**A Case Study of an E-Learning Platform for Social and Emotional Learning in an Urban Charter Middle School: A Narrative Approach to Qualitative Inquiry**

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**Chapter One: Introduction**

Emotional well-being is a core concern within several research disciplines, including mental health, education, and psychology. The assertion is that psychological or emotional well-being is relatively stable but not fixed (Geertshuis, 2019). Thus, psychological well-being can be affected by changes in environmental, mental, and emotional conditions over days, weeks, or months (Geertshuis, 2019). Conceptions of well-being within education have mainly focused on students' increased incidence and severity of depression and anxiety. The change in education from traditional classroom settings to online learning, now back to the classroom, elevates stress and anxiety levels. The decline in motivation and the concern for students' mental health and well-being have developed (Ergas, 2019). There is the prominence of integrating mindfulness practices and social and emotional learning (SEL) for students' well-being post-Covid-19. Therefore, this qualitative research design will aim to investigate one example of an e-learning platform, BASE Education for SEL integration in an urban charter middle school, through a narrative inquiry. Data collection will center on middle school administrators, teachers, and students' descriptive experiences with BASE Education to provide insight for future mindfulness and SEL e-learning practices in schools.

**Statement of the Problem**

With student safety, physically and emotionally, and learning loss due to Covid-19, mindfulness in students' social and emotional well-being and innovative digital learning platforms have become the forefront of education. Social and emotional learning (SEL) and mindfulness are an integral part of education and human development. The Aspen Institute National Commission on Social, Emotional, and Academic Development revised what constitutes school success. Scientific evidence demonstrates that social, emotional, and academic development are interconnected in the learning process (Immordino-Yang et al., 2018). Mindfulness practices have also become one of the essential practices followed in education during and post Covid-19. Browning et al. (2020) explain mindfulness as moment-by-moment awareness of our thoughts, emotions, bodily sensations, and surrounding environment with openness and curiosity (Browning et al. 2020). Ergas (2019) suggests that mindfulness strategies and SEL activities and lessons can help alleviate daily student stressors and reduce negative thoughts and behaviors while increasing academic achievement. By implementing an e-learning platform, BASE Education on SEL, students can apply the knowledge, skills, and attitudes required to develop healthy identities, manage emotions, show empathy for others, maintain healthy relationships, and achieve personal and practical goals (Ergas, 2019).

With student well-being in mind, many educational organizations create and implement innovative digital e-learning platforms, such as Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL), Edmentum, and BASE Education, to increase student academia and support well-being. Educators incorporate these research-based practices and adapt their lessons to fit individual learners' needs or implement strategies schoolwide to foster a safe, healthy, and positive school culture and climate (Browning et al., 2020). The demand for e-learning platforms on SEL for K-12 education has increased with various platforms available worldwide. However, research on implementing SEL through e-learning in urban charter middle schools is limited, making it difficult for urban school districts to purchase the best fit platform for their students (Linsky et al., 2018). This qualitative narrative research design will gain in-depth knowledge from administrators, teachers, and students' experiences implementing an e-learning platform, BASE Education. Data collection will center on when and how the platform was implemented, its strengths and weaknesses, and if students' academia and well-being were impacted positively due to the implementation of the platform. The collected data will provide insight for future mindfulness and SEL e-learning practices in schools. The demand for e-learning platforms on SEL for K-12 education has increased with various platforms available worldwide. However, research on implementing SEL through e-learning in urban charter middle schools is limited, making it difficult for urban school districts to purchase the best possible platform for their students (Linsky et al., 2018).

**Purpose**

Horton (2012) explains e-learning as the use of electronic technologies to create learning experiences. Design and development are involved in constructing an effective e-learning plan and providing students with a wealth of information and knowledge. Due to the effects of Covid-19, education is now learning towards technology and e-learning as its primary teaching method. The changes in students' learning environments and daily stressors caused high levels of anxiety and depression (Geertshuis, 2019). Many mindfulness and social and emotional (SEL) e-learning platforms were created to aid student wellness post-Covid-19. The e-learning platform that will be analyzed qualitatively is BASE Education. This SEL e-learning platform includes therapeutic lessons and activities that allow exploration, creativity, and self-expression, increasing intrinsic motivation and academic development (BASE, 2021). BASE Education also offers students an outlet for personal growth and provides a private and safe space to share and reflect (Edmentum, 2021). The calming design of the program allows for effortless concentration with minimal text, actively engaging the brain's emotional center. The result is a non-academic look and feel to stimulate optimal engagement (Edmentum, 2021).

