in a public or private school in the state of Texas. Data was collected utilizing the Brief Family Relationship Scale and the Social-Emotional Learning Scale. Survey results were collected on a computer via Google Forms. A multiple linear regression analysis was used to analyze the data and to draw conclusions. The researcher rejected the null hypothesis at the 95% confidence level where $F(3, 76) = 15.86$, $p = <.001$ indicating a significant relationship between the predictor and criterion variables. Results of the study indicated that family functionality could be a key predictor of middle school students' social-emotional learning skills at school. The research suggests that schools encourage positive cohesion, expressiveness, and conflict management in the home. It is recommended that future studies could observe more diverse cultural groups, compare results between private versus public school settings, as well as differentiate results between genders and age groups.

Keywords: family-functionality, social-emotional learning, cohesion, conflict, expressiveness

Dedication

This work is dedicated to the many educators who have positively influenced my life and career. The following people have been especially special to me:

First off, I dedicate this to Ms. Hucker who was my seventh grade science teacher. She taught me that being a student is not about being the best and brightest, but instead it is about having a willingness to learn and grow, even when that means that I make mistakes along the way.

Second, I dedicate this to a couple of my professors at Abilene Christian University, Dr. Dana Mayhall and Dr. Andrew Huddleston. As an undergraduate and graduate student, I felt so encouraged because I was poured into by these two. Dr. Mayhall made me feel seen. She taught me the importance of knowing students and building relationships with them, just as she did with me. Dr. Huddleston is responsible for putting a strong desire in me to pursue a doctoral degree. This is something that I always thought that I was interested in but felt so out of reach. He truly made me feel like I was capable.

Lastly, I would like to dedicate this in memory of Mr. Bo Kiser. When I first began my teaching career, I knew I could turn to him for all the support. He asked me questions that expanded my thinking. Though sometimes I did not know what I was doing, he would guide me in the right direction. I will never be complacent in my work because I know that he had the highest expectations for me. This was not because he wanted to challenge me, but because he knew I was able. I give him credit for much of my leadership and teaching skills.

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Most especially, I praise God for the strength, determination, and willpower he gave me to arrive here. “Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer” Romans 12:12.

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List of Abbreviations

Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL)

Communal Mastery Family Scale (CMFS)

Coronavirus disease of 2019 (COVID-19)

Emotional intelligence (EI)

Emotional quotient (EQ)

Institutional Review Board (IRB)

Intelligence quotient (IQ)

Reasons for Life Scale (RFLS)

Social-emotional learning (SEL)

Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS)

Variance inflation factor (VIF)

Youth Community Protective Factors Scale (YCPFS)

Zone of proximal development (ZPD)

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

The purpose of this non-experimental, quantitative, predictive correlational study was to determine if there was a predictive relationship between family functionality, based on the linear combination of expressiveness, cohesion, conflict, and social-emotional learning skills for middle school students. This chapter will discuss the background of family functionality and its influence on social-emotional learning. Within this section, the theoretical framework will be outlined. Next, the problem statement will discuss the gap regarding this research in the current literature. The purpose of the study and its significance to education will then be explored. The chapter will conclude with an introduction to the research question and the definitions that are necessary for the exploration of the topic.

Background

Middle school years bring about a time of decision-making that has the potential to be filled with negative outcomes. Potential negative outcomes can include academic decline and social maladjustment (Green et al., 2021), as well as substance abuse, violence, and depression that can develop later in life (Bayly & Vasilenko, 2021). Social-emotional learning (SEL) can give adolescents a greater capacity to make better decisions and improve their well-being (Araz-Ledezma et al., 2020). SEL includes five competencies which are self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning [CASEL], 2021). Despite the pull to implement SEL strategies, teachers have limited time to utilize specific practices in their classrooms (Allbright et al., 2019; Petri, 2020). Due to this, children rely on relationships outside of school to build SEL skills. This could include relationships with peers and relatives. Families

are prime examples of people who could influence the growth of children the most, especially because they are the first teachers to students. Therefore, the condition of relationships in the household is highly impactful on childhood social development and should be strongly observed (Jones & Doolittle, 2017; Osher et al., 2020; Zolkoski et al., 2020). These relationships at home can be exceptionally helpful to the progression of students' SEL skills, or they can be detrimental and damaging (Zolkoski et al., 2020).

Historical Overview

Prior to the establishment of public education in the United States in the late 1700s and even for some time after this, family units were responsible for educating their children (Smith, S. J., 2020). Oftentimes, this took place in a more economical sense with children expected to assist on family farms or businesses (Center on Education Policy, 2020). Life skills were primarily learned in these environments, shaping children's behaviors, and allowing them to specialize in certain industries. Besides this, religion was often the center of moral learning in the household (Smith, S. J., 2020). As public education began to flourish and become more normalized in the late 18th century and early 19th centuries, character education was the focus of learning in the United States. Benjamin Franklin, one of the founding fathers, and Horace Mann, perhaps one of the most prominent leaders in education, were heavily influential in advocating for integrating ethics and character education in newly developed public school systems. Their ideas were strongly aligned with John Locke's, a theorist who believed that students should establish the ability to make sound choices and promote justice through education. Horace Mann emphasized the teacher's role in modeling outstanding character so that students would follow suit. As moral character flourished in students, so could relationship skills (Watz, 2011). To some extent, this could arguably be the beginning of social-emotional education.

In the latter half of the 19th century, education shifted to a mass learning model inspired by the industrial revolution (Center on Education Policy, 2020). This model concentrated more on arithmetic, reading, and writing. Character education began to slowly fade into the background of public education and become more of a responsibility for religious institutions. At the beginning of the 20th century, schools began to slowly reform with the emphasis being placed on factors such as socialization, attitude, and goal setting (Váradi, 2022). This new focus returns to the roots of character education and holistic child development, which includes relationship skills. Fast forwarding to the 1990s, scholars and educators alike have begun calling for more social-emotional learning (SEL) to take place in classrooms and have even stressed the importance of learning these skills over the mastery of content (Allbright et al., 2019).

In 1994, social-emotional learning was defined by five competencies put together by the Collaborative for Academic and Social-Emotional Learning (CASEL, 2021). These competencies include self-awareness, self-management, responsible decision-making, relationship skills, and social awareness. These pieces all work to form a socially and emotionally competent child. As research continued to explore these competencies, there became a recognition of where students develop these abilities. Both the familial setting and classroom are linked in this developmental process (CASEL, 2021). The collaborative has begun work in exploring these relationships to develop SEL activities that can be used in today's classrooms.

Society-at-Large

Educators intend for students to develop skills that will equip them for sustainable livelihoods (Marsay, 2022). The students that are currently in classrooms are also future leaders, role models, parents, and the 21st-century workforce (Marsay, 2022). Employers are looking for employees that possess skills such as communication, decision-making, problem-solving, and

social perceptiveness (Vista, 2020). Each of these skills falls within a category of social-emotional learning (SEL) (Collaborative for Academic and Social-Emotional Learning, CASEL, 2021). If the home and school are the places that develop social-emotional skills to the greatest degree, it is critical to understand how these two different pieces impact one another and work as a complex system in developing the whole child. SEL teaching strategies can be further individualized by taking students' family backgrounds into consideration (Donahue-Keegan et al., 2019). This is especially important because there is a mutual understanding that family systems equally will influence learning in different educational processes, and potentially SEL (Bæck, 2017; Barger et al., 2019; Chun & Devall, 2019). Research needs further understand the extent of familial impact.

Rey-Guerra et al. (2022) found that families that were engaged more frequently at home, obtained stronger social-emotional skills at an earlier age. This study was supported by Chun and Devall (2019) who emphasized that discussions of social expectations with children at home also resulted in more advanced SEL skills. Understanding the strength of this relationship is vital to help teachers in current school systems better understand the individual characteristics of children that are influenced by their family life (Anthony & Ogg, 2019). Formulating social expectations in the family unit is one way that families could potentially influence SEL. However, it does not allow a glimpse into the functionality of the family and its impact as this study will.

Educational institutions have begun emphasizing the social and emotional development of children with regular content. This means that SEL has become a part of the educational process (Shriver & Weissberg, 2020). As this has become more regulated in public education, family members are often involved in the process of development. However, there is not

currently a strong base of knowledge regarding social contexts of socio-emotional development in non-school settings (Garcia & Serra, 2019; Gebauer et al., 2020). Family life can be a strong predictor of issues like substance abuse, violence, and depression, among others. (Bayly & Vasilenko, 2021). Meanwhile, SEL strength correlates with a decrease in many of these negative habits, behaviors, or mental states (Fang et al., 2021).

Not having opportunities to utilize social-emotional skills such as self-regulation, control, and general relationship skills has been shown to correspond with an increase in anxiety and depression, both major problems that are continuing to grow in today's students (Bazley et al., 2019; Deli et al., 2021; Valois et al., 2017). If students cannot develop SEL skills or do not see them being used at home, the school may be the only place they can be exposed to such education. Ultimately, parents and teachers alike form collaborative communities that can improve relationship skills among children (Niu & Niemi, 2020).

Literature that has already studied family life SEL has often focused on large traumatic events that have occurred in students' lives (Barr, 2018; Paiva, 2019), or negative home environments (Zolkoski et al., 2020). However, these factors do not address all kinds of children. There are those who have positive experiences with their families or may feel more neutral about their home environment. Family functionality is meant to understand the health of the family unit, positive or negative (Fok et al., 2014). Understanding the condition of the family environment allows insight into the factors of expressiveness, cohesion, and conflict. If SEL education is helpful for every student, it is critical to observe all types of backgrounds by looking at all parts of children's experiences and relationships.

Theoretical Background

Two theories framed the study: Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural learning theory and Goleman's (1995) theory of emotional intelligence.

Sociocultural Learning Theory

Vygotsky's (1978) theory of sociocultural learning investigates student understanding and differentiation. This was one of two major social learning theories that began that became prominent in the 1970s. During this time, society began to strongly recognize the pathway to learning culture, expression, and relationship skills through social interactions with others and the environment. Other educative practices have grown from this knowledge (Vygotsky, 1978).

This social theory indicates that learning occurs via language usage and behaviors of people who are within close proximity of a learner (Vygotsky, 1978). Family members or teachers are considered a more knowledgeable other; this is essentially the source of knowledge and skills that students will absorb and utilize in their own education and experiences. This theory also considers family culture as norms communicated with children, overall influencing behavior, and social ideas (Mercer & Howe, 2012; Vygotsky, 1978). This can also be connected to the practice of culturally responsive teaching (Darling-Hammond, 2020), which unites with this learning theory well because it suggests that teachers should recognize the individual cultures, strengths, weaknesses, abilities, and interests that sit within their classroom walls. Each of these pieces is learned from different relational environments and communication styles. In other words, the home can be one place that highly impacts a student's culture which in turn influences social-emotional and content education (Darling-Hammond, 2020). Vygotsky's (1978) theory ties into the study by allowing educators and family members alike to understand their influence on students. Students are strongly impacted by the learning that takes place within

the home and on school campuses, especially as they observe people with more life experience (Vygotsky, 1978).

Theory of Emotional Intelligence

A second theory crucial to this study is the theory of emotional intelligence (EI) (Goleman, 1995). This theory describes four skill sets, including abilities to regulate, understand, assimilate, and express emotions (Goleman, 1995). The theorist expresses that these are all skill sets in which a person can improve and grow, leading to a better working and living environment. Overall, this theory claims that higher EI can also reduce social issues such as bullying, drugs, suicide, and alcohol, among others. Several studies have supported this as teachers have worked to implement EI learning in their classrooms (Bazley et al., 2019; Jagers et al., 2019; Jones et al., 2019; Neth et al., 2020; Valois et al., 2017).

EI can be considered a key part of relationships and experiences (Goleman, 1995). Exposure to different levels of EI can produce different levels of a person's emotional quotient (EQ). People who have a higher EQ often demonstrate more agreeable, organized, controlled, and goal-directed behavior (Mayer et al., 2004), along with high levels of self-awareness and social awareness, both competencies of social-emotional learning (SEL) skills (Meshkat & Nejati, 2017). Personality traits and EI do correlate with one another because of the direct influence on decision-making and behaviors. Mayer et al. (2004) would argue that there are different types of EI that could even further develop different socio-emotional behaviors. In general, this theory is relevant to the research because it explains how students can grow in EI, which is exactly what SEL aims to develop.

Overall, these two theories allow educators to understand the role of family members and even themselves as they influence the social behavior of children. Students imitate the behaviors

of those the most influential individuals in their lives (Vygotsky, 1978). These behaviors and actions will also influence EI (Goleman, 1995). EI also must be understood considering familial and cultural values (Poulou, 2018). Knowing that students develop SEL in both places, teachers must be aware of the behaviors that students observe and mimic from home.

Problem Statement

Current literature has addressed the importance of applying social-emotional skills in the classroom (Loeb et al., 2019; West et al., 2020). Research demonstrates further support that families play a role in learning and practicing social skills (Barger et al., 2019; Motamedi, 2020; Osher et al., 2020). Knowing the critical role that families play in the development of social and emotional skills, the research could extend further into these combined areas. Family functionality is a specific piece of home environmental factors that have not yet been explored in the literature regarding social-emotional learning (SEL) in middle school students. In evaluating parent perceptions of SEL, the skillset that is seen at home may differ in the classroom context (Elliott et al., 2022). Adding family into the picture could provide a broader understanding of SEL skills and approaches that can be used to develop this type of learning (Miller, 2022). The Collaborative for Academic and Social-Emotional Learning (CASEL, 2021) has recognized that extending SEL development to the home can allow for greater success in the many SEL competencies, but these approaches have yet to be more fully developed.

Research should not limit itself to studying SEL progression solely within school settings (Gebauer et al., 2020). There needs to be a deeper understanding of social contexts in non-school settings so that the growth in SEL programs can be further individualized (Garcia & Serra, 2019; Gebauer et al., 2020). Many variables exist within the family unit, which ultimately could vary the way that a middle school student expresses and utilizes SEL strategies in a classroom setting.

Overall, this research could significantly impact how education systems approach SEL based on family systems. This could lead to even stronger culturally responsive and individualized practices when focusing on SEL. The problem is that the literature has not fully addressed the extent to which family functionality can predict SEL skills in middle school students.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this non-experimental, quantitative, predictive correlational study was to determine if there was a predictive relationship between family functionality, based on the linear combination of expressiveness, cohesion, conflict, and social-emotional learning skills for middle school students. The predictive variable is family functionality which consists of three subscales including expressiveness, cohesion, and conflict (Fok et al., 2014). Expressiveness is the ability to openly discuss thoughts and feelings within the family unit (Fok et al., 2014). Cohesion is the level of family closeness and support. Lastly, conflict is the extent to which families are openly expressive of frustration or anger.

The criterion variable is students' social-emotional learning (SEL) skills. SEL skills are defined as students' levels of interpersonal communication and abilities to create healthy identities for themselves, regulate emotions, maintain, and reach positive personal goals, demonstrate empathy, manage conflicting situations, and ultimately maintain positive relationships with others by making responsible decisions (Fernández-Martín et al., 2022). The sample included 80 middle school students, grades 6-8, and their families in public or private school campuses in Texas.

Significance of the Study

This non-experimental, quantitative, predictive correlational study aimed to understand if there was a predictive relationship between family functionality, based on the linear combination

of expressiveness, cohesion, conflict, and social-emotional learning skills for middle school students. The findings of this study provided data to better understand the extent to which home life impacts the ability of middle school students to apply social-emotional skills at school. The learning that takes place in the home environment around family needs to be further considered in the educational setting so that teachers can more strongly differentiate, thus leading to stronger academic and social achievement (Min et al., 2022; Ziernwald et al., 2022).

The result of this research provided educators with data to use as a baseline in understanding and evaluating the current levels of a child's social-emotional learning (SEL) skills. With SEL including relationship skills, educators can inspect and understand how and why students relate to their peers, families, and authority figures in certain ways. Students need to be reached through their culturally diverse backgrounds, which should include family (Hammond, 2014). This knowledge can allow teachers to build better relationships with their students. Teachers who build upon students' backgrounds will nurture their social, emotional, and even academic competencies even further (Ferreira et al., 2020). This is the type of teaching that is culturally responsive and that requires insight into students in outside contexts (Darling-Hammond, 2020). This can be provided by observing the predictive relationship between family functionality and SEL skills.

Research Question

RQ1: How accurately can *social-emotional learning skills* be predicted from a linear combination of *family functionality factors* (expressiveness, cohesion, and conflict) for middle school students?

Definitions

1. *Academic achievement* – This refers to the "level of actual accomplishment or proficiency one has achieved in an academic area, as opposed to one's potential in the educational goals measured by examinations" (Lawrence & Deepa, 2013, p. 103),
2. *Cohesion* – Cohesion is the level of family closeness and support (Fok et al., 2014).
3. *Conflict* – Conflict is the extent to which families are openly expressive of frustration or anger (Fok et al., 2014).
4. *Culturally responsive teaching* – Culturally responsive teaching is "cultural knowledge, prior experiences, and performance styles of diverse students to make learning more appropriate and effective for them; it teaches to and through the strengths of these students" (Gay, 2000, p. 36).
5. *Emotional intelligence* – This is the "intelligent use of emotions and thinking in our decision-making process" (Gill, 2021, p. 3).
6. *Expressiveness* – Expressiveness is the ability to openly discuss thoughts and feelings within the family unit (Fok et al., 2014).
7. *Family functionality* – Family functionality is the linear combination of expressiveness, cohesion, and conflict within the family unit overall measuring the health and stability of relationships (Fok et al., 2014).
8. *Learning abilities* – A child's learning abilities refer to "the enhancement of individual capacity to recognize and regulate emotional information and behaviors to facilitate desirable social outcomes" (Seal et al., 2011, p. 82).
9. *Social-emotional learning (SEL)* – Social-emotional learning occurs and is used to effectively utilize "knowledge, skills and attitudes necessary to develop healthy identities,

manage emotions, formulate and achieve positive personal and collective goals, feel and show empathy for others, initiate and maintain positive and supportive interpersonal relationships, manage interpersonal situations constructively and make responsible and caring decisions" (Fernández-Martín et al., 2022, p. 2). SEL includes five competencies including self-awareness, social awareness, self-control, interpersonal skills, and relationship skills (CASEL, 2021).

10. *Social skills* – Social skills are "interpersonal behaviors needed to make and keep friends, such as joining in and giving compliments; peer-related social skills valued by classmates, such as sharing and working cooperatively; teacher-pleasing social skills related to academic success, such as listening and following directions; self-related behaviors, such as following through and dealing with stress; communication skills, such as attending to the speaker; and assertiveness skills" (Basu & Mermillod, 2011, p. 182).

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

The purpose of this literature review is to present important elements of family functionality, structure, involvement, and social-emotional learning (SEL) in preparation for the study. This chapter will review the currently known relationships between SEL and family. The chapter begins with the theoretical framework. This study is grounded in Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural learning theory and Goleman's (1995) theory of emotional intelligence (EI). Following this section is a thorough exploration of related literature. Furthermore, the existing relationships between SEL and family will be reviewed. Topics pertinent to the study including general SEL strategies, family structure, environment, culture, relationships, family involvement, and benefits of SEL will be reviewed. This chapter will end with a summary.

Theoretical Framework

Two theories frame this study, Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural learning theory and Goleman's (1995) theory of emotional intelligence (EI). Vygotsky's (1978) learning theory establishes how students obtain knowledge regarding social behavior, whereas Goleman's (1995) theory of EI explains the different levels of ability in controlling and expressing emotions and developing empathetic interpersonal relationships. Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural learning theory establishes how learning occurs between children and those who surround them while Goleman's (1995) theory of EI establishes a sound explanation pertinent to the development of social-emotional learning skills.

Sociocultural Learning Theory

Sociocultural learning theory (Vygotsky, 1978) indicates that knowledge stems from the language and behaviors of those who are near the learner. This theory sits under the umbrella of

social-learning theories due to the need for the learner to interact with others to obtain knowledge. Language is the centerpiece of this theory because Vygotsky (1978) noted that language transmits knowledge of culture and information. Ultimately, this means that the learner interacts with others to develop an understanding of the world around them. This best occurs in the zone of proximal development (ZPD). The ZPD is the gap between mastery and what should be mastered next. It pushes the learner outside of their comfort zone to process new information. This means that the learner must observe and interact with a more knowledgeable other to gather understanding (Vygotsky, 1978). Within sociocultural learning theory (Vygotsky, 1978) the belief is that intellectual discoveries are an outcome of social interaction. Culture is a large part of development because learning and understanding depend on how cultural norms are communicated to children. Vygotsky (1978) believed that a culture is a tool that can be used to adapt to the environment intelligently, therefore, children-learn from those they spend-time with.

Vygotsky's (1978) theory sets a foundation that explains the development of behaviors and how home environment and relationship factors can impact developmental processes in children (Nasir & Hand, 2006). To grasp how these cultural ideas and the home environment can impact learning, it is essential to be familiar with the ZPD and what Vygotsky (1978) meant by this. The ZPD depends on a child's comfort zone. In teaching and learning situations at school, students are asked to exit their comfort zone of knowledge to enter the ZPD. According to Vygotsky's (1978) theory, different levels of engagement need to occur before a student meets mastery. Jered et al. (2020) describe these different levels of the ZPD in three categories. The first category is a level where students can perform an activity with communal support. The second level occurs with peer support, support from people who are in the same social or academic situation. On the third level, students exit the ZPD and enter independent engagement

(Jered et al., 2020). Vygotsky (1978) makes it clear that this process occurs through socialization with the community or a more knowledgeable other before a student can meet mastery in social or academic skills. This study will assume that the community is inclusive of family and the school.

With the concern of social-emotional skills, students must enter the ZPD to develop a mastery of the critical elements that come with social-emotional learning (SEL). For a student to enter the ZPD in any environment, it is essential that they feel safe (Amerian et al., 2014). If students feel unsafe at home or associate their home life with trauma, social skills are slower to develop (Amerian et al., 2014). In other words, it will take longer to enter mastery of SEL skills, as these are not communicated well in a negative social environment (Amerian et al., 2014). This element of Vygotsky's (1978) theory emphasizes the emotions involved in learning in a sociocultural context. Sociocultural learning affects emotions and the way that they are displayed (Harris et al., 2022).

Overall, the sociocultural learning theory creates a context for SEL across different cultures (Harris et al., 2022). Culture is inclusive of the makeup of the family, trauma, emotions, and SEL skills (Smock & Schwartz, 2020). If learning occurs through dialogue in the ZPD, students must enter this dialogue to obtain SEL skills (Amerian et al., 2014; Vygotsky, 1978). Intellectual achievements and failures are not simply a product of a child's own efforts, but they evolve through the cultural context of family interactions (Mercer & Howe, 2012). Culture is a large part of development because learning and understanding depend on how cultural norms are communicated to children, especially in the family environment (Mercer & Howe, 2012; Vygotsky, 1978).

This study will further observe environmental factors in the home that consider family functionality. The levels of perceived cohesion, expressiveness, and conflict are interactive factors that shape children's behavior (Fok et al., 2014). Language and behaviors used in conflict, or levels of expression, and closeness, will give children a basis for how they develop their own relationships outside of the family. The observed levels of these predictor variables in the home could potentially influence social behavior in other contexts. The goal of this study was to understand the extent to which these levels do influence SEL skills.

Theory of Emotional Intelligence

Goleman's (1995) theory of emotional intelligence (EI) touches upon the social-emotional learning (SEL) piece of this study. The theory of EI was first explored in a journal article written by Mayer et al. (1990). Mayer et al. (1990) explained EI in four categories. These four categories include (a) nonverbally identifying emotions (b) using emotions to guide thinking (c) understanding how emotions can drive actions and (d) regulating one's own emotions. Goleman (1995) later built on the idea, emphasizing that EI is more important than the intelligence quotient (IQ) of a person. The theory's purpose was to add to the idea of intelligence, including a person's emotional capabilities (Goleman, 1995).

Goleman's (1995) theory focuses on five components including emotional self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills. The theory is that the development of these emotional pieces can lead to success, leadership, and positive relationships (Goleman, 1995). Emotions are internal responses that are set off by psychological systems. They usually occur when there is a change in relationship, memory, family, or other events (Mayer et al., 2004). This means that EI is highly impacted by the environment and life experiences. EI is developed through experiences, and can be grown through SEL (Wood, 2020).

The home atmosphere can influence EI (Uzzaman & Karim, 2018). Children with families who are more expressive and involved in their education have been shown to have higher levels of EI (Uzzaman & Karim, 2018). Perceived EI among family members can influence the construction of one's own EI, especially when it comes to coping with mental health (Sánchez-Núñez et al., 2020). Wood (2020) noted that students bring their EI into the classroom, which can be a positive experience if they have learned how to use their EI healthily at home. Otherwise, EI has the potential to establish unhealthy behaviors such as emotional manipulation (Wood, 2020). Family can be very influential in this way (Sánchez-Núñez et al., 2020).

It is critical to consider the relationships in the home environment. Observing the predictor variables of expressiveness, cohesion, and conflict, students perceive different levels in their households and are likely to mimic the emotional outcomes that they see based on the strength of these factors. Stronger levels of these variables coincide with healthy family functionality. Each of these elements could make an impact on students' EI, overall changing how they apply SEL in outside contexts. This study helped further recognize the role of family functionality in EI.

Summary

Research has called for connecting emotional intelligence (EI) (Goleman, 1995) to social-emotional learning (SEL) in cross-cultural contexts (Wood, 2020). When paired together, the two theories lay a strong foundation for understanding how family systems shape culture and ultimately SEL skills. This study can utilize Vygotsky's (1978) theory within family relationships to understand how impactful this theory is in the development of EI. The behaviors observed in the family unit will overall shape children's EI, giving a basis for how relationships

are developed, maintained, and grown in contexts outside the home environment (Goleman, 1995). Overall, each theory establishes SEL skills with the learner with Vygotsky's (1978) theory by shaping behavior, and Goleman's (1995) theory of EI establishing an emotional understanding of children's environment and relationships. These theories set precedence for understanding the impact of expressiveness, cohesion, and conflict management within the household and how this can overall impact the ability to learn SEL skills at school.

Related Literature

This section explores related literature on the topic of social-emotional learning (SEL) and family that has contributed to the development of this study. First, there will be an inspection of SEL with a connection to relationships and culture. Next, family relations and demographics will be explored. Additionally, there will be an exploration of family involvement and the impact it has on children's academic and social growth. This will proceed with an examination of the benefits that come from SEL.

Social-Emotional Learning

Social-emotional learning (SEL) skills are comprised of five domains including self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making (Collaborative for Academic and Social-Emotional Learning, CASEL, 2021). The development of these skills is especially necessary for the middle school years when behavioral issues can intensify, while autonomy and independence are becoming more normal for this age group in the household (Yeager, 2017). There is a need in school settings, home environments, and workplaces for SEL. The outcome of positive SEL skills is universal, as these learned behaviors are able to shift through different contexts (Weissberg, 2019). SEL is a practice that

needs to be taught and modeled. These skills are developed through teaching, relationships, and culture (Barnes & McCallops, 2019; Osher et al., 2020).

Strategies of Social-Emotional Learning (SEL)

For social-emotional learning (SEL) to be effective, it must be intentionally implemented in the classroom setting. As of 2020, 18 states in the United States have developed an SEL curriculum that is utilized in public schools and 26 states have released guidelines that encourage schools to implement socioemotional instruction. This makes it clear that SEL is becoming more normalized (Shriver & Weissberg, 2020). Those that support SEL instruction would claim that this type of learning is just as important as academic core classes (Kaspar & Massey, 2023; Shriver & Weissberg, 2020). As educational systems have recognized a need to use SEL in classrooms, there must be recommended guidelines regarding how practices should be utilized. SEL instruction that has successful outcomes convinces all members of a community that the strategies are beneficial to all (Kaspar & Massey, 2023).

The Aspen Institute (2018) claims that the most important pieces of effective SEL instruction come from the professionals who are developing and implementing the curriculum (Jones et al., 2020; Moroney, 2019). Educators must continuously reflect on and improve the instruction that is being utilized in the classroom. They must be trained to effectively implement this curriculum, and they must use SEL instruction alongside core content (Kaspar & Massey, 2023). Many SEL curriculums have been designed; however, the design itself is of lesser importance than teacher attitude towards SEL and managing time to ensure the curriculums are being taught in the classroom (Ferreira et al., 2020; Misbah et al., 2022). Teachers who demonstrate positive attitudes toward teaching SEL curriculum observe better output and competence in the newly learned skills (Misbah et al., 2022).

Much of the SEL curriculum focuses on language support relevant to self-regulation (Daunic et al., 2021). In early childhood, literature can often be used as a model to demonstrate healthy socioemotional practices (Daunic et al., 2021; Thierry et al., 2022). The curriculum is often based on modeling language that is age appropriate for students developing the SEL (Ferreira et al., 2020; Scheithauer et al., 2022). As children begin to latch onto developmental SEL skills, they will mock behaviors that they see from more knowledgeable others (Vygotsky, 1978). For this reason, many SEL curriculums aim to prevent negative behaviors and are a measure taken to teach children to regulate their emotions from the beginning (Scheithauer et al., 2022). However, this is not the only way that SEL is developed. Studies must begin to observe positive relationships, taking a look at the holistic outcomes of SEL based on alternate relationships and environments (Majed et al., 2022).

Relationships and Social-Emotional Learning (SEL)

A core competency of social-emotional learning (SEL) is relationship skills (Collaborative for Academic and Social-Emotional Learning, CASEL, 2021). SEL is highly impacted by relationships with student-teacher relationships being one of the most crucial (Osher et al., 2020; Poulou, 2018). Teachers must learn how to help students manage and regulate emotions to achieve a positive classroom environment (Anderson et al., 2020; Poulou, 2018; Shewark et al., 2018). Educators who plan lessons that actively build on student strengths can increase intrinsic motivation, which appears as an act of affection (Haslip et al., 2020). As teachers model positive SEL outcomes, students connect these practices to their own academic and social life (Panayiotou et al., 2019). With the student-teacher relationship being so critical to the development of both SEL skills and academic learning, it is even more important that teachers model positive socioemotional behaviors (Kaspar & Massey, 2023). Students who

demonstrate more disruptive behaviors that are negative for themselves and others, often cannot claim that they have had a positive relationship with a teacher (Van Bergen et al., 2020).

Child-to-family relationships are also highly impactful to SEL (Hickey-Moody & Horn, 2022). With each family comes shared language, traditions, habits, history, religion etc. (Hickey-Moody & Horn, 2022). Families are responsible for this overall development as the household culture sets precedence for understanding concepts of SEL (Osher et al., 2020). While family relationships can positively influence social and emotional skills, they can also be detrimental if relationships with family members are in poor condition (Zolkoski et al., 2020). Positive familial support in this area will lead to positive outcomes, whereas stressful and traumatic environments in the home can lead to negative outcomes (Lara & Saracostti, 2019). The unfortunate reality is that students who lack SEL education at home, heavily rely on school programs to implement and teach SEL skills. This can be acceptable if instruction is a positive experience. However, if not addressed through individualized and intentional practices, the outcome can be highly unsatisfactory, negatively impacting the child's life satisfaction (Burroughs & Barkauskas, 2017). Research has not yet fully addressed the impact of parental stress and factors on SEL, especially after the effects of the Coronavirus Disease of 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic (Dillmann et al., 2022). Due to the stress of this time period, many relationships were strained, therefore impacting the effect of SEL in the household (Dillmann et al., 2022).

Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural learning theory notions the importance of language and environment on child development. The theory confirms the need for relationships in learning (Osher et al., 2020). The people that students spend their time with are those that will influence the behaviors and socioemotional outcomes of children in many contexts (Osher et al., 2020). A family and teacher's ability to create a safe learning environment and work to build relationships

with students can support social, emotional, and academic competence (Ferreira et al., 2020). With this in mind, it is important to note that teachers and parent's perceived view of a child's social-emotional abilities can differ (Fält et al., 2018; Schönmoser et al., 2022). Children use different SEL skills in unique contexts. The behavior practiced at home with siblings could easily be different from what is seen and modeled in the classroom. Schönmoser et al. (2022) found that children do strongly develop SEL skills from these relationships, but they are viewed in distinct ways. Overall, positive relations can lead to intrinsic motivation that in turn develops prosocial SEL skills in students (Collie, 2022). Research still needs to understand the extent to which these relations impact application of SEL.

Culture and Social-Emotional Learning (SEL)

Social and cultural factors greatly influence social-emotional learning (SEL) (Barnes & McCallops, 2019). Through family modeling, children learn how to manage and interpret emotions eventually grasping culturally based expectations for appropriate behavior in handling emotions (Raval & Walker, 2019). Race and ethnicity are factors that are very intensely engaged with SEL and outcomes combining culture and climate (Allbright et al., 2019). The population of students in the United States is becoming increasingly diverse, while the population of teachers still reflects a majority that is White, middle-class females (Barnes & McCallops, 2019). Studies show that Latino and Hispanic students have struggled the most in social-emotional learning competencies (Loeb et al., 2019; West et al., 2020). This emphasizes an even stronger need for culturally responsive pedagogy while applying these practices in the classroom (Allbright et al., 2019; Osher et al., 2020).

In the early 2000s many educators and administrators started to develop a strongly culturally tied curriculum (Darling-Hammond, 2020; Gay, 2000; Hammond, 2014; Ladson-

Billings, 2014). This began as culturally relevant teaching and eventually transformed into culturally responsive teaching (Ladson-Billings, 2014). Essentially, educators have seen a strong need to incorporate culturally appropriate teaching in classrooms. This type of teaching considers the diverse backgrounds of many students, but often excludes the family unit and does not translate into contexts other than school (Gebauer et al., 2020). Culturally responsive curriculum values SEL at its core. This type of teaching and learning aims to understand the whole child, including his or her background and is dependent on the building of trust and relationships (Rutledge et al., 2023).

Yuan and Jiang (2018) discuss a specific example of a Chinese immigrant student named Emma. The researchers were able to bridge social learning gaps through storytelling. As Emma discussed her family traditions, she began to build relationships with other students around her (Yuan & Jiang, 2018). “Engagement with family stories, religious and community practices can change a teacher’s conception of thought” (Hickey-Moody & Horn, 2022, p. 804). Essentially this implies that teacher perceptions can change based on background knowledge of cultural information. This information can be utilized to provide the best possible social-emotional teaching (Hickey-Moody & Horn, 2022). The authors argue that embracing cultural and family stories can help schools embrace diverse communities, overall improving relational skills.

In the past decade, the Collaborative for Academic and Social-Emotional Learning (CASEL, 2021) has aimed at using SEL to encourage equity in schools. Leveraging SEL requires this type of education to become culturally responsive (Schlund et al., 2020). In 2019, a movement for transformative SEL entered the conversation. This is a type of pedagogy that works to integrate SEL in classrooms and outside settings (Jagers et al., 2019). There is a call to allow this learning to be spread throughout different cultural contexts, including within the

family (Jagers et al., 2019). Culturally responsive teaching and SEL should not be approached as two fields, but instead should come together to allow for further success among diverse groups (The Aspen Institute, 2018). The first step in allowing for this to be successful is to investigate and understand the family unit.