BASE Education has proven to aid students' well-being and increase engagement, collaboration, and learning motivation (Edmentum, 2021). Its digital SEL curriculum allows educators, counselors, and administrators to collaborate by connecting to their students' work and identifying any immediate danger. The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) approved SEL and mindfulness lesson plans and activities embedded in the program help students build rapport through evidence-based best practices while allowing educators to customize their learning experiences (BASE, 2021). The global BASE Education SEL interactive lessons and videos enable students to determine and exhibit their values, knowledge, and behavior as aligned to the topic being explored.

Given the vast challenges in the instructional day, educators seldom have the time or resources to provide students with the one-on-one attention they deserve. Research reports that students who utilized BASE Education as a part of the curriculum felt cared for and heard (Edmentum, 2021). A study conducted by the pioneers of BASE Education, with the assistance of Excelsior Youth Centers, examined the impact of BASE Education on students' well-being and academia. Research indicates that 87% of students felt encouraged and successful when completing BASE activities and lessons. 77% of students stated that they have or still utilize what they have learned from the e-learning program in their everyday lives. Lastly, 81% of students stated that BASE empowered them to discuss personal matters with their counselor that they could not before (BASE, 2021).

Whether the SEL activities or lessons are utilized in group instruction or individualized support, practical and complex social and emotional, and mental health lessons are presented for forward-thinking and meeting the needs of our 21st-century learners. Therefore, this qualitative research design will analyze the implementation of BASE Education's SEL e-learning platform in an urban charter middle school. This descriptive analysis will include administrators', teachers', and students' experiences with the program's implementation and its strengths and weaknesses to provide insight for future mindfulness and SEL e-learning practices in schools.

**Research Questions**

This qualitative case study aspires to gain an in-depth, holistic, and contextual understanding through a naturalistic paradigm for implementing BASE Education, an e-learning platform, in an urban charter middle school. A descriptive analysis will be piloted of administrators', teachers', and students' experiences implementing the social and emotional learning (SEL) e-learning platform. Semi-structured open-ended questions will be conducted to gain "behind the scenes" information about the program's implementation. The study's findings will provide insight for future mindfulness and SEL e-learning practices in schools globally. Three primary questions will analyze the implementation of BASE Education, an SEL e-learning platform in an urban middle school:

* RQ1: What are administrators, teachers, and students' perspectives of BASE Education, a social and emotional e-learning platform?
* RQ2: What are the strengths and challenges administrators, teachers, and students experienced implementing BASE Education, a social and emotional e-learning platform?
* RQ3: How did the utilization of BASE Education, a social and emotional e-learning platform, affect students' well-being?

**Chapter Two: Review of the Literature**

**Introduction**

Research regarding mindfulness and social and emotional learning in education during and post Covid-19 were required to proceed with this study. Studies regarding mindfulness and social and emotional learning (SEL) have been conducted for decades. However, the recent emphasis on mindfulness and well-being in education has increased due to stressors from Covid-19. The pandemic led to unprecedented school closures and prompted educational systems to find alternative teaching methods on short notice. This created an innovative road map for educational technology and emphasized incorporating digital mindfulness practices and SEL strategies to aid student well-being.

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

The pandemic has forced changes in traditional education which have caused families, students, and educators moderate to high levels of stress and anxiety. The wave of learning innovations, especially given the abrupt transitioning, has changed students' motivation and willingness to learn. Parents have expressed concern about the challenges of digital learning. Any technical issues with the internet connection could result in a loss of instructional time (Bhamani et al., 2020). Research suggests that mindfulness-based interventions (MBIs) offer the potential for addressing a wide range of both teacher and student stressors (Wigelsworth & Quinn, 2020). There is emerging evidence demonstrating the benefits of mindfulness for individuals of all ages in physical and mental health and education (Browning et al., 2020).