Scholars have encouraged the use of culturally responsive pedagogy in schools worldwide (Sisson et al., 2020). This pedagogical practice considers students' cultural identities when applied to classroom content and learning (Sisson et al., 2020). There is a strong positive correlation between cultural socialization and positive SEL development (Umaña-Taylor & Hill, 2020). Daniel et al. (2022) claim that intentional SEL requires teachers to know their students, as well as their cultural backgrounds. It is critical for students to experience a culturally responsive curriculum as they develop their cultural identity and all the social pieces that come with it, including a feeling of belonging and a sense of individualism or collectivism (Subramaniam & Carolan, 2022). In other words, a social-emotional curriculum needs to be designed with student culture in mind for learning to be effective (Daniel et al., 2022).

Evaluating and Assessing Social-Emotional Learning (SEL)

Social-emotional learning (SEL) can be relative to the context in which the skills are practiced and used. Oftentimes, SEL is measured by assessing emotional intelligence or social skills (O'Connor et al., 2019). With measurement, there can be discrepancies based on who is assessing or evaluating SEL levels. Mudarra et al. (2022) found that most often, parents and teachers have similar results in evaluating perceived SEL skills for the same child. However, this often differs based on other factors such as gender, ethnicity, and age. Elliott et al. (2022), on the other hand, studied parent perceptions of SEL. Their findings demonstrated that SEL skills that are seen at home may differ in the classroom context. Assessing SEL is difficult because of the

many covariates involved (Mudarra et al., 2022). The many pieces of a child must be considered in the assessment of the SEL level.

Scales have been developed to individually measure parts of SEL competencies such as self-control, self-awareness, social awareness, relationship skills and responsible decision-making (Fernández-Martín et al., 2022). These assessments have been implemented by CASEL (2021) but are often limited in diversity and consideration of outside contexts and factors. Future studies could evaluate diverse populations and take demographic information into consideration as SEL skills are used in many different environments, and social contexts, and can differ among different peer groups (Fernández-Martín et al., 2022).

Family Relations and Demographics

The family has never been a static institution. The demographics of the family are constantly changing based on an abundance of factors such as marriage and divorce, childbearing, and same-sex relationships (Smock & Schwartz, 2020). In the early 20th century, marriage was a more common goal, occurring more frequently and at a younger age compared to the beginning of the 21st century (Bloome & Ang, 2020). However, the 1980s saw a shift in family demographics, observing higher divorce rates, cohabitation, and nonmarital childbearing (Smock & Schwartz, 2020). During these years, divorce shifted from a 2% to 5% rate. Regardless of the familial demographic, relationships in the home unit influence the holistic development of children (Eyo, 2018). These relations are unique depending on the environment and circumstance. The household environment can be a cause for developmental flourishing but can also be a source of stress (Mohangi, 2022; Van Winkle & Struffolino, 2018). Stressors can include financial situations, the health of family members, or even constant change (Mohangi, 2022). In the household, families make meaning of their world culturally, linguistically, and

developmentally ultimately shaping children's perceptions and attitudes toward the world around them (Flores et al., 2020). The home is a microsystem that impacts the development of children as they encounter new experiences outside of their household (Cross, 2020). This section will explore family makeup, parenting styles, sibling relations, as well as alternate family structures.

Family Makeup

Families are unique. Each family is a jigsaw of different people who come together sharing a bond of belonging to one another. The family unit can include two parents and three children, or a single mother with two children; perhaps a household comprises of grandparents, an aunt, an uncle, a cousin, a single mother, and a child. Whatever the family's makeup, children are impacted developmentally by the people surrounding them that they know as a family (Barger et al., 2019).

A child's need for stability can come from a household where his or her parents are happily married (Becker et al., 2019; Nomaguchi & Milkie, 2020; Perelli-Harris et al., 2019). Children who grow up with two parents that are married continuously have higher emotional intelligence outcomes that translate into adulthood (Cross, 2020; Panico et al., 2019). Marriage is only a part of the equation with the other part being a positive mother-father relationship perceived by the child (Cole et al., 2020). Living apart from a biological parent has been shown to impact dropout rates, behavioral implications, or even physical health issues (Cross, 2020). Others would argue that it is not necessarily the marriage that is more heavily influential towards child development, but instead the parenting style and self-efficacy of both parents (Albanese, 2019; Cross, 2020; Yerkes et al., 2021). Self-efficacy is a term often associated with social-emotional learning (SEL) that refers to a person's belief in their ability to perform a task well (Albanese, 2019; Collaborative for Academic and Social Emotional Learning, CASEL, 2021).

Parents who believe that they have a positive influence on their child's social and emotional development have modeled this characteristic for their children, which in turn can positively impact the child's own self-efficacy (Albanese, 2019). Cross (2020) and Clair (2019) encourage future research to study other factors of family structure, such as racial makeup and ethnicity and how these pieces can impact SEL competencies.

Divorce is one of the factors that can impact children. This refers to the legal separation of two spouses (Eyo, 2018). In the 1970s the divorce rate within the United States stood at 2%, doubling to 5% in the 1980s. Although the 21st century has seen a decline in divorce, currently at a 2.5% rate, there is a higher number of people opting not to marry at all (Ortiz-Ospina & Roser, 2020). While divorce certainly impacts children on a socio-emotional level, it does not affect all children equally. Some children are more prepared for its occurrence, especially if they have observed negative behaviors between their parents for longer periods of time (Brand et al., 2019). Besides this, parents who communicated well with their children regarding their divorce saw more positive social and emotional adjustment post-divorce (Herrero et al., 2020). On the other hand, children whose parents divorced unexpectedly have seen higher rates of academic decline and in some cases emotional instability (Brand et al., 2019).

Other constructs are impactful towards the influence of the divorce on the children in the household, including the nature of the divorce, the parent's education, the preparedness for the divorce etc. (Brand et al., 2019). Eyo (2018) establishes that many children whose parents are divorced can become prone to social problems and trauma. However, it can be equally a time of freedom and joy if the marriage was strained, causing stress on the children present in the household. Often, the severity of the divorce is one of the strongest factors that should be considered. This is the case because this could be seen as a traumatic event, shaping the

emotional stability of children experiencing this event in their family (Van der Wal et al., 2019). This emphasizes a heavy need for strong positive social influence that can occur through SEL (CASEL, 2021). Overall, the dynamic of divorce in the household can be difficult for children as their relationships change along with socioemotional coping (Raley & Sweeney, 2020).

Divorce can lead to a time in a person's life when they find themselves as a single parent. Parenting as a single father or mother can influence other household areas. Depending on the situation, single parenting can result in financial strain (Bzostek & Berger, 2017; Heintz-Martin & Langmeyer, 2020). Parenting stress can elevate mental health struggles among single parents (Liang et al., 2019). Clair (2019) establishes that the curation of how household struggles are presented to children can influence their well-being. The focus of single parenting often focuses on negative outcomes, but these experiences are not always true for all households (Clair, 2019). Once again, it is critical to look at each situation holistically to understand the psychosocial implications that stressors in the household can have on children (Clair, 2019; Liang et al., 2019). This is why it is so critical to understand family functionality as a whole when looking at the SEL development in children.

Parenting and Social-Emotional Learning (SEL)

Parent behavior, attachment to parents, and style of parenting play a role in the development of emotional intelligence and socialization (Hasanova, 2020). In some cases, the role of the parent can create instability and anxiety in adolescence which results in negative social and emotional behavior (Hasanova, 2020). Parental factors include the child's perception of fatherhood and motherhood roles in the household. Higher life satisfaction is associated with positive parenting and the expected fulfillment of these roles (Kisbu et al., 2023). Different parenting styles directly correlate with a child's emotional well-being (Haslam et al., 2020).

These parenting styles include authoritative, authoritarian, and permissive styles, each creating a different outcome of social-emotional competencies in children (Garcia & Serra, 2019).

The mother-child relationship is considered the primary context in which a child learns to regulate social and emotional skills (Behrendt et al., 2019). When mothers are sensitive to their child's needs, as well as their own, there are stronger outcomes of bonding and social-emotional behavior (Behrendt et al., 2019; Mónaco et al., 2019). This allows children to develop higher regulation skills which can ultimately allow them to deal with stress in a much healthier way (Behrendt et al., 2019).

In fatherhood, fathers that are seen as the dominant role and head of a household, also instilling harsher punishment on their children were found to be less warm and less emotionally supportive thus impacting child behavior (Hunter et al., 2017). Children growing in this environment often internalize emotions (Petts et al., 2018; Rothenberg et al., 2018). However, fathers who are warmer to their children often demonstrated higher levels of closeness with their children, leading to more externalization of emotions (Rothenberg et al., 2018). Parental roles and how they are modeled make a difference in the social, and emotional development as well as the well-being of children (Kisbu et al., 2023).

Oftentimes, attachment styles are accredited to the development of SEL skills. This is often explored in mother-child relationships but fails to leave other family members out of the equation. Attachment refers to the sense of stability that comes from different relationships (Keresteš et al., 2019). Adolescents who have secure relationships with their parents have shown healthier emotional regulation versus adolescents with insecure relationships with their parents have had an adverse outcome (Mónaco et al., 2019). Securely attached adolescents often have higher life satisfaction, higher emotional-intelligence (EI), and a stronger ability to regulate

emotions (Garcia & Serra, 2019). However, adolescents that are insecure with their maternal and paternal figures are more impulsive and at higher risk for anxiety and depression (Holt et al., 2018; Keresteš et al., 2019).

Prior to 2020, most children attended a public or private school for the majority of the calendar year. Being in a classroom setting shifted temporarily when the Coronavirus Disease of 2019 (COVID-19) struck and changed the ways that children attended their respective educational institutions. Many students virtually attended through video conferences or experienced online learning to some extent from their homes (Cluver et al., 2020). Besides shifting learning environments, the COVID-19 global pandemic impacted parent relationships in ways that had not been seen so much before. Children were home for extended periods when normally they would be in school. The extra time spent at home with family members led to more observations of parental stress (Cluver et al., 2020; Dillmann et al., 2022). The child's reaction to parental stress was highly dependent on parent coping strategies (Dillmann et al., 2022). Parents who demonstrated healthy coping skills and conflict management were more highly adaptable and flexible, leading to more healthily developed socioemotional skills throughout the pandemic (Cobham & Newnham, 2018). Children with parents that were clear with their high levels of stress demonstrated a higher development of mental health problems, as well as cognitive and emotional struggles (Cluver et al., 2020). The functionality of the family and how stressors are modeled inform and shape child adaptation to different social contexts and therefore must be understood.

Sibling Relations and Social-Emotional Learning (SEL)

In nuclear families, the role of the sibling must also be considered. The sibling relationship is one of the most prevalent and important relationships that are formed in a person's

lifetime. Siblings play one of the strongest roles in developing how children express feelings, thoughts, and beliefs (Howe et al., 2022). Part of the development in this case also considers the age gaps and birth order of children. How a child handles conflict strongly correlates with birth order and power dynamics within sibling relationships (Mark et al., 2017).

When looking at children with siblings versus only children, some characteristics differ between the groups in their social-emotional skills, but the differences are not always drastic (Schönmoser et al., 2022). In other cases, the role of the sibling only affects the social-emotional learning (SEL) skills and practices of the child when a major life event such as the birth or death of the sibling is at hand. These events are heavy in emotions and ultimately can shape the way that a child approaches social situations, whether this be with anger and sadness or excitability and happiness (Pirskanen et al., 2019).

Children who experience a high level of conflict between siblings, or favoritism shown to another sibling by a parent, often encounter depression, anxiety, hostility, and loneliness. Loneliness is associated with the strength of the relationship. Siblings who are more cohesive and have stronger and positive relations with one another, express lower levels of loneliness and insecurity (Davies et al., 2019; Stocker et al., 2020). With loneliness referring to negative or nonexistent social interactions, SEL skills in family contexts are developed at a stronger level when loneliness is not present (Stocker et al., 2020). Overall, sibling relations can teach children how to deal with conflict through relationship quality. This is influential on SEL skills that are also applied in other contexts (Howe et al., 2022). Siblings have not always been observed in the role of family functionality but should be included in this context as they surely have a part to play in the SEL growth of children.

Other Family Structures

Alternate familial structures are present in the United States, including multigenerational households. In 2018, 20% of children lived in multigenerational households (Cohn & Passel, 2018; Subramaniam & Carolan, 2022). This structure can pose challenges and risks for children, including stresses over privacy and overcrowding, leading to stress (Mohangi, 2022). However, the opportunity to live with multiple generations of family members can allow children to thrive in other ways. This opportunity can foster resilience-building skills, which play a key role in developing self-efficacy (Burgess & Muir, 2020). The role of the multigenerational family can assist in building identity, including cultural identity and cognition (Lee et al., 2021; Subramaniam & Carolan, 2022). Oftentimes, grandparents serve as the carriers of traditions and culture, this is especially true in South Asian cultures.

Adoptive and foster families are also becoming more common in the United States (Font & Gershoff, 2020; Palacios et al., 2019). It is observed that many children that are adopted or fostered have demonstrated struggles in being vulnerable or have shown more behavioral and emotional struggles (Anthony & Ogg, 2019; Goldberg et al., 2021). However, despite troubles that may occur, families that have fostered or adopted have also shown greater support levels in mental health and academics than non-adoptive families (Goldberg et al., 2021; Palacios et al., 2019). Usually, there is a higher level of involvement in education from foster or adoptive parents, which ultimately supports social, academic, and emotional success (Goldberg et al., 2021). Children in the foster care system often come with emotional trauma (Font & Gershoff, 2020). These children who have experienced high levels of trauma or stress from their previous households need parental warmth (Anthony & Ogg, 2019). Anthony and Ogg (2019) argue that adoptive and foster parents are prone to giving this support and warmth that will positively

impact the child's socioemotional development. However, Font and Gershoff (2020) indicate that the support that should come from foster parents does not always occur. This research calls for an overhaul of the system to successfully develop positive social and emotional skills for children in these families.

Overall, the family contributes to the child's holistic development. (Eyo, 2018). The caregiver is primarily responsible for the emotional growth of the child (Thümmler et al., 2022). There is much to consider in this process including the marital status of parents, environment, and family structure. There are long-term impacts that children carry with them outside of the household because of family (Van Winkle & Struffolino, 2018). It is important to understand the implications that life at home can have on childhood development, behavior in school, and overall understanding of the world around them. There needs to be a connection that is further explored between the home and the development of SEL in school settings (Min et al., 2022).

Family Environment

The environment and household culture in which a child lives and develops create emotional senses with which a child must learn to cope (Thompson, 2019). Family members and their emotional regulation skills highly impact the way in which a child feels that they can control his or her emotions in their environment. The less control a child has in this sense, the higher the levels of stress and feelings of incompetence will be (Shaw & Starr, 2019). When considering the family environment, there are many levels of impact. The experience of the household environment can be both positive and negative. A positive environment in which the family is close and cohesive has a positive result on emotional regulation and life satisfaction (Ni et al., 2021). Children who experience trauma and low levels of cohesion, often experience lower

levels of resilience and abilities to regulate emotions (Daniels & Bryan, 2021; Sweetman, 2021). Household rules, norms, and culture all contribute to the familial environment.

Culture

The cultural context of children's learning is incredibly important in the development of many aspects, including self-regulation, relational patterns, cognitive development, and adverse childhood experiences (Cantor et al., 2019). There are cultures where families are more individualistic, and there are cultures where families are more collective in their values (Kotlaja, 2020; Krys et al., 2019). Culturally, the idea of well-being differs and is pursued uniquely depending on familial ethnic background and home environment (Krys et al., 2019). Oftentimes, there is a stronger bond between families that are within a collective culture versus an individualistic culture (Kotlaja, 2020). Culture can impact emotional attachment to one another, predict the roles of each family member, designate leaders, and ultimately shape family functionality (Sumari et al., 2020). Examples of this could be seen in Malaysian, Alaska Native, and Cantonese families where traditionally there are higher levels of collectivism and a more patriarchal style of leadership seen within the family unit (Fok et al., 2014; Sumari et al., 2020). It is important that future research recognizes the strong differences in familial diversity and functionality when studying the development of children (Sumari et al., 2020).

Another piece to consider in culture is familial values. Childhood development is impacted by family roles, rules, and socialization in the cultural context (Henry et al., 2019; Kotlaja, 2020; Sumari et al., 2020). In Hispanic/Latinx families, there is usually a higher value in the family bond with a goal to develop respect and strong socioemotional skills; Black families in the United States typically promote independence, equity, and strong ties to the family (Henry et al., 2019). Religious backgrounds can also influence differences in values that occur through

socialization, decision-making, and ethical behavior (Astrachan et al., 2020). As children see these pieces being modeled for them, they will begin to use what they see as a behavioral compass.

Fok et al. (2014) developed the Brief Family Relationship Scale, the measurement used for this study, to understand family functionality for the Alaskan Native culture. The authors recommended this instrument be tested and used among other Western and non-Western cultures. This makes it clear that family functionality is impacted by culture. Expression, cohesion, and conflict differ based on the values of families. If the family is important in the cultural background, it must be considered in relation to SEL (Jagers et al., 2019). SEL does not only take place in a formal learning environment but is influenced by norms that are developed in alternate contexts (Hayashi et al., 2022). This study will recognize family functionality across different cultural backgrounds in order to fulfill a need to recognize a correlation of family functionality and its impact on SEL.

Family Norms

Family norms refer to the regular environment present between family members in a shared household. The 21st century has brought about new considerations in raising children. These considerations include the use of technology, social media, time together, and time spent with peers. Families consider what is and what is not allowed in the household, what should and should not be consumed, as well as with who children should be spending their time with. Each of these factors contributes to the socio-emotional development of the whole child (Procentese et al., 2019).

Social media and technology are specifically an issue that have become more central in a typical household with adolescents (Procentese et al., 2019). Families have had to change rules

and boundaries regarding what they consider to be a healthy use of social media. On one hand, it has created a world of constant connection, but on the other hand, it has contributed to stronger levels of isolation and slower development of socio-emotional skills and emotional intelligence (Mulawarman et al., 2020). Many adolescents who use social media describe the phenomenon of being fearful of missing out, which is also connected to the closeness of the family unit (Bloemen & De Coninck, 2020). High-quality relationships among family members will lead to stronger relationship skills, less time spent on social media, and less fear of missing out (Alt & Boniel-Nissim, 2018; Bloemen & De Coninck, 2020).

Household norms regarding time spent together, such as eating meals together, participating in hobbies and interests, as well as simply having quality time as a family, have also seen tremendous effects on emotional intelligence (Szcześniak & Tułecka, 2020). Families with higher levels of cohesion, connectedness, and quality time have seen not only stronger relational skills but also higher levels of life satisfaction (Szcześniak & Tułecka, 2020). Family values such as emphasizing quality time will pass down to children, but this also holds true for the opposite. Children who do not spend very much time with their family members because this time is not valued, have been known to show more aggressive behaviors and may even experience more negative relationships with peers (Pérez-Fuentes et al., 2019).

Trauma in the Household

Trauma and domestic violence can cause life-altering effects and challenges that are carried into every social context (Sweetman, 2021). There are multiple types of trauma that can exist in a family unit. Trauma itself is usually considered to be one event that results in negative feelings such as pain, anger, and sadness. This may refer to a death of a close family member, or a single instance of sexual assault. This differs from complex trauma which is ongoing and can

biologically and emotionally alter the outcome of a child's personality and behavior. This could include ongoing poor health of a close relative, or alcoholism that results in violence on a frequent basis (Daniels & Bryan, 2021). These experiences are impossible to separate from day-to-day thinking, feeling, and being (Psycher & Crampton, 2020). As children are being raised, they take cues from their guardians in how to regulate and control emotions; children who are cued into negative behaviors and maltreatment experience a deficit in emotional regulation (Speidel et al., 2019). Family environments that are traumatic, meaning unstable, chaotic, and highly stressful create high levels of insecurity (Paiva, 2019). Children in states of complex trauma will begin to internalize emotions and demonstrate higher levels of depression, anxiety, or even aggression (McGuire & Jackson, 2018).

Children between the age of 3-6 are within the time of their lives where socioemotional development is more strongly influenced by the home environment and family members (Barr, 2018). If trauma occurs within the home between these ages, children often struggle to adjust to classroom expectations and lack executive functions (Barr, 2018). Many schools turn to SEL at this point as a solution, but unfortunately, it is often too late to gain back the deficits (Stearns, 2019). In the current educative climate, there are higher levels of disengagement and challenging behaviors being seen. These experiences are often the aftereffects of trauma (Parker & Hodgson, 2020). Family stability should be taken into consideration when implementing these practices in the classroom; the functionality highly informs SEL abilities and can have both a positive and negative effect on children (Hannigan & Hannigan, 2019).

Family Functionality Variables

Literature has explored family functionality and its impact on children, but often definitions and subscales have differed among the research. Szcześniak and Tułecka (2020)

define family functionality as a combination of cohesion, flexibility, and communication. The focus of their research was to understand the role of family functionality in relation to life satisfaction and emotional intelligence (EI). Pérez-Fuentes et al. (2019) described family functionality with five subscales including adaptability, growth, partnership, affection, and resolve when exploring the development of aggressive behaviors among adolescents. This study will use expressiveness, cohesion, and conflict as a measurement to evaluate family functionality, which is the healthiness and stability of relationships among family members (Fok et al., 2014). This will then be applied to the application of social-emotional learning (SEL) skills.

Emotional expressiveness is considered a healthy behavior that can positively impact childhood (Speidel et al., 2020). This refers to the frequency of which a child is exposed to positive or negative emotions within his or her household (Speidel et al., 2020). Norms about how children should express their emotions often are considered within a cultural context that comes from the family unit (Di Giunta et al., 2020). Based on Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory, children absorb the language of their more knowledgeable others. Di Giunta et al. (2020) state that the language surrounding family expressiveness makes a difference of whether the speaking is aimed at the child or is simply in the environment of the child. This modeling can grow or hinder children's self-regulation skills, a major component of socioemotional development (Speidel et al., 2020); in turn, conflict management is shaped.

Cohesion refers to closeness, support, and connectedness to the family (Fok et al., 2014; Lin & Yi, 2019). This measurement is directly correlated to self-esteem and life satisfaction, with higher cohesion levels directly influencing these two factors in a positive way (Lin & Yi, 2019). Many adolescents experience a decline in life satisfaction in their teen years. This decline

is associated with familial pressure, peer relationships, and academic stress (Buenconsejo & Datu, 2020; Chen et al., 2022). Despite this tendency, family cohesion can promote a slower decline in self-esteem in turn promoting strong emotional intelligence (Lin & Yi, 2019). Family cohesion levels and communication frequency and openness have also been shown to directly influence adolescents' decision-making skills (Bianchi et al., 2019).

Conflict within the family can derive from levels of cohesion and expressiveness (Ferrar et al., 2022). Higher levels of conflict in the household can lead to riskier behaviors and decisions in adolescents (Zolkoski et al., 2020). Conflict management or lack thereof is passed through different generations and often perpetuated if not dealt with correctly (Rothenberg et al., 2020). Conflict management can be taught through SEL, especially as children develop positive relationship skills (Collaboration for Academic and Social-Emotional Learning, CASEL, 2021). Overall, literature has explored these predictive variables separately, or combined with alternate subscales, but has yet to put these pieces together to understand family functionality through the lens of SEL.

Family Involvement in Education

Positive family involvement produces great academic and social outcomes for students (Chun & Devall, 2019; Hall, 2020). There is also a direct correlation between a welcoming school environment and the degree to which families are willing to become involved in their student's learning (Chun & Devall, 2019). While families can be directly involved in the classroom, they also have indirect involvement as students develop ideas about societal norms, transferring them into the classroom (Cherewick et al., 2021).

Academic Growth

Family can be a source of motivation, academic adjustment, and positive communication skills. Familial involvement in school can indirectly impact a child's intelligence, allowing them to grow in their academics or in some cases, struggle with classroom content (Khansari, 2021). When families are able to successfully provide feedback to their child's academic endeavors, there is often a growth in student success and motivation (Hall, 2020).

Other factors should also be considered, including family culture (Chun & Devall, 2019). There are familial factors that could influence academic achievement negatively. If academics are not emphasized as important within the family culture, students may struggle in school or be apathetic toward their learning (Lagravinese et al., 2020). Attitude can vary across many different individuals and social groups (Corneille & Stahl, 2019). These attitudes toward education can also be influenced by the family member's educational backgrounds. A family with higher socioeconomic status and education levels are more likely to have students that place a high value on academic success (Harju-Luukkainen et al., 2020).

Teachers continue to develop processes and programs to invite families into academics as studies demonstrate that this can allow for further academic success (Smith, J., 2020). The findings demonstrate that when parents are involved in academics, grades have a positive outcome (Hall, 2020; Yau et al., 2021). Goal engagement is one of the most important ways to invite family members into the learning process (Hall, 2020; Yau et al., 2021). This simply means that parents and students alike should develop goals together to meet certain academic expectations. This develops a shared value (Yau et al., 2021). Meanwhile, parents whose involvement is simply assisting in homework, are less effective in academic achievement than in discussing and encouraging goals and expectations (Barger et al., 2019; Yau et al., 2021).

However, the most crucial piece of academic success and family involvement is the value of education in the household (Harju-Luukkainen et al., 2020). Among the goals and expectations being discussed, family members should include social-emotional learning (SEL) skills if it is a part of academic achievement and growth. There is a gap in the literature that addresses the need for parents to assist in academic achievement with the inclusion of SEL learning goals (Calkins, 2019).

Social Growth

Families engaged in their student's social development at home have predicted earlier development of social-emotional skills (Rey-Guerra et al., 2022). This also translates to the school environment, as families discussing social expectations at home result in greater social-emotional development at school (Chun & Devall, 2019). These discussions can only occur if social development is valued in the home (Segrin et al., 2019). These conversations establish familial norms, but they do not always occur (Xu et al., 2022). For example, if perfectionism is emphasized and discussed at home, students will have high anxiety regarding this attitude at school (Segrin et al., 2019). This can lead to weaker family cohesion and negative social outcome in the classroom.

Students undertake family expectations as self-expectations which ultimately can alter behavior in the presence of their peers and teachers (Vaid et al., 2022). Self-efficacy, one of the major components of social-emotional learning (SEL), is often developed under the influence of the family (Gebauer et al., 2020). A student's socialization capabilities are highly developed under the persuasive language of family members (Gebauer et al., 2020). Social support from the family allows students to form his or her identity, in turn, growing confidence into their adult years (Toyoshima & Nakahara, 2021).

Social support has been one of the strongest factors considered in the definition of family functionality in past studies (Martín et al., 2021; Pérez-Fuentes et al., 2019; Szcześniak & Tułecka, 2020). Lack of social support from the family has been correlated with the development of aggressive behaviors in children (Pérez-Fuentes et al., 2019). This has also been connected with lower life satisfaction and emotional intelligence (EI) levels (Martín et al., 2021; Szcześniak & Tułecka, 2020). Literature has made it clear that familial support is critical in social growth, but the extent remains unknown in the realm of SEL.

After the Coronavirus Disease of 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic that began in 2020, social growth demonstrated different outcomes that have been carried into the school setting (Naff et al., 2022). Caregivers struggled to meet the emotional needs of children while at home during the global pandemic (Li et al., 2022). In other cases, adolescents built stronger communication and relationships with family members supporting the development of SEL (Naff et al., 2022). Educators are not solely responsible for developing the social growth of their students. Family members were especially critical in this role as students spent more time at home during the pandemic years (Gross & Hamilton, 2023). As social growth from the home carries into the school, educators must understand familial relationships and how they have developed over time. If educators understood the family impact of social development, SEL could be further individualized leading to more emotionally prepared adolescents.

Challenges with Family Involvement

Involving families in education can truly be positive in the development of both social and academic growth. However, this involvement does not come without challenges. Some of these challenges include familial career obligations, limited time, and other personal struggles (Oke et al., 2021). Other barriers to family involvement include cultural differences or

socioeconomic status (Singh et al., 2017). To some extent, family involvement becomes more reachable when schools are inclusive and invitational to families (Ainscow, 2020). Communication is critical in familial involvement; teachers and administrators that do not communicate well send an unwelcoming message that can also be perceived as lack of opportunities to be involved (Liang et al., 2019).

It is widely seen that family involvement in school and learning decreases as students enter the middle school years (Smith et al., 2019). The literature suggests that schools reflect upon barriers that are specific to their district and work to remove these barriers. Besides, it is suggested that schools develop more clear communication between family members and administration so that involvement can become more accessible (Liang et al., 2019; Smith et al., 2019). School involvement is not only beneficial to students but is also beneficial to parents as they are able to increase a positive influence over their child despite potential barriers (Smith et al., 2019). Though schools can work to overcome challenges in involvement, there is only so much that can be done about a child's home life. Regardless, there are connections between the two that certainly influence students' academics and socio-emotional development (Lara & Saracostti, 2019).

Benefits of Social-Emotional Learning (SEL)

Social-emotional learning (SEL) aims to develop students' self-control and decision-making skills (Collaborative for Academic and Social-Emotional Learning, CASEL, 2021). Often, students who are considered at-risk are the most targeted audience for SEL programs (Carroll et al., 2020). SEL is most beneficial to students who demonstrate emotional and behavioral difficulties (Carroll et al., 2020; Dyson et al., 2021). The beneficial effects of effective SEL instruction have been long-term, especially for these at-risk students (Low et al.,

2019; Taylor et al., 2017). These benefits include decreased behavioral conduct problems (Low et al., 2019), higher graduation rates, safe sexual practice, and, ultimately, improvement of SEL development (Taylor et al., 2017). SEL interventions have been applied to mitigate negative behavior in classroom settings that also apply to life outside the classroom walls (Muela et al., 2021; Xu et al., 2022). These practices have been found to decrease perceived bullying, drug use, and suicide (Muela et al., 2021; Nickerson et al., 2019; Xu et al., 2022). Majed et al. (2022) disagree with the approach of utilizing SEL for prevention. Instead, they suggest incorporating social-emotional practices that encourage positive youth development (PYD). This shifts the focus to student strengths based on their backgrounds to encourage positive change rather than using SEL as a measure to stop certain behaviors (Majed et al., 2022).

Bullying

Student perceptions of a teacher's effectiveness in teaching social-emotional learning (SEL) skills correlate strongly with bullying prevention and victimization, which is strong in middle school-aged adolescents (Nickerson et al., 2019; Yang et al., 2020). Schools that apply effective SEL instruction have found lower bullying levels, especially in middle school settings (Nickerson et al., 2019). SEL can lead to an increase in social awareness which can decrease negative behavior toward other students and the number of students who act as bystanders when observing bully-like behavior (Yang et al., 2020). Even so, the competencies emphasized in SEL could allow SEL to be less effective (Majed et al., 2022; Yang et al., 2020). To truly prevent bullying behavior, SEL skills such as self-management, social awareness, and responsible decision-making should be practiced and instructed upon most frequently in classroom settings (Yang et al., 2020). Focusing on these specific skills can change the trajectory of bullying prevention and create a more restorative environment in schools (Majed et al., 2022).

Mental Health

Studies show that SEL can have the ability to effectively prevent mental health challenges such as anxiety or depression. Programs have been used in schools as a preventative measure and to build resiliency (LaBelle, 2023). However, the call for using SEL in schools needs clarity and rigor in solving specific mental health issues to be effective (Chu & DeArmond, 2022; Deli et al., 2021). With middle school being a time of increased mental-health-related difficulties, SEL needs to be tiered, scaffolded, and individualized (Green et al., 2021). Those who are trained to approach SEL with a trauma-based lens are often more impactful to the prevention of mental health challenges (Espelage et al., 2021). This further calls for understanding student background, trauma, and family life so that SEL can be differentiated based on familial demographics and environment.

Oftentimes, children internalize mental health-related struggles and can tend to be overlooked in receiving the necessary care that could derive from SEL programs (Neth et al., 2020; Wilson, 2022). The context of these developing mental health problems and or solutions is incredibly important because relationships impact the perspective of the solution (Ying et al., 2023). With SEL skills developing and growing relationships, a specific focus on mental health within the programs could transform the mindset of the student to one of growth (Neth et al., 2020). Whereas students who are struggling and not meeting the need for social-emotionally growth, lack the ability to reach their full potential (Wilson, 2022).

The Coronavirus Disease of 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic left more students in a higher state of anxiety, depression, and with other mental health struggles than previously seen (Naff et al., 2022). Educators have called for the systematic development of programs that can engage youth in SEL to allow students to learn proper coping mechanisms (Gross & Hamilton, 2023).

Cauberghe et al. (2021) found that many adolescents were using social media as a replacement for social interactions with friends and family during this time, leaving a gap in SEL development that is normally fulfilled. With schools going back to normal, educators have had to create and utilize programs to continuously educate and develop adolescents on mental health topics which in turn influence SEL skills (Gross & Hamilton, 2023).

Long Term Benefits

Stronger social-emotional learning (SEL) skills often correlate with increased social support and emotional intelligence, overall leading to higher life satisfaction (Kong et al., 2019). While SEL is most used in a school building, the effects maintain through different social contexts and result in more positive outcomes (Taylor et al., 2017). After students have exited specific SEL learning programs, there are continued long-term benefits such as higher levels of academic work, prosocial behavior and attitudes, and even psychosocial influence on mental health and wellbeing (Green et al., 2021).

Social-emotional awareness begins to develop strongly between the ages of 3-5 (Burroughs & Barkauskas, 2017). Children who are exposed to more programs that intentionally implement SEL have higher social awareness; this includes the skills that are needed to maintain friendships, value relationships, and resolve conflicts (Burroughs & Barkauskas, 2017). With practice, these SEL skills will lead into adulthood and are developed more strongly as time passes (Ahmed et al., 2020; CASEL, 2021). Many students who began to learn SEL strategies at a young age have demonstrated higher levels of college and career success (Dusenbury & Weissberg, 2017). The development of SEL skills is considered equivalent to the development of 21st-century workforce skills that many employers value. Those who have benefitted from strong SEL curriculum and implementation are considered more hirable and often have higher-

paying jobs (Dusenbury & Weissberg, 2017). It is important to view SEL not only as a responsive intervention but also as a factor of positive youth development (Majed et al., 2022). The benefits demonstrate a need to glimpse into factors that are relevant to students outside of school, including family functionality.

Summary

Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural learning theory establishes how children learn behaviors through interactions in the family unit. Goleman's (1995) theory of emotional intelligence (EI) addresses children's abilities in utilizing social-emotional learning (SEL) skills. Unpacking family functionality and its relation to SEL could potentially provide a baseline measure for children as they enter the 21st century as contributing citizens (Panico et al., 2019). Family involvement is clearly impactful to the socio-emotional development of the child, but research has not targeted the family's contributions to the ability to apply SEL skills (Lara & Saracostti, 2019). SEL is highly influenced by relationships, positive and negative, as well as culture. Literature has revealed that family can assist in a child's academic success and social goals, but there is a strong gap when it comes to understanding the implications of the student's integrated, or already present levels, of SEL based on their home context (Jagers et al., 2019). Overall, SEL is critical in allowing middle school students to thrive in many areas of life. This is why it is crucial to individualize the learning process even further and to utilize family functionality as a predictor for the successful application of strong SEL skills.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Overview

The purpose of this non-experimental, quantitative, predictive correlational study was to determine if there was a predictive relationship between family functionality, based on the linear combination of expressiveness, cohesion, conflict, and social-emotional learning skills for middle school students. Chapter Three begins by describing the research design of the study. The chapter proceeds to review the research questions and hypotheses. Next, there is an explanation of the population being studied and the setting in which the research will take place. Lastly, this chapter discusses instruments used to collect data, procedures, and methods of data analysis.