Zimmerman (2018) advocates that the power of mindfulness rests because, as humans, we cannot always control our lived experiences. Therefore, it is essential to practice mindfulness practices daily, especially during these trying times within the education system. With this notion, many schools implement mindfulness and SEL into their curriculum. Mindfulness practices are complementary to SEL, as self-awareness and self-management. Studies indicate that SEL delivers long-term improvements in skills, behavior, and academic performance while reducing anxiety and depression. Schoolwide SEL helps students excel academically, builds stronger relationships, and leads happier, healthier, more fulfilling lives (Browning et al., 2020).

The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) promotes SEL as a critical component of students' academic, social, personal, and professional success. CASEL addresses five broad and interrelated areas of competence and highlights. Examples of each are self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. These competencies can be taught and applied at various developmental stages from childhood to adulthood and across diverse cultural contexts (CASEL, 2021). Additionally, SEL provides authentic school-family-community partnerships to establish learning environments and experiences that feature trusting and collaborative relationships, rigorous and meaningful curriculum and instruction, and ongoing evaluation (CASEL, 2021). Lastly, SEL can help address various forms of inequity, empower creativity in schools, and contribute to safe, healthy, and just communities (Browning et al., 2020). Many education systems globally utilize mindfulness practices and SEL in their curriculum to increase academic achievements, aid in school engagement, focus on health and wellness, and fulfill interpersonal goals (Ergas, 2019).

**Student Academic Achievement**

There are many contributing factors to learning loss due to Covid-19. The Center on Reinventing Public Education (CRPE) (2020) explains that without face-to-face interactions among students and teachers, education will suffer. Nevertheless, educators delivered instruction—including new content—as effectively as possible under unprecedented circumstances. Some district leaders set grading policies that limited how much students' grades could drop during school closures. Some middle school students would retain their third-quarter grade if they showed competency in the final quarter (CRPE, 2020). If students failed to show competency, their grades would only be reduced by one level. Some districts launched formal instruction but avoided real-time teaching. Districts aspired to make remote instruction more manageable for teachers, many of whom had children at home, and maximize flexibility for parents and students. Depending on the district, teachers were provided additional time to prepare for their online classes (CRPE, 2020). However, school systems worked closely with families regardless of the district to ensure all students' safety and the best possible education.

**Summary**

Research on mindfulness-based instruction and social and emotional learning (SEL) e-learning platforms have steadily grown in schools and has documented a promising approach in education to support students’ well-being and academic achievement during and post Covid-19 (Browning et al., 2020). SEL helps students practice personal mindfulness for self-care, engage in conscious transformation, and establish a school culture of safety, respect, and rapport (Ergas, 2019). Several successful SEL practices were implemented in school districts, such as breathing techniques, monthly mental health newsletters, and digital e-learning platforms to create and promote mindfulness in education and develop a healthy daily routine (CASEL, 2021).

Other notions related to mindfulness were the intentionality, acceptance, and value of mindfulness practices. However, the strategies implemented varied based on school districts. School districts met their families' needs, and students held the tools required to learn. Schools also focused on building centralized units of study, which reduced the burden on teachers who were expected to deliver instruction differently (Husne & Oznacar, 2021). This helped district leaders ensure that all students were ready for instruction regardless of their residency. Finally, differentiated digital e-learning platforms were provided in school districts to maximize the effect of mindfulness and SEL practices on all students' well-being and academic achievement

**Chapter Three: Methodology**

**Introduction**

Qualitative is a constructivist claim and follows a social approach world view. It is an in-depth understanding of what is going on, focusing on a single concept or phenomenon (Creswell, 2018). Qualitative research encourages exploring the phenomena when participants are observed in their natural environment (Torres & Oluwole, 2015). This qualitative case study's descriptive analysis will examine administrators, teachers, and students' perspectives on implementing BASE Education, an SEL e-learning platform in an urban charter middle school. A narrative inquiry will be conducted to seek in-depth information and contextual understanding through a naturalistic paradigm for implementing the SEL e-learning platform. From this methodology, themes and trends will emerge from implementing the e-learning platform's social and emotional activities and lessons. The study's findings will provide insight for future mindfulness and SEL e-learning practices in schools globally