Design

This study was framed with a non-experimental, quantitative, predictive correlational design. This design was utilized because it helps to understand the strength of the relationship between criterion and predictive variables (Gall et al., 2007). The goal of this study was to recognize the strength of the correlation that lies between the predictor variable of family functionality, which includes, cohesion, expressiveness, and conflict, and the criterion variable, social-emotional learning (SEL) skills. This type of design also aimed to provide evidence for the validity of predictor variables as well as the tests that will be used to understand patterns for the criterion variables (Gall et al., 2007). Overall, a predictive correlational design was best suited to answer the research question at hand.

The non-experimental design was chosen because there will be no manipulation of the variables or a control group (Gall et al., 2007). The design was quantitative, using statistics to analyze data that is collected via two separate instruments. The relationship observed between the variables was predictive, meaning that there was an ideation that there may be an effect on

the criterion variable as a direct result of the predictor. The design was correlational as it explored the relationship between the predictor variable and the criterion variables. A limitation of this design type is that there could have been external variables that might interfere with the information that is provided through the instruments (Gall et al., 2007). Another limitation of the predictive correlational design is that it could not prove causation, but only recognize a relationship between variables. However, it can lead to future studies that intend to observe causation and effects between the variables using a different design method such as a causal-comparative design (Gall et al., 2007).

Within this study, the predictive variable is family functionality (Fok et al., 2014). Family functionality is made up of three subscales, which include, expressiveness, cohesion, and conflict. Each of these factors measures the health and stability of family relationships. Expressiveness is the ability to openly discuss thoughts and feelings with family members (Fok et al., 2014). Cohesion is referring to a family's levels of closeness and support (Fok et al., 2014). Conflict is the extent to which a family is open with frustration or anger (Fok et al., 2014). These variables aim to predict a correlation with the criterion variable which is social-emotional learning (SEL) skills (Fernández-Martín et al., 2022). SEL skills are inclusive of five competencies which are self-awareness, social awareness, self-control, interpersonal skills, and relationship skills (Collaborative for Academic and Social-Emotional Learning, CASEL, 2021). Together, these competencies can measure students' knowledge and skills in developing healthy relationships (Fernández-Martín et al., 2022).

Research Questions

RQ1: How accurately can *social-emotional learning skills* be predicted from a linear combination of *family functionality factors* (*expressiveness, cohesion*, and *conflict*) for middle school students?

Hypothesis

The null hypothesis for this study is:

$H_0$1: There is no statistically significant predictive relationship between the criterion variable (*social-emotional learning skills* scores), as measured by the Social-Emotional Learning Scale, and the linear combination of *family functionality* factors (*expressiveness, cohesion*, and *conflict*) measured by the Brief Family Relationship Scale, for middle school students.

Participants and Setting

The following section will include a description of the studied population and participants. This section will also describe the sampling technique and the sample size. To conclude, the setting in which the study takes place will be discussed.

Population

The population for the study was drawn from students who were enrolled in 13 middle schools within a public or private school campus in Texas during the 2023-2024 school year. Among these schools, there were approximately 5,628 6th-8th grade students. About 54.46% of the middle school students were White, 30.62% were Hispanic/Latino, 8.73% Black, 3.30% Asian/Pacific Islander, 2.60% were considered to be two or more races, and 0.45% Native American (Population and Survey Analysts, 2023).

Participants

Purposive sampling was used to gather participants for the study. To obtain a sample size,

a recruitment email was sent home to students' families by a campus administrator providing information about the study. This included a permission form to be filled out by a parent or guardian. The school administrators sent this email to all families on campus who had a student enrolled in sixth, seventh, or eighth grade. The email included information regarding privacy, disclosure, and procedures that would take place to collect data.

The number of participants gained through convenience sampling was 80. Sample size required for a multiple regression analysis must exceed $N > 50 + 8k$ where k is the number of predictor variables. This will be assuming a medium effect size with a statistical power of .7 at the .05 alpha level. In this case, there are three predictor variables. Using this knowledge, a reasonable number of participants is $N = 75$. Therefore, the number of participants must be larger than 75 (Warner, 2013). Demographic information regarding the sample is provided below (Table 1).

Table 1

Participants' Demographic Information

Characteristic	*n* = 80	Percentage
Gender		
Male	29	36.30%
Female	50	62.50%
Prefer not to say	01	1.20%
Grade Level		
Sixth grade	33	41.80%
Seventh grade	22	27.80%
Eighth grade	24	30.40%
Ethnicity/Race		
White	39	48.80%
Black	05	6.30%
Hispanic/Latino	22	27.50%
Asian	01	1.20%
Native American/Alaska Native	00	0%
Two or more races	12	1.50%
Other/unknown	01	1.20%

Setting

The sample comes from two different settings. About half of the sample size comes from each setting. The first setting is among 11 private school campuses with middle school grade levels, including Grades 6-8. Among these schools, there was a total of 4,183 students. Most of these campuses have a majority population of White students, except for one that has a majority population of Hispanic/Latino students. Of these schools, 10 of the 11 identify as a Christian private school.

The second setting is among two public school campuses. One campus is classified as a middle school, containing grade levels five and six. The second campus is a junior high school, containing grade levels seven and eight. These two campuses have approximately 1,445 students total, with the majority of students being Hispanic/Latino.

Instrumentation

Two instruments were used for this study to measure the linear relationship between family functionality and social-emotional learning skills. The Brief Family Relationship Scale (Fok et al., 2014) was the instrument that measured the predictor variable, family functionality, with three subscales that included cohesion, expressiveness, and conflict (Fok et al., 2014). The Social-Emotional Learning Scale measured the criterion variable, social-emotional learning skills (Fernández-Martín et al., 2022).

Brief Family Relationship Scale

The purpose of the Brief Family Relationship Scale (Fok et al., 2014) is to measure adolescents' perception of family functionality (Fok et al., 2014). See Appendix A for the instrument. The scale was developed from Moos' (1990) Family Environment Scale. The Family Environment Scale (Moos, 1990) received criticism that it was not useful or reliable when looking at more diverse populations. The Brief Family Relationship Scale was created to assess psychometric properties and internal family structure among Alaska Native adolescents, a diverse, non-western population. The scale was developed initially through a pilot study in which parts of the scale that were unreliable and invalid were removed. The scale developers recruited Alaskan Youth through parental consent and administered the survey in a computer lab. There was an interest in developing this scale with this population due to Alaska Native's unique family structure which is considered a family-oriented kinship. The researchers understood the potential role that family functionality could have on future problems such as substance abuse and psychopathology. Therefore, they developed this scale that was inclusive of Moo's (1990) factors of expressiveness, cohesion, and conflict with an adaptation to a different population.

Other peer-reviewed studies have utilized this scale including Mohamed and Moussa

(2018), Sitota and Tefera (2022), and Tang et al. (2021), and Aeilts et al. (2023). Mohamed and Moussa used the scale among university employees in Egypt to understand the correlation between family functionality and social media use. Sitota and Tefera (2022) tested the scale with an Ethiopian population, searching for a correlation between family life satisfaction and family functionality. Tang et al. (2021) studied adverse childhood experiences and their correlation to family functionality and generalized anxiety. Aeilts et al. (2023) used the scale to study a sample in the United States observing if family members would act upon a medical diagnosis from a healthcare provider. Each researcher found the scale to be valid and reliable within their samples.

To ensure the validity of the scale, the researchers reported correlations between four different scales with similar constructs including the Comprehensive Mastery Family Scale, the Reasons for Life Scale, and the Youth Community Protective Factors Scale. Positive correlations were found with all three scales with Comprehensive Mastery Family Scale scores ($r = .51$, $p < .01$), Reasons for Life Scale ($r = .48$, $p < .01$), and Youth Community Protective Factors Scale ($r = .44$, $p < .01$). These scores suggest convergent validity, concluding that the Brief Family Relationship Scale (Fok et al., 2014) is aligned with scales utilizing similar measures. The created scale was also compared to the Alaska Native Cultural Identification Scale where there was a weaker correlation ($r = .18$, $p < .01$). The Alaska Native Cultural Identification Scale measures constructs that are unrelated to the construct of the Brief Family Relationship Scale (Fok et al., 2014), demonstrating discriminant validity. Therefore, concluding that the Brief Family Relationship Scale is distinct from unrelated constructs and is valid. Validity coefficients for each subscale are as follows: cohesion ($r = .86$, $p < .01$), expressiveness ($r = .59$, $p < .82$), and conflict ($r = .76$, $p < .01$).

Fok et al.'s (2014) scale was found to be reliable using Cronbach's alpha. The internal

consistency was highest for levels of conflict and cohesion. Conflict had an alpha level of $\alpha =$ .83, and cohesion had an alpha level of $\alpha = .80$. Expressiveness was rated lower with $\alpha = .65$. The scale had a reliability score of $\alpha = .88$ overall, making the instrument valid. Fok et al. (2014) explained the lower internal consistency in the expressiveness subscale as an attribute of their sample population. This scale was developed with Alaska Native youth, where there are higher levels of collectivism in families. There are also a lower number of items associated with expressiveness on the scale, which will result in a lower reliability score (Gall et al., 2007). The researchers encouraged future research to utilize the scale with westernized populations.

The Brief Family Relationship Scale (Fok et al., 2014) includes three subscales measuring family cohesion, expressiveness, and conflict. The scale includes 16 questions and uses a five-point Likert scale that ranged from *strongly agree to strongly disagree*. There are seven questions regarding cohesion, three questions regarding expressiveness, and six questions regarding conflict within the scale (Table 2). These three subscales grasp many concepts of social-emotional learning within a family setting.

Responses to the scale were as follows: *not at all = 1, somewhat = 2, a lot = 3*. The combined possible score on the Brief Family Relationship Scale ranges from 16 to 48 points. Items related to conflict are reverse-keyed on the scale. Items are then summed to measure the strength of each factor. A score of 16 points is the biggest indicator of low family functionality, with low levels of cohesion, expressiveness, and poor conflict management. A score closer to 48 is an indicator of perceived high-quality family functionality with high scores in family cohesion and expressiveness, and low scores in conflict (Fok et al., 2014).

The scale can be administered on a computer in a survey format. The approximate time to complete the scale is about 10 minutes. The survey responses were scored by the researcher

who summed each subscale using the survey results. There was no training required for scoring. See Appendix C for permission to use the instrument.

Table 2

Brief Family Relationship Subscales

Characteristic	Item #
Cohesion	1, 3, 6, 7, 14, 16
Expressiveness	4, 8, 18
Conflict (Reverse Keyed)	2, 5, 9, 11, 13, 19

Social-Emotional Learning Scale

The Social-Emotional Learning Scale's purpose is to measure social-emotional learning competency (Fernández-Martín et al., 2022). See Appendix B for the instrument. The scale was developed due to an observation that there are increasing numbers of behavioral, social, and emotional incidences within schools, specifically for adolescents. Many scales have been developed in the past to understand the success rates of very specific social-emotional learning (SEL) programs. These scales include the Emotional Intelligence Inquiry, Socialization Battery, and the Trait Social Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire. Despite the validity of the instruments, they do not fully cover each of the five competencies in SEL, especially for adolescents. Therefore, the developers created a scale that would measure all five competencies of SEL in secondary education. Fernández-Martín et al. (2022) utilized parts of already developed instruments with similar constructs to measure the competencies of SEL. After several modifications, the created scale was tested by a pilot study consisting of 46 adolescents.

Currently, there is not yet another study that has utilized the Social-Emotional Learning Scale (Fernández-Martín et al., 2022) as this measurement tool was created very recently. Other

SEL scales that have been largely used such as that of Coryn et al., (2009) were not suitable for this study as they did not aim to measure social-emotional learning for adolescents in a classroom setting. Coryn et al.'s (2009) scale was created to measure SEL competencies in elementary-aged students. The focus of this scale was to understand SEL in regard to peer relationships. Other scales such as the Trait Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire, and the Socialization Battery, did not address the five competencies of SEL but focused more broadly on emotional intelligence. The Social-Emotional Learning Scale (Fernández-Martín et al., 2022) was best fit for this study because it recommends use for adolescents and covers all five pieces of SEL within the definition as created by the Collaborative for Academic and Social-Emotional Learning (CASEL, 2021).

To obtain validity of the Social-Emotional Learning Scale (Fernández-Martín et al., 2022), the different competencies of SEL were correlated with scales of similar constructs. The authors used Pearson's *r* to measure the strength and direction of the scale's competencies and external variables. They then compared the competencies across different variables to ensure the validity of the instrument being used on their sample population. The Mann-Whitney U-Test and Kruskal-Wallis H-Tests were used to measure significant differences. The researchers then used the Bonferroni correction as a precaution for having an increased chance of making type-I errors due to multiple tests being performed. Validity coefficients for each subscale are as follows: self-awareness ($r = .38$, $p < .01$), social awareness ($r = .38$, $p < .01$), self-control ($r = .70$, $p < .01$), relationship skills ($r = .59$, $p < .01$), and responsible decision-making ($r = .46$, $p < .01$).

The internal reliability and composite reliability for the scale were calculated using Cronbach's alpha. The score was $\alpha = .90$ for the entire scale. Coefficients should be .70 and above for a valid and reliable instrument. There are five subscales of social-emotional

competence that are measured on this scale. These subscales include self-awareness, social awareness, self-control, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. The subscales ranged from scores of $\alpha = .70$ to $\alpha = .84$. Self-awareness had an alpha level of $\alpha = .70$. Social awareness had an alpha level of $\alpha = .74$. Self-control had an alpha level of $\alpha = 84$. Relationship skills had an alpha level of $\alpha = .77$. Lastly, responsible decision making had an alpha level of $\alpha = .82$. The scales and subscales exceeded the minimum level and therefore are reliable and valid.

The scale includes 30 questions and used a four-point Likert scale that ranged from Never to Always. There are five questions regarding self-awareness, five questions regarding social awareness, 10 questions regarding self-control, five questions regarding relationship skills, and lastly, five questions regarding responsible decision-making. These are all the main pieces of social-emotional learning according to the CASEL (2021).

Responses were as follows: *never = 1, occasionally = 2, often = 3, and always = 4.* Scores range from 30 to 120. A score of 30 indicates low social-emotional competency whereas a score of 120 indicates the highest possible score for social-emotional competency. The scale can be administered on a computer in survey format. The survey can take between 15-20 minutes to complete. Scoring was completed by the researcher and does not require additional training. Scores were summed to obtain results. See Appendix D for permission to use the instrument.

Procedures

Two different procedures took place for this study. For both procedures, a Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB) application was submitted to obtain permission for conducting the study. See Appendix E for IRB approval. Once permission was granted, an email was sent to school administrators of private and public schools that have sixth through eighth

grade students on their campus. See Appendix F. The email requested the campus participation and provided information regarding the purpose and procedures of the study. See Appendix G. Administrators who agreed to participate signed a permission form to allow for data collection. See Appendix H. This form was then submitted to the IRB. After receiving the IRB approval for each campus, data collection began. After this step, two different procedures were performed.

The first procedure took place among a population of 11 private school campuses where data was collected completely electronically. Campus administrators sent families a recruitment letter through email. This included information regarding the purpose and procedures of the study and a parental permission form. See Appendix I and J. This form gave family members disclosure and privacy policy information and explained that there were no names or identifying factors collected when obtaining survey data. After parental permission was obtained electronically, families provided their sixth, seventh, or eighth grade student(s) the survey link to administer the Brief Family Relationship Survey (Fok et al., 2014) and the Social-Emotional Learning Survey (Fernández-Martín et al., 2022) at home. Both surveys were included in the recruitment email that was sent by administrators. Students first assented to data collection by clicking on the survey link. See Appendix K for the child assent form. Students then provided demographic data about their families. Next, they completed the Brief Family Relationship Survey (Fok et al., 2014). After completing the survey, students proceeded to the Social-Emotional Learning Survey (Fernández-Martín et al., 2022). The anticipated time to complete both surveys was approximately 15-30 minutes. A follow-up email was sent by administrators to families after two weeks to recruit more participants (Appendix L).

The second procedure took place on two public school campuses. At these campuses, parental permission forms were sent home with sixth, seventh, and eighth grade students on

paper. See Appendix J. The school district allowed one week for permission forms to be signed and returned. After this time period, a trained assistant visited the two public school campuses to administer the Brief Family Relationship Survey (Fok et al., 2014) and the Social-Emotional Learning Survey (Fernández-Martín et al., 2022). This data collection took place during a field day where students who had obtained permission were taken to one room to complete the surveys under the observation of a trained assistant. Students were provided with the survey link where they first assented to the data collection, then provided demographic information, and finally were able to proceed with the surveys. Anticipated time to complete the surveys was 15-30 minutes. However, most students finished both surveys in 5-15 minutes.

After all surveys were submitted, the complete survey results were downloaded from Google Forms. The results were analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). Data will be held on a password-protected computer and will be deleted after five years to conserve privacy.

Data Analysis

The data was analyzed using multiple linear regression. This type of analysis determines the predictive correlation between a criterion variable and two or more predictor variables on a continuous scale (Gall et al., 2007; Warner, 2013). This data analysis is used when examining relationships between variables in a single group. Multiple linear regression was chosen because the criterion variable, social-emotional learning competency, is measured on a continuous scale. The predictor variable of family functionality, which includes three subscales--cohesion, expressiveness, and conflict within families--, will also be measured on a continuous scale. Therefore, the variables meet the criteria for this type of data analysis.

Before data was analyzed, it was screened for missing or inaccurate entries. After being visually screened, six assumption tests were addressed for the multiple linear regression analysis (Warner, 2013). The first assumption of multiple regression analysis is that the criterion variable is measured on a continuous level. The second assumption is that the predictor variables are measured on a continuous or categorical level. Both variables were being measured on a continuous level and therefore met the requirements for this type of analysis. Other assumptions were addressed using a graphic method or statistics on the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) program.

The third assumption is that there is independence of observations (Warner, 2013). This means that variables are not correlated. The Durbin-Watson statistic was used to address this assumption on SPSS. This is a part of the multiple regression procedure. Within this statistic, there should be a value of about 2. If this number is the approximate outcome, there is independence among the variables, and the assumption was tenable.

The fourth assumption is that there is a linear relationship between predictor and criterion variables (Warner, 2013). This was tested by creating a scatterplot of the residuals against the predictor variables. This was also completed between each criterion variable and predictor variables by using partial regression plots on SPSS.

The fifth assumption is that there needs to be homoscedasticity of residuals (Warner, 2013). In other words, there needs to be equal error variances. This was tested by observing the same scatterplot that was created to inspect linearity. There should not be a pattern within the scatterplot and should be spread constantly across fitted values.

The sixth assumption is that there is no multicollinearity (Warner, 2013). There should not be two or more predictor variables that are correlated. SPSS was used to search for

correlation coefficients and tolerance and variance inflation factor (VIF) values. Acceptable values are between 1 and 5.

Lastly, there should not be any significant outliers (Gall et al., 2007; Warner, 2013). Significant outliers are unusual points on a regression line, ultimately changing the output of data. There were no outliers detected using casewise diagnostics on SPSS. This led to the assumption that all residuals were normally distributed. This was tested by observing P-plot determining that the points are aligned.

An alpha level of $\alpha = .05$ was used as the standard of significance for the predictor variables (Warner, 2013). A 95% confidence level (CI) provides information regarding the amount of potential sampling error associated with the findings (Warner, 2013). The effect size was measured using the coefficient of determination (R^2) where .02, .13, and over .26 represent small, medium, and large effect sizes (Cohen et al., 2003). This data analysis addresses the single hypothesis being made toward the research question. Based on the statistical data, the researcher chose to reject the null hypothesis.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Overview

The purpose of this non-experimental, quantitative, predictive correlational study was to determine if there was a predictive relationship between family functionality, based on the linear combination of expressiveness, cohesion, conflict, and social-emotional learning skills for middle school students. The predictive variable is family functionality which consists of three subscales including expressiveness, cohesion, and conflict. The criterion variable was social-emotional learning (SEL). A multiple linear regression was used to test the hypothesis. Chapter Four includes the research question, null hypothesis, data screening, descriptive statistics, assumption testing, and results.

Research Question

RQ1: How accurately can *social-emotional learning skills* be predicted from a linear combination of *family functionality factors* (expressiveness, cohesion, and conflict) for middle school students?

Null Hypothesis

The null hypothesis for this study is:

$H_0$1: There is no statistically significant predictive relationship between the criterion variable (*social-emotional learning skills* scores), as measured by the Social-Emotional Learning Scale, and the linear combination of *family functionality* factors (*expressiveness, cohesion*, and *conflict*) measured by the Brief Family Relationship Scale, for middle school students.

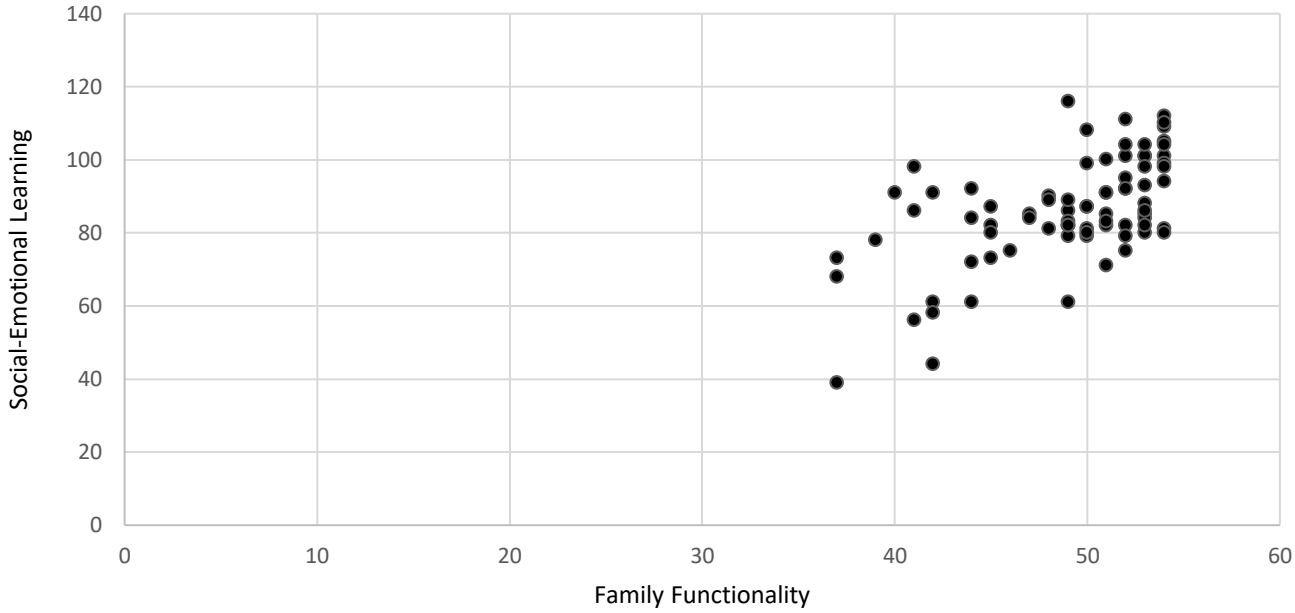
Data Screening

The researcher sorted the data and scanned for inconsistencies in each variable. No data errors or inconsistencies were identified. A scatter plot was used to detect bivariate outliers

between predictor variables and the criterion variable. No bivariate outliers were identified. See Figure 1 for the scatter plot.

Figure 1

Scatter Plot



Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive statistics were obtained on each of the variables. The sample consisted of 80 participants. Social-emotional learning (SEL) was measured using the Social-Emotional Learning Scale. Scores range from 30-120. A high score of 120 indicates a high level of SEL skills and means that students have strong levels of self-awareness, social awareness, self-control, interpersonal skills, and relationship skills (Fernández-Martín et al., 2022). A low score of 30 indicates a low level of SEL skills in these same five categories. Family functionality was measured using the Brief Family Relationship Scale. A high score of 48 means that the student has high-functioning family relationships considering subcategories of cohesion, expressiveness, and conflict, whereas a low score of 16 means that the student has a low functioning family in

the same categories (Fok et al., 2014). Table 3 provides the descriptive statistics for each variable.

Table 3

Descriptive Statistics

	n	Min.	Max.	*M*	*SD*
Social-Emotional Learning	80	39.0	116.0	86.10	4.71
Family Functionality	80	19.0	48.0	39.51	14.61
Cohesion	80	10.0	21.0	17.81	3.20
Expressiveness	80	3.0	9.0	7.06	1.84
Conflict	80	6.0	18.0	14.64	3.30
Valid *n* (listwise)	80				

Assumption Testing

Assumption of Continuous Variables

Multiple regression requires that the criterion variable and predictor variables are measured on a continuous scale (Warner, 2013). The criterion variable, social-emotional learning, was measured on a continuous scale. The predictor variable, family functionality, comprises three subscales, cohesion, expressiveness, and conflict. These subscales were also measured on a continuous scale. The assumption of continuous variables is met.

Assumption of Independent Observations

The Durbin-Watson statistic was used to address the assumption that observations were independent (Warner, 2013). The outcome for this statistic was 1.865. This number was approximately 2. Therefore, the variables are independent, and the assumption is met.

Assumption of Linearity

Multiple regression requires that the assumption of linearity be met (Warner, 2013). Linearity was examined using a scatter plot of the residuals against the predictor variables. This was also completed between each criterion variable and predictor variables by using partial regression plots on SPSS. See Figure 2 for the scatterplot. See Figures 3, 4, and 5 for the partial regression plots. The assumption of linearity was met.

Figure 2

Scatter Plot of Residuals Against Predictor Variables

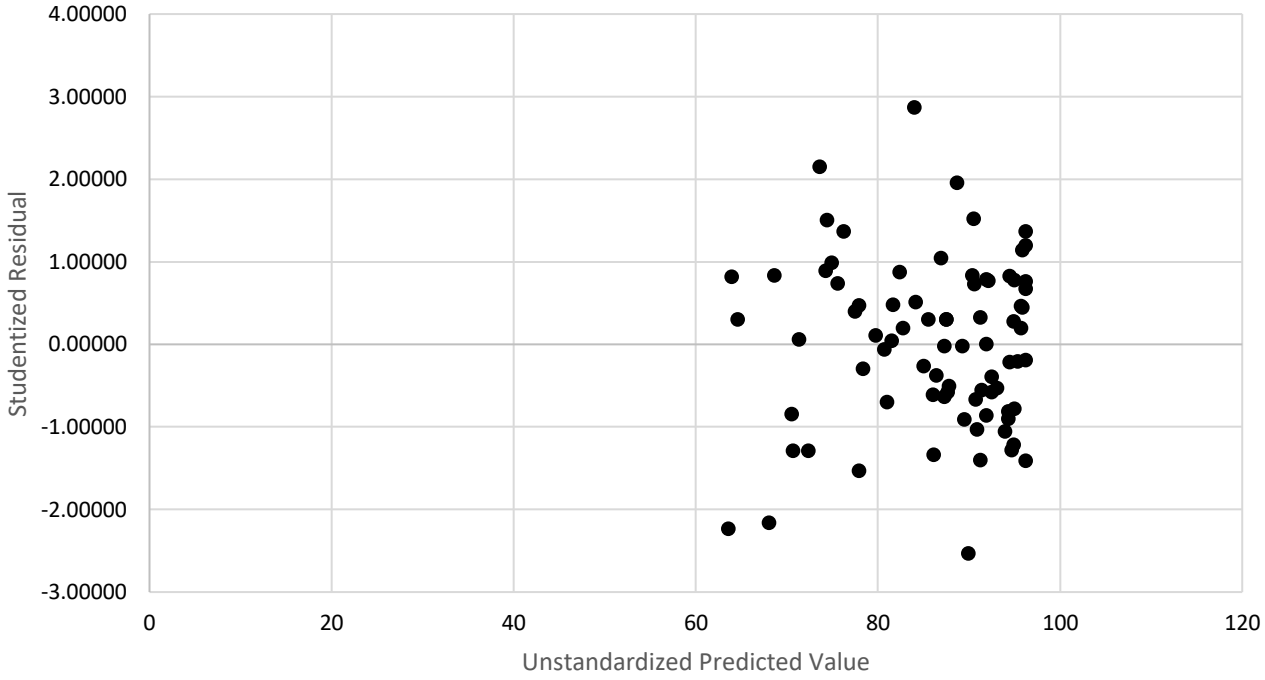


Figure 3

Partial Regression Plot: Cohesion

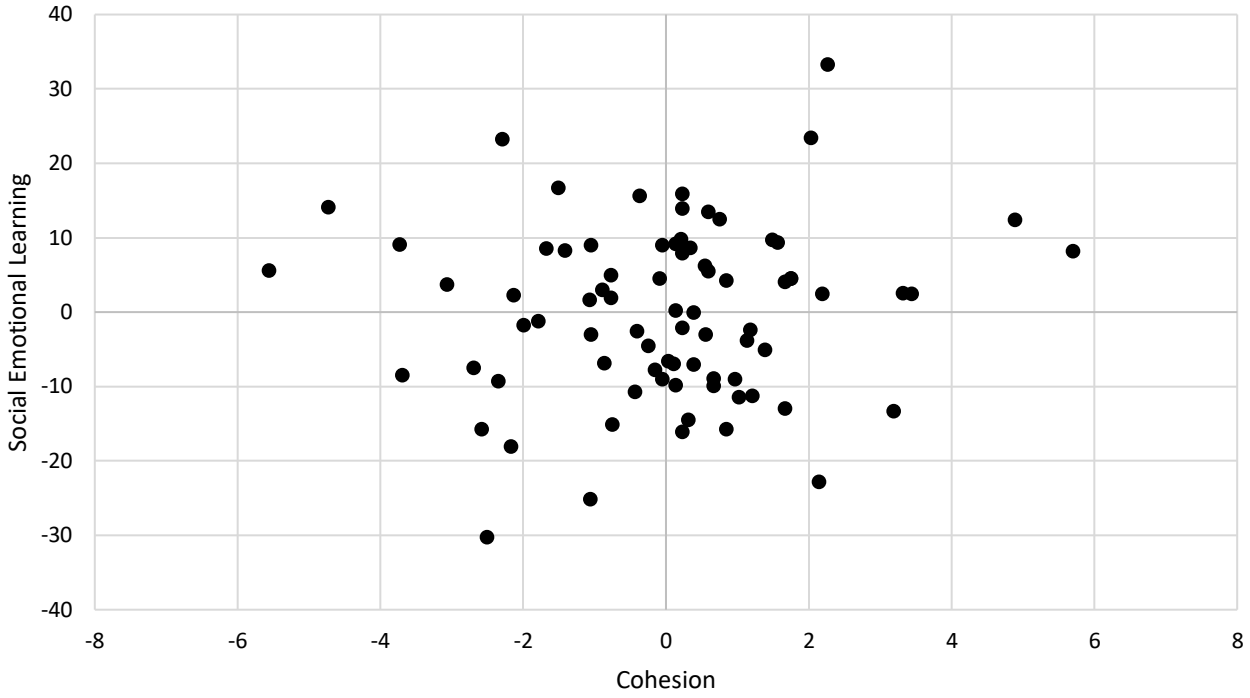


Figure 4

Partial Regression Plot: Expressiveness

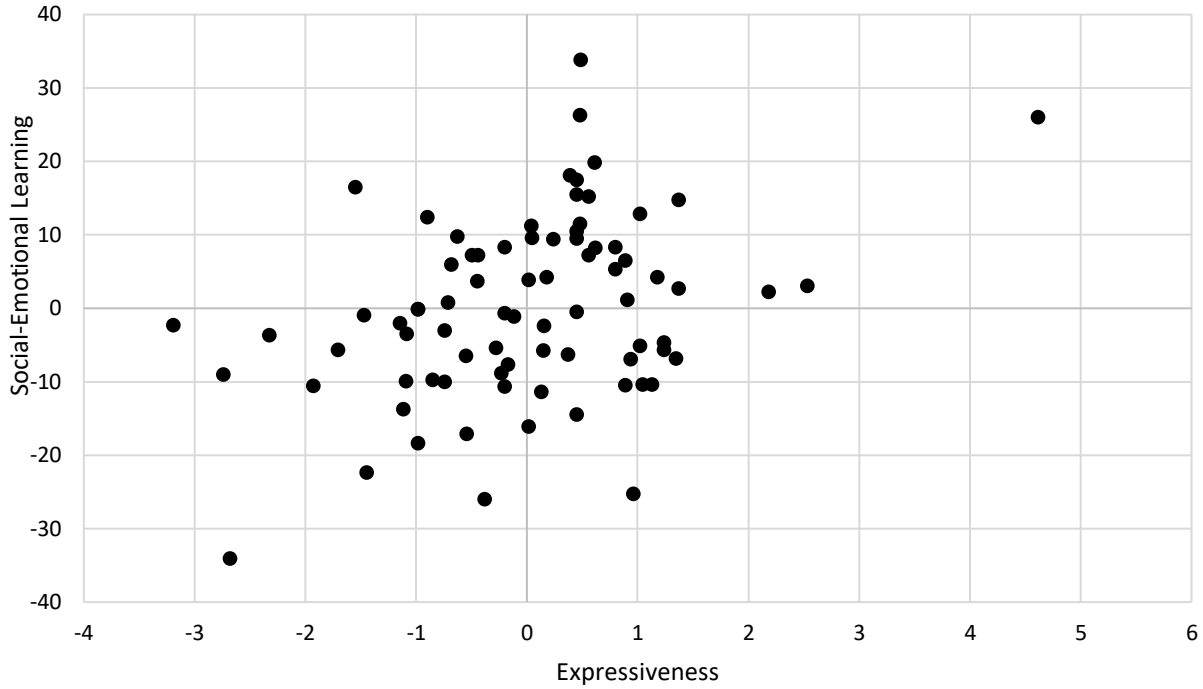
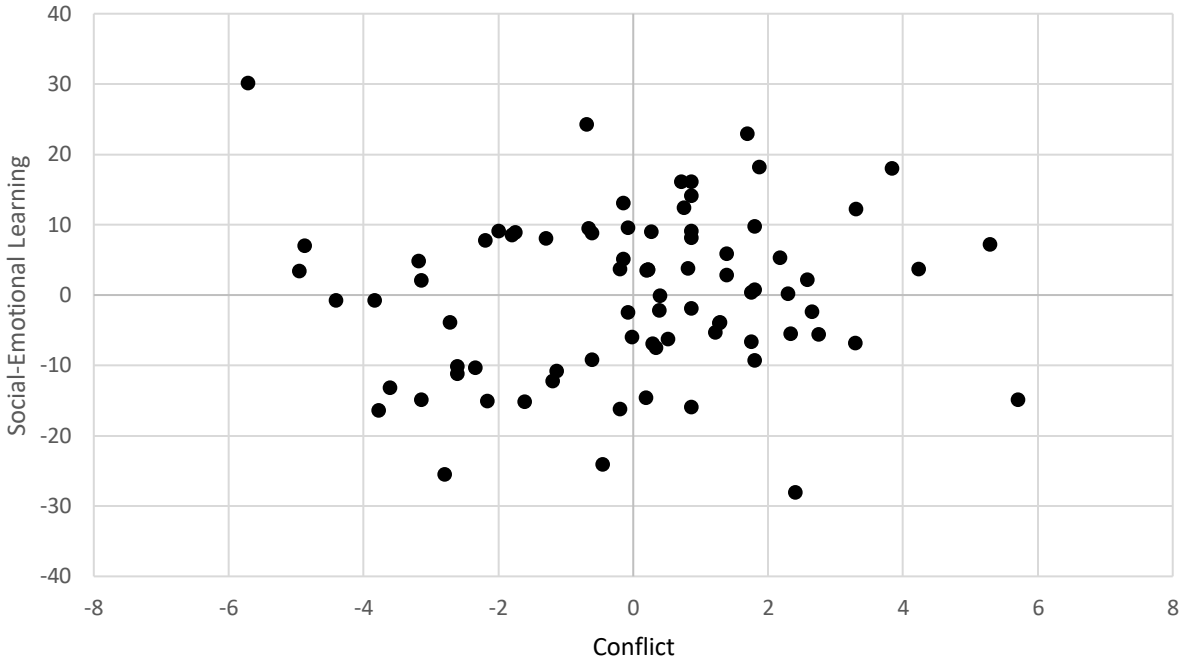


Figure 5
Partial Regression Plot: Conflict



Assumption of Homoscedasticity

The assumption of homoscedasticity refers to equal variance for all values of the predicted dependent variable (Warner, 2013). The same scatter plot used to test linearity was referenced to test this assumption. See Figure 2 for the scatter plot. There was no funnel or fan-shaped pattern in the scatter plot. Therefore, the assumption of homoscedasticity was met.