**Research Design**

Qualitative research involves a complex theoretical or philosophical framework that includes rigorous analysis to demonstrate the validity of the analysis and its conclusion (Mack et al., 2005). Case study and narrative analysis merged as methodological frameworks can critically contribute to current and future research studies (Moen, 2006). A case study is a comprehensive analysis of a specific topic, such as a person, organization, or phenomenon, and is generally utilized in social, educational, clinical, and business research (Moen, 2006). Case studies are suitable for describing, evaluating, and understanding different components of the research problem. A narrative inquiry is a qualitative research method in which the stories themselves become the raw data (Butina, 2015). Narrative case studies can be conducted with small sample sizes, yielding more in-depth data collection (Sonday et al., 2020). Patton (2015) indicates that by reflecting on the objective of a narrative inquiry and the participants' responses, researchers can collect a wealth of informative data. Therefore, collecting quality raw data from administrators, teachers, and students from one urban charter middle will provide in-depth information on implementing BASE Education and SEL e-learning platform.

**Population and Sample Size**

Haregu (2012) explains that qualitative data is information that approximates and characterizes. This data type is non-numerical and can be observed through methods mainly focusing on gaining insights, reasoning, and motives. Since qualitative data cannot be measured, researchers favor methods or data collection tools (phone surveys, online surveys, or in-person interviews) that are structured to a limited extent (Mack et al., 2005). When determining sample sizes for qualitative research, it is essential to remember what sample size will reach saturation or redundancy and how large the sample size must be to represent the variation within the target population.The target population selected for this proposed research study includes administrators, teachers, and students involved in implementing and utilizing the social and emotional (SEL) e-learning platform Based Education to support well-being in an urban charter middle school in Passaic, New Jersey.

Based on the urban charter middle school analysis for the 2022-2023 fiscal school year, approximately 500 students (25 students in each grade level) will be from fourth to eighth grade, with 36 observable teachers, 63 staff members, and three administrators. All individuals that implemented or utilized the SEL e-learning platform, BASE Education, will be individually emailed regarding the study with a link to a Qualtrics survey. Parents will be asked for consent for their child's participation. Both the parent and student must consent prior to the study. According to the Qualtrics responses for participation from administrators, teachers, students, and parents, the sample size for the study will be determined.

**Instruments, Procedures, and Resources**

A qualitative research study can collect data through in-depth interviews, focus groups, and ethnographic research. The types of studied questions have an equally vital role in determining sample size. Qualitative research aims to have a large enough sample size to discover a variety of opinions but to limit the sample size to the point of saturation (Shetty, 2022). Data collection will be through survey responses, semi-structured open-ended interview questions, and focus groups to gain "behind the scenes" information on implementing and utilizing a social and emotional (SEL) e-learning platform, BASE Education, at an urban charter middle school in Passaic, New Jersey. Sohn et al. (2017) emphasize understanding the participants' experiences from their perceived interpretations. As the perception described by the participants is established on their account, the qualitative approach will clarify the "how" of each research question (Morse, 2015).

Qualitative data in statistics is known as categorical data that can be arranged grounded on the features and properties of a phenomenon (Morse, 2015). Analyzing data collection in qualitative research is vital, with two approaches a researcher can utilize; deductive and inductive. The deductive approach is quick and easy, involving analyzing qualitative data based on the researchers' predetermine structure. The researcher utilizes their questions as a guide for analyzing the data (Torres & Oluwole, 2015). The inductive approach is more time-consuming and is not based on a predetermined structure or framework. This approach is often utilized when a researcher has very little to no idea of the research phenomenon (Torres & Oluwole, 2015). Due to limited time, a deductive approach will be utilized for this research study. Another limitation is getting an adequate sample size for the research study. Participation must be approved at many levels, from the school district level to parental approval, since the majority of the participants are secondary students. The resources utilized in this research study for data collection during the interviews will include a voice recorder, notebook, and a question guide to help write responses corresponding to the participants' inquired questions. The researcher will travel to the urban charter middle school to conduct interviews and focus groups with administrators, teachers, and students. The study will conclude after the end of one full marking period. This is approximately four months. The findings from this research study will add to the literature by providing insight for future mindfulness and SEL e-learning practices in schools.