Assumption of Multicollinearity

A variance inflation factor (VIF) test was conducted to ensure the absence of multicollinearity (Warner, 2013). This test was run because if a predictor variable is highly correlated with another predictor variable, they essentially provide the same information about the criterion variable. If the VIF is too high (greater than 10), then multicollinearity is present. Acceptable values are between 1 and 5. A tolerance test was also conducted. Acceptable values

should be more than .25. The absence of multicollinearity was met between the variables in this study. Table 4 provides the collinearity statistics.

Table 4
Collinearity Statistics

Model		Collinearity Statistics	
		Tolerance	VIF
1	Cohesion	.36	2.78
	Expressiveness	.43	2.36
	Conflict	.50	1.99

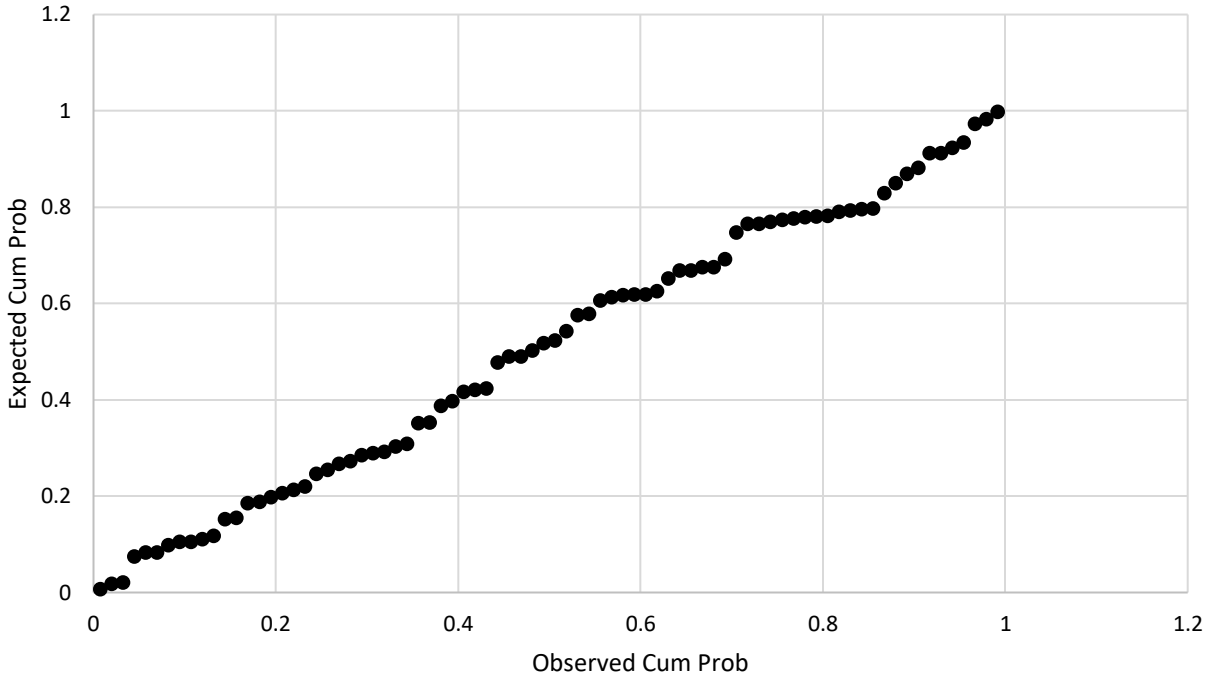
a. Dependent Variable: Social-Emotional Learning

Assumption of Bivariate Normal Distribution

Multiple regression requires that the assumption of bivariate normal distribution be met which was examined using a P-plot. The assumption of bivariate normal distribution was met. Figure 6 provides the scatter plot.

Figure 6

P-plot



Results

A multiple regression was conducted to see if there is a predictive relationship between family functionality and social-emotional learning (SEL) skills. The predictor variables were family functionality scores, which included cohesion, expressiveness, and conflict. The criterion variable was SEL scores. The researcher rejected the null hypothesis at the 95% confidence level where $F(3, 76) = 15.86$, $p = <.001$. There was a significant relationship between the predictor variables (family functionality scores) and the criterion variable (SEL scores). Table 5 provides the regression model results.

Table 5

Regression Model Results

Model		*SS*	*df*	*MS*	*F*	Sig.
1	Regression	6492.81	3	2164.27	15.86	<.001[b]
	Residual	10370.40	76	.002		
	Total	16836.21	79			

a. Dependent Variable: Social-Emotional Learning
b. Predictors: (Constant), Cohesion, Expressiveness, Conflict

The model's effect size was large where $R = .62$. Furthermore, $R^2 = .39$ indicated that approximately 39% of the variance of the criterion variable can be explained by the linear combination of predictor variables (Cohen et al., 2003). Table 6 provides a summary of the model.

Table 6

Model Summary

Model	R^2	*R*	Adjusted R^2	*SEM*
1	.39[a]	.62	.36	11.68

a. Predictors:(Constant), Cohesion, Expressiveness, Conflict

Because the researcher rejected the null, analysis of the coefficients was required. Based on the coefficients, it was found that expressiveness was the best predictor of SEL scores where $p = <.001$. Table 7 provides the coefficients.

Table 7

Coefficients

		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients			95.0% Confidence Interval for B	
	Model	*B*	*SE*	B	*t*	Sig.	Lower Bound	Upper Bound
1	(Constant)	44.87	7.56		5.93	<.001	29.81	59.94
	Cohesion	.54	.69	.12	.79	.431	-.82	1.91
	Expressiveness	3.76	1.20	.47	3.43	<.001	1.58	5.95
	Conflict	.34	.56	.08	.61	.547	-.78	1.46

a. Dependent Variable: Social-Emotional Learning

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSIONS

Overview

After a multiple regression analysis was performed, the researcher rejected the null hypothesis, finding a significant predictive relationship between the criterion variable (social-emotional learning competency scores) and the linear combination of predictor variables (conflict, cohesion, and expressiveness) for middle school students. Chapter Five includes a discussion of the study, implications, limitations, and recommendations for future research.

Discussion

The purpose of this non-experimental, quantitative, predictive correlational study was to determine if there was a predictive relationship between family functionality, based on the linear combination of expressiveness, cohesion, conflict, and social-emotional learning skills for middle school students. The study utilized two surveys including the Brief Family Relationship Survey (Fok et al., 2014) and the Social-Emotional Learning Scale (Fernández-Martín et al., 2022). After data was collected, a multiple regression analysis was performed and analyzed. The researcher rejected the following null hypothesis:

> **$H_0$1:** There will be no significant predictive relationship between the criterion variable (social-emotional learning competency scores) and the linear combination of predictor variables (conflict, cohesion, and expressiveness) for middle school students.

The research revealed a significant predictive relationship between social-emotional learning (SEL) scores and family functionality, including cohesion, expressiveness, and conflict. The study findings indicate that higher family functionality can be an accurate predictor of stronger social-emotional learning (SEL) skills at school. There is also indication that lower family functionality can be an accurate predictor of lower SEL skills at school. Other studies,

such as those from Albanese (2019), Hunter et al. (2017), and Mónaco et al. (2019), have revealed the importance of family influence on the social-emotional development of children. Albanese (2019) reported that parents with high levels of positivity and confidence often see strong SEL skills in their children, specifically when looking at children's self-efficacy. Meanwhile, families that are more reticent, meaning less cohesive and expressive, will often find that their children internalize emotions leading to a lack of self-regulation (Hunter et al., 2017). Mónaco et al. (2019) concluded that more secure family relationships led to healthy emotional regulation in children. This means that family members heavily influence self-regulation, which is a critical SEL skill. This study aligned with previous research and furthered the implications of SEL skills in a middle school setting.

According to the study findings, expressiveness--the ability to discuss thoughts and feelings within the family unit openly (Fok et al., 2014)—was the most significant predictor of higher social-emotional learning scores in middle school students. The results of this study align with results of Behrendt et al. (2019) and Rothenberg et al. (2018) who have also considered the implications of expressiveness on SEL. Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural learning theory claims that knowledge stems from language and behavior. Expressiveness considers language revolving around emotions. This trait is often reliant on mothers and fathers within the family unit (Behrendt et al., 2019; Rothenberg et al., 2018). Behrendt et al. (2019) and Rothenberg et al. (2018) found that mothers and fathers who were expressive in their emotions created a safe space for children to feel comfortable discussing thoughts and feelings openly.

The ability to openly express thoughts and feelings impact a child's self-awareness, one of SEL's main competencies (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning, [CASEL], 2021). Past studies, such as those of Behrendt et al. (2019) and Rothenberg et al.

(2018), have often focused on expressiveness in the home but have not translated the implications to alternate settings. This study implies that higher levels of expressiveness at home, correspond to higher SEL skills at school. Expressiveness is a healthy socioemotional skill that can lead to children also having stronger conflict management skills (Speidel et al., 2020). Students who are able to openly express their thoughts and feelings may develop more effective communication skills which can lead to a higher success rate in school. The findings of Di Giunta et al., (2020) agreed that expressiveness can strongly predict SEL skills, but also encouraged future studies to observe more diverse populations in this area. This study has insufficient diversity in the population and sample size, and, therefore, cannot be generalized among middle school students.

Cohesion and conflict did not produce a statistically significant relationship when detecting a predictive effect on student SEL skills in a school setting. Observing the subscale of conflict, prior researchers seem to agree that conflict and stressors harm children's SEL skills (Cluver et al., 2020; Paiva, 2019). The results of Cobham and Newnham (2018) and Speidel et al.'s (2020) studies note that when conflict management techniques are modeled in a healthy way, there is a higher level of SEL skills developed by children. Conflict management skills being modeled to children can help develop problem-solving abilities, which is a competency of SEL (CASEL, 2021, Cobham & Newnham, 2018; Speidel et al., 2020). When children hear adults manage problems in a productive way, they will often apply these strategies to their own lives inside and outside of school (Cobham & Newnham, 2018). The findings of this study do not show a strong predictive correlational relationship and cannot yet suggest that children whose family units have healthy conflict-solving skills, also have stronger SEL skills.

Focusing on cohesion, another subscale that was not found to be statistically significant in the prediction of SEL skills, other studies have emphasized the importance of cohesion in the family unit (Davies et al., 2019; Stocker et al., 2020). Overall, strong cohesion can be an indicator for positive relationship skills in children (Davies et al., 2019). Cohesion in the family creates security in many relationships, extending beyond the home according to Mónaco et al. (2019). Other studies suggest that cohesion is a part of a family's cultural background. Cohesion may be more prevalent in families whose cultures value a more collective approach to life and learning (Sumari et al., 2020). In their research, Sumari et al. (2020) focused specifically on Hispanic and South Asian cultures, both being more collective and less individualistic. This study's sample size was majority White, making up 48.8% of the survey responses. Individualism is stronger in White households, which means there may be less cohesion (Kotlaja, 2020).

This study supports Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural learning theory by suggesting that children are affected by the language and behavior of those around them, especially family. Family functionality includes three subscales that focus on the behavior and language which are often modeled by family members. This study also supports Goleman's (1995) theory of emotional intelligence (EI). EI is the use of emotions and thinking in decision-making processes (Gill, 2021; Goleman, 1995). Children with families who are more expressive and involved in their education have been shown to have higher levels of EI (Uzzaman & Karim, 2018). Strong SEL skills often pair with stronger EI (CASEL, 2021). Goleman's (1995) theory focuses especially on expressiveness, which was also shown be the largest predictor for SEL skills among all family functionality subscales.

Implications

This study's findings validate the importance of life outside of the school building and the implications that are within the middle school classroom regarding social-emotional learning (SEL). Public and private school stakeholders could use these findings to emphasize to family units the importance of SEL inside and outside of school. Current literature has emphasized the importance of applying social-emotional skills in the classroom (Loeb et al., 2019; West et al., 2020). However, previous research has been limited in exploring how SEL skills are developed and then applied in school. This study contributes to the field of education by understanding that the home can be predictor of the strength of a middle school student's SEL skills, including self-awareness, social awareness, self-control, interpersonal skills, and relationship skills (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning, CASEL, 2021). This study has implications that could be insightful for school administrators, teachers, parents, and family units in general.

For school administrators and teachers, this study further emphasizes the importance of social-emotional education. This research can also give teachers a baseline for understanding the current state of students' SEL skills. For students who have low-functioning families, school may be the place that becomes responsible for teaching students how to understand and manage emotions, build positive relationships, and practice self-control. Private and public schools could consider investing time and funding into the SEL curriculum to strengthen the life skills that come with SEL. According to Marsay (2022), educators intend for students to develop skills that will equip them for sustainable livelihoods and prepare them for the 21st century workforce. This requires more than learning core content. SEL can be emphasized and taught in schools. The

outcome of this investment could considerably impact the future of students as individuals, and society as a whole.

For parents and families, this study emphasizes the strong need to model healthy expressiveness and conflict management in the home, which can overall create a more cohesive environment. Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural learning theory states that children learn through the language and behavior of more knowledgeable others. If those inside the family unit are considered to be more knowledgeable than the child, the child will look to these family members as models. Goleman's (1995) theory of emotional intelligence (EI) emphasizes the management of emotions as a part of the overall intelligence of a person. EI is highly influenced by the environment and life experiences. Therefore, family members should be intentional with the way that they model expressiveness and emotions in the home. Allowing the opportunities for children to openly discuss thoughts and feelings at a young age could develop stronger relationships, problem-solving skills, and overall social awareness. These conversations need to be facilitated by parents or adults in the household. Students who feel comfortable expressing their thoughts and ideas have a higher sense of security, which overall creates stronger cohesion and could be a predictor for higher SEL skills used at school.

Past research has been limited by examining SEL progression solely within school settings (Gebauer et al., 2020). This study advances a gap because it considers the development of SEL outside the walls of the school building by observing several variables within the family unit and how these outside factors are then brought into the middle school setting. Overall, stakeholders can use this study to further emphasize the importance and need to invest time and funding in SEL. Teachers and administrators could use this information to educate families about the importance of SEL and what this could look like in the household. Finally, families can take

this information to be intentional about the home environment and the way that cohesion, expressiveness, and conflict are modeled.

Limitations

The study included several limitations. The first limitation is due to the non-experimental, quantitative, predictive correlational research design. A limitation of this design type is that there could have been external variables that might have interfered with students' responses to the surveys (Gall et al., 2007). For example, at the time of data collection, the student may have been frustrated with family members or may not be feeling successful at school. Another limitation of the predictive correlational design is that it cannot prove causation, but only recognizes a relationship between variables (Gall et al., 2007). Therefore, it cannot be stated that family functionality causes high or low SEL skills. Instead, it can only be implied that there is a linear relationship between family functionality and SEL skills at school for middle school students.

The third limitation was the rate of school administration's responsiveness to participate in the study. Approval for the study to be conducted on campuses was difficult to obtain. A total of 178 schools across Texas were contacted, and only 58 responses were acquired. Schools that had not responded after one week are contacted again three times by e-mail or phone call. Out of the 58 schools that responded, 13 campuses approved data collection, and 46 rejected data collection. The remaining private or public-school campuses did not reply to the invitation to participate in the study. Schools that did not wish to participate had concerns regarding an overload of parent contact, timing with student testing or school accreditation, and disruption to students' instructional time.

The fourth limitation of the study is the lack of diversity in the population. Most campuses that desired to participate were private Christian schools with majority White students

and families which made up 48.8% of the sample size. There was an especially small percentage of Black (6.3%) or Asian (1.2%) students that were in the population or the sample. Therefore, data cannot be generalized to all sixth through eighth-grade populations in the state of Texas due to the small population of minority groups that participated in the study.

Recommendations for Future Research

The findings indicated that family functionality can be a key predictor for middle school students' social-emotional learning (SEL) at school, with expressiveness being the most impactful part of family functionality on SEL. Previous research has agreed that SEL is influenced by family relations, however, researchers utilized alternate subscales in the matter (Mónaco et al., 2019; Rey-Guerra et al., 2022). This study observes family functionality's impact on students' SEL skills in a middle school setting. While the results demonstrate a predictive relationship between the variables, future studies should contemplate the following recommendations while considering past studies and the limitations of this study.

1. It is recommended that future studies explore the implications of this research with more diverse populations. This study was limited in the diversity of participants. The majority of the population and sample were White students attending private Christian schools. Therefore, the findings cannot be generalized to all middle school campuses in the state of Texas. Future researchers should consider collecting data from populations with more minority groups.
2. While a limitation of this study was the difficulty in obtaining permission to collect data from public schools, there is still a need to observe the predictive relationship between family functionality and SEL skills in a fully public school setting. There is total of about 5.5 million students attending public schools in Texas, making up the majority of school

enrollment (Wang et al., 2023). This study could be beneficial to public schools as it would allow for these public agencies to understand current levels of SEL within each district and create a plan to better support families in developing SEL skills outside of school.