Credibility is the criterion for evaluating a qualitative research's value or internal validity. A qualitative study is credible when its results, presented with adequate context descriptions, are recognizable to people who share the experience and individuals who care for or treat them (Hammarberg et al., 2016). For any research study to be reliable, the same experiment must be conducted under the same conditions to generate the same results. This will reinforce the findings and ensure that the broader research population will accept the proposal. Reliability is a necessary element for determining the overall validity of a research experiment and enhancing the depth of the result. This relates to the concept of good quality research to generate understanding when reliability is a concept to evaluate. Waajid et al. (2013) explain that the role of administrators and teachers in supporting children's social and emotional readiness for classroom learning has been recognized. Therefore, the results from this research study on urban charter middle school administrators, teachers, and students' descriptive experiences with BASE Education will provide insight for future mindfulness and SEL e-learning practices in schools.

**Timeline for Research Study**

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **July/August** | **September** | **October** | **November/December** |
| Week 1 | -Background research  -Initial approval for the researcher's study from NJCU  -Site authorization from the charter middle school | -Observations of BASE Education SEL activities and lessons from the urban charter middle school | -Continue teacher interviews  -Begin setting interviews with students | -Organize collected data  -Data analysis |
| Week 2 | -Send out informed consent form to teachers, students, and parents in the charter middle school about the research study and approval to participate | -Observations of BASE Education SEL activities and lessons from the urban charter middle school | -Continue observations, and teacher and student interviews from the urban charter middle school | -Data analysis  -Begin writing final report draft |
| Week 3 | -Collect informed consents  -Identify research participants | -Observations of BASE Education SEL activities and lessons from the urban charter middle school | -Continue observations, and teacher and student interviews from the urban charter middle school | -Final report draft |
| Week 4 | -Observations of BASE Education SEL activities and lessons at the urban charter middle school | -Observations of BASE Education SEL activities and lessons. Begin teacher interviews | -Collect and organize data | -Final report |

**Conclusion**

While academia is vital for student success, well-being and mental health are the core of motivation and engagement (Geertshuis, 2019). Research demonstrates that education promoting social and emotional learning (SEL) achieves positive results. The findings are congregated from multiple sources, including student achievement, neuroscience, health, counseling, classroom management, and the prevention of negative behavior (Ergas, 2019). While there are many potential contributing factors to personal anxiety towards learning, a shift from traditional classroom settings to online learning, now back to the classroom, requires mindfulness practices, frequently associated with stress relief and improvement in academic achievement (Ergas, 2019).

With this notion in mind, this qualitative research design will aim to investigate one example of an e-learning platform, BASE Education for SEL integration in an urban charter middle school, through a narrative inquiry. Data collection will center on middle school administrators, teachers, and students' descriptive experiences with BASE Education to provide insight for future mindfulness and SEL e-learning practices in schools.

The BASE Education platform will present administrators, teachers, and students in an urban charter middle school in Passaic, New Jersey, with various SEL activities, impactful SEL skills, and lessons on coping strategies, digital citizenship, bullying, and equity. The e-learning platform will signify BASE Education as the digital program that empowers students to regulate their emotions and behaviors, develop relationship skills and social awareness, and exercise critical decision-making to plan for their futures (Edmentum, 2021). The collected data will be examined to assess the continuation of the e-learning SEL program for the rest of the school year with a possibility of program expansion to the urban elementary and high urban charter schools in Passaic, New Jersey, for the 2023-2024 fiscal school year. The study's findings will provide insight for future mindfulness and SEL e-learning practices in schools globally.

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