3. About half of this study's sample was obtained from 11 private schools, while the other half was gathered from one public school district at two campuses. There were 38 responses that were collected from students attending private schools, and 42 responses that were obtained from students attending public school. The study did not differentiate between the public middle school student versus the private middle school student. Middle school students may utilize SEL skills within a public school differently than in a private school. Future studies could observe the difference between school types by using a non-experimental, quantitative, causal-comparative research design.
4. It is recommended that future researchers investigate the differences in gender and age as independent variables along with family functionality and SEL skills. This research could contribute to the field of education and provide insight into how each genders' SEL skills could be impacted by family functionality at different ages. Prior researchers have investigated differences in male versus female emotional development and have even claimed SEL skill inequality among each (Attanasio et al., 2020). Observing this concept through a lens of family functionality on the development of SEL skills in each gender could provide insight into how to best support students at certain ages, depending on gender.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: Brief Family Relationship Scale

Brief Family Relationship Scale

1= not at all, 2=somewhat, 3= a lot

In our family we really help and support each other.

1 2 3

In our family we spend a lot of time doing things together at home.

1 2 3

In our family we work hard at what we do in our home.

1 2 3

In our family there is a feeling of togetherness.

1 2 3

My family members really support each other.

1 2 3

I am proud to be a part of our family.

1 2 3

In our family we really get along well with each other.

1 2 3

In our family we can talk openly in our home.

1 2 3

In our family we sometimes tell each other about our personal problems.

1 2 3

In our family we begin discussions easily.

1 2 3

In our family we argue a lot

1 2 3

In our family we are really mad at each other a lot

1 2 3

In our family we lose our tempers a lot

1 2 3

In our family we often put down each other

1 2 3

My family members sometimes are violent

1 2 3

In our family we raise our voice when we are mad

1 2 3

APPENDIX B: Social-Emotional Learning Scale

Social-Emotional Learning Scale

1 = never; 2 = occasionally; 3 = often; 4 = always

I can easily describe my emotions
1 2 3 4

I understand my moods and feelings
1 2 3 4

I know how my emotions influence what I do
1 2 3 4

I am confident that I can successfully complete any school assignment
1 2 3 4

I try my best when doing difficult homework or schoolwork, as this is what allows me to improve
1 2 3 4

I can easily recognize how another person is feeling by their facial expressions, gestures, tone of voice, etc.
1 2 3 4

It is easy for me to understand why people feel the way they do
1 2 3 4

If someone close to me is sad or happy, upset or nervous, I have a pretty good idea why
1 2 3 4

I am respectful of anyone's ideas, even if they are different from mine
1 2 3 4

I find it easy to defend my ideas without putting anyone down
1 2 3 4

I know how to stay calm when I feel under pressure
1 2 3 4

Whatever happens to me, I can keep calm
1 2 3 4

When I am angry with someone, I calm down and then talk to him/her about it
1 2 3 4

I am clear about my school goals
1 2 3 4

I am able to work effectively to achieve long-term school goals
1 2 3 4

I am disciplined (i.e., I follow certain routines to do my homework accurately)
1 2 3 4

I concentrate easily on the schoolwork I have to do
1 2 3 4

I carefully plan my homework according to my goals
1 2 3 4

I resist any temptation or distraction while doing my homework
1 2 3 4

If I commit to a school assignment, I do it. I know how to motivate myself
1 2 3 4

I use appropriate verbal language when conversing with friends, family, classmates, etc.
1 2 3 4

I am confident in my ability to work as part of a team in class
1 2 3 4

I treat all members of my team in class in the same way, politely and respectfully
1 2 3 4

I offer help or help others when I think they need it
1 2 3 4

I get on well with my classmates

1 2 3 4

When I have to make a decision or face a problem… I think of all possible options or coping strategies before I act or decide

1 2 3 4

When I have to make a decision or face a problem… I consider the advantages and disadvantages of each option or strategy before acting or deciding

1 2 3 4

When I have to make a decision or face a problem… I check that my decisions or actions are having positive results

1 2 3 4

I care about the welfare of my environment or community

1 2 3 4

I help members of my environment or community

1 2 3 4

APPENDIX C: Brief Family Relationship Scale Permissions

Hello Dr. Allen,

My name is Elisabeth Chapman, and I am currently pursuing my doctoral degree in educational leadership at Liberty University. I am writing to formally request your permission to utilize the Brief Family Relationship Scale for my dissertation research. I am asking for your permission to recreate the scale through SurveyMonkey, collect data through the scale, and then publish the scale within the appendix of my dissertation.

I believe that this scale you and your team have created best suits my research in understanding family functionality and its predictive relationship with social-emotional learning skills. Please let me know if all three of these requests are acceptable and/or if you have any further questions. Thank you so much!

Sincerely,
Elisabeth Chapman

Dear Elisabeth Chapman,
You are welcome to use the Brief Family Relationship Scale with permission. Attached is a journal article with instructions, scoring, and permission.
Kind regards-

James Allen, PhD
Professor Emeritus | Department of Family Medicine & Biobehavioral Health and
Memory Keepers Medical Discovery Team – Health Equity

University of Minnesota Medical School, Duluth Campus
Senior Research Scientist | Center for Alaska Native Health Research
University of Alaska Fairbanks

APPENDIX D: Social-Emotional Learning Scale Permissions

Greetings Dr. Fernandez,

My name is Elisabeth Chapman and I am currently pursuing my doctoral degree in educational leadership at Liberty University. I am writing to formally request your permission to utilize the Social and Emotional Learning Scale for my dissertation research. I am asking for your permission to recreate the scale through SurveyMonkey, collect data through the scale, and then publish the scale within the appendix of my dissertation.

I believe that this scale you and your team have created best suits my research in understanding family functionality and its predictive relationship with social-emotional learning skills. Please let me know if all three of these requests are acceptable and/or if you have any further questions. Thank you so much!

Sincerely,
Elisabeth Chapman

Dear Elisabeth,
of course, your requests are acceptable. You have my permission to utilize the Social and Emotional Learning Scale for your dissertation research, recreate the scale through SurveyMonkey, collect data through the scale, and then publish the scale within the appendix of your dissertation.
Best regards,
F.D Fernandez

APPENDIX E: Liberty University IRB Approval

December 8, 2023

Elisabeth Chapman Maryna Svirska-Otero

Re: IRB Approval - IRB-FY23-24-204 Family Functionality and Social-Emotional Learning Skills for Middle School Students: A Predictive Correlational Study

Dear Elisabeth Chapman, Maryna Svirska-Otero,

We are pleased to inform you that your study has been approved by the Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB). This approval is extended to you for one year from the following date: December 8, 2023. If you need to make changes to the methodology as it pertains to human subjects, you must submit a modification to the IRB. Modifications can be completed through your Cayuse IRB account.

Your study falls under the expedited review category (45 CFR 46.110), which is applicable to specific, minimal risk studies and minor changes to approved studies for the following reason(s):

7. Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies. (NOTE: Some research in this category may be exempt from the HHS regulations for the protection of human subjects. 45 CFR 46.101(b)(2) and (b)(3). This listing refers only to research that is not exempt.)

For a PDF of your approval letter, click on your study number in the My Studies card on your Cayuse dashboard. Next, click the Submissions bar beside the Study Details bar on the Study Details page. Finally, click Initial under Submission Type and choose the Letters tab toward the bottom of the Submission Details page. Your stamped consent form(s) and final versions of your study documents can be found on the same page under the Attachments tab. Your stamped consent form(s) should be copied and used to gain the consent of your research participants. If you plan to provide your consent information electronically, the contents of the attached consent document(s) should be made available without alteration.

Thank you for your cooperation with the IRB, and we wish you well with your research project.

Sincerely,

G. Michele Baker, PhD, CIP

Administrative Chair

Research Ethics Office

APPENDIX F: Recruitment Email

Good morning, [campus administrator name]

My name is Elisabeth Chapman, and I am a Ph.D. candidate from Liberty University! I am reaching out because my dissertation topic focuses on students in grades 6-8 and I am in need of a site in which I can conduct my research. [School name here] caught my attention, and I would be honored if your campus would be interested in participating. Overall, my research is looking into the impact that families have on the social-emotional learning of middle school students. This topic simply requires two surveys to be completed, which can be completed by students at home with a link.

I have attached all of the information (including parent permission forms and the surveys) in the attached Word document. I have highlighted the specific steps that I would need from the school for quicker reference. I am happy to discuss over the phone with you as well! Please let me know if this is possible, or if you are willing to discuss further.

I hope you have a wonderful day!

Kind regards,
Elisabeth Chapman

APPENDIX G: Procedure Information

Research Information

1. Name of researcher, position, years' experience in education
    - My name is Elisabeth Chapman. I am in my fourth year of teaching middle school.
2. University affiliation
    - I am affiliated with Liberty University as a doctoral candidate for a Ph.D. in Educational Leadership.
3. Abstract

This non-experimental, quantitative, predictive correlational study aims to examine if family functionality, which includes cohesion, expressiveness, and conflict, can predict students' social-emotional skills in middle school students. The findings of this study will provide data to better understand the extent to which home life impacts the ability of middle school students to apply social-emotional skills at school and can provide educators with data to use as a baseline in understanding and evaluating the current levels of a child's social-emotional learning (SEL) skills. The research will observe 00# middle school students, grades 6-8, within private schools across Texas. Data will be collected utilizing the Brief Family Relationship Scale and the Social-Emotional Learning Scale. Survey results will be collected on a computer via Google Forms. A multiple linear regression analysis will be used to analyze the data and to draw conclusions. Once data analysis is complete, results, limitations of the study, and suggestions for future research will be discussed.

4. Methodology:

- Brief Family Relationship Scale (Fok et al., 2014) and the Social-Emotional Learning Scale (Fernández-Martín et al., 2022).
    - Copies of the Instruments are attached below.
- This is a non-experimental, predictive correlational study that uses two surveys to collect data. The following steps will need to take place for successful data collection.
    - 1. Once permission from the site is obtained, the researcher will send the school administration an electronic letter to send to parents of students grades 6-8. This letter contains parent permission forms, and the two surveys.
    - 2. Data collection will not take place during the school hours. Recruitment forms will be attached to parent permission slips. Within this document, parents will receive a link that will allow them to access the surveys that will be utilized for data collection. Students will take the survey on their own time and will provide assent prior to beginning surveys. This allows for parents to be in control, and will not intrude on instructional time on campus.
- Data will be analyzed using multiple linear regression. This type of analysis determines the predictive correlation between a criterion variable and two or more predictor variables on a continuous scale (Gall et al., 2007; Warner, 2013). This data analysis is used when examining relationships between variables in a single group. Multiple linear regression was chosen because the criterion variable,

social-emotional learning competency, is measured on a continuous scale. The predictor variable family functionality, which includes three subscales, cohesion, expressiveness, and conflict within families, will also be measured on a continuous scale. Therefore, the variables meet the criteria for this type of data analysis.

5. Research will not be collected on campuses and will not be disruptive to student learning. Parent permission slips/recruitment letters will be distributed by the researcher and passed on by school administration.

APPENDIX H: Data Collection Permission Form

Dear Elisabeth Chapman

After careful review of your research proposal entitled *Family Functionality and Social-Emotional Learning Skills for Middle School Students* I have decided to grant you permission to conduct your study at [school name here]

Check the following boxes, as applicable:

☐ I grant permission for Elisabeth Chapman to invite 6th-8th graders to participate in her research study

☐ I am requesting a copy of the results upon study completion and/or publication.

Sincerely,

Signature & Name here

[School name here]

APPENDIX I: Research Recruitment Letter

Dear Parents,

As a doctoral candidate in the School of Education at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a Ph. D in Educational Leadership. My research aims to understand the relationship between family functionality and social-emotional learning skills. I am writing to invite eligible participants to join my study.

Participants must be students enrolled in grades 6-8. Participants, if willing, will be asked to complete two surveys (within one link) and provide demographic information. It should take approximately 15-20 minutes to complete the procedures listed. Participation will be completely anonymous, and no personal, identifying information will be collected from students.

To participate, please sign the attached electronic permission form.

Parent Permission Form: http://bit.ly/41fOvc8

A consent form is attached to the electronic survey if you are willing to allow your student to participate. The consent document should be validated by your student and contains additional information about my research. The link below contains both the consent document for your student, and the needed surveys.

Once you have given parental consent, please proceed to the below survey to allow your student to participate.

Thank you so much for your consideration.

Survey link here: https://bit.ly/3LGZyED

Sincerely,

Elisabeth Chapman
Liberty University Doctoral Candidate, School of Education
eachapman@liberty.edu

APPENDIX J: Parental Permission Form

1971 University Blvd, Green Hall 2845, Lynchburg, VA 24515
irb@liberty.edu

Parental Consent

Title of the Project: Family functionality and social-emotional learning skills in middle school students: A predictive correlational study
Principal Investigator: Elisabeth Chapman, Ph.D. Candidate, School of Education, Liberty University

Invitation to be Part of a Research Study

Your student is invited to participate in a research study. To participate, he or she must be a middle school student. Taking part in this research project is voluntary.

Please take time to read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to allow your student to take part in this research project.

What is the study about and why are we doing it?

The purpose of the study is to understand how family functionality (relationships and behaviors) impacts your student's abilities to use social-emotional skills. The family is a crucial part of the learning process. I want to understand more deeply how family relationships can influence the ways in which your student performs skill such as self-awareness, decision making, social-awarness etc.

What will participants be asked to do in this study?

If you agree to allow your student to be in this study, I will ask him or her to do the following:

1. Fill out demographic information such as family makeup, ethnic group, etc.
2. Respond to the Brief Family Relationship Scale. This scale measures cohesion, expressiveness, and conflict among family members. This will be performed in the homeroom classroom on a computer. It will take about 10 minutes to complete.
3. Respond to the Social-Emotional Learning Scale. This scale measures skills in self-awareness, social awareness, self-control, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. This survey will be administered on a computer and will take about 20 minutes to complete.

How could participants or others benefit from this study?

Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from taking part in this study.

Benefits to society include the ability to further understand how the family can shape students in contexts outside of the household. This can provide a baseline for a development in social-emotional learning curriculum.

What risks might participants experience from being in this study?

The expected risks from participating in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks your student would encounter in everyday life.

How will personal information be protected?

The records of this study will be kept private. Published reports will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records.

- Participant responses will be anonymous. Students will not be asked to provide any names.
- Data will be stored on a password-locked computer. After five years, all electronic records will be deleted.

Is study participation voluntary?

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether to allow your student to participate will not affect your or his or her current or future relations with Liberty University or the school district. If you decide to allow your student to participate, he or she is free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time prior to submitting the survey without affecting those relationships.

What should be done if a participant wishes to withdraw from the study?

If you choose to withdraw your student from the study or your student chooses to withdraw, please have him or her exit the survey and close his or her internet browser. Your student's responses will not be recorded or included in the study.

Whom do you contact if you have questions or concerns about the study?

The researcher conducting this study is Elisabeth Chapman. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact her at [redacted]. You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor, Dr. Maryna Svirska-Otero at [redacted]

Whom do you contact if you have questions about rights as a research participant?

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the IRB. Our physical address is Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA, 24515; our phone number is 434-592-5530, and our email address is irb@liberty.edu.

Disclaimer: The Institutional Review Board (IRB) is tasked with ensuring that human subjects research will be conducted in an ethical manner as defined and required by federal regulations. The topics covered and viewpoints expressed or alluded to by student and faculty researchers are those of the researchers and do not necessarily reflect the official policies or positions of Liberty University.

Your Consent

By signing this document, you are agreeing to allow your student to be in this study. Make sure you understand what the study is about before you sign. You will be given a copy of this document for your records. The researcher will keep a copy with the study records. If you have any questions about the study after you sign this document, you can contact the study team using the information provided above.

I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to allow my student to participate in the study.

_____

Printed Child's/Student's Name

_____

Parent/Guardian's Signature Date

APPENDIX K: Child Assent

Child Assent to Participate in a Research Study

What is the name of the study and who is doing the study?
The name of the study is Family functionality and social-emotional learning skills for middle school students, and the person doing the study is Mrs. Chapman

Why is Mrs. Chapman doing this study?
Mrs. Chapman wants to know more about how your family impacts the way that you use social and emotional skills that you use every day.

Why am I being asked to be in this study?
You are being asked to be in this study because you are a middle school student who has a family!

If I decide to be in the study, what will happen and how long will it take?
If you decide to be in this study, you will have one week to get permission from your parents. You will return the permission form on (insert date here). You will then participate in two surveys on a computer.

Do I have to be in this study?
No, you do not have to be in this study. If you want to be in this study, then tell the researcher. If you don't want to, it's OK to say no. The researcher will not be angry. You can say yes now and change your mind later. It's up to you.

What if I have a question?
You can ask questions any time. You can ask now. You can ask later. You can talk to the researcher. If you do not understand something, please ask the researcher to explain it to you again! The researcher is happy to explain anything to you.

Signing your name below means that you want to be in the study.

_____

Signature of Child Date

Elisabeth Chapman
eachapman@liberty.edu

Liberty University Institutional Review Board

APPENDIX L: Follow-Up Email

Dear parents,

My name is Elisabeth Chapman, and I am a Liberty University Ph. D. candidate. I am so grateful that your campus administration was willing to allow me to collect data for my dissertation on your campus. I am exceptionally grateful for those of you who have filled out the parent permission form and proceeded to have your child(ren) complete the attached survey.

The links are still open and I am still in need of responses if you are interested in participating. Please remember that participation is voluntary and is much appreciated! If you have filled out the parent permission form already, please remember to proceed to the survey for your student to take. I have attached both links below!

Step One: Parent Permission Form: http://bit.ly/41fOvc8
Step Two: Survey (for your 6th-8th grader to complete): https://bit.ly/3LGZyED

Thank you again!

Sincerely,
Elisabeth Chapman
Liberty University, Ph. D. Candidate