**Assignment 2: An E-Learning Plan for Social and Emotional Learning and Academic Achievement in Charter Middle Schools: BASE Education**

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**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. Thus, the prominence of integrating mindfulness practices and social-emotional learning (SEL) for students' well-being post-Covid-19 and in determining an effective educational e-learning plan is fundamental for student success. This proposal recommends supporting middle school students' well-being and increasing academic achievements by creating and implementing SEL activities and lessons through an e-learning platform: BASE Education.

**Problem Statement**

With student safety, physically and emotionally, and aggregating learning loss due to Covid-19, mindfulness in students' social and emotional well-being and incorporating innovative digital learning platforms have become the forefront in 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 success in schools. 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 most critically essential practices followed in education during and post Covid-19. Mindfulness maintains a moment-by-moment awareness of our thoughts, emotions, bodily sensations, and surrounding environment with openness and curiosity (Browning et al., 2020). Lastly, mindfulness strategies and SEL activities and lessons can help alleviate daily stressors students experience due to Covid-19 and reduce negative thoughts and behaviors while increasing academic achievements.

With the notion of student well-being in mind, many educational companies are creating and implementing innovative digital e-learning platforms, such as CASEL, Edmentum, and BASE Education, to aid in student academia and well-being. Educators integrate these research-based practices and adapt their lessons to fit individual learners' needs, students working in groups, or implementing strategies schoolwide to foster a safe, healthy, and positive school culture and climate (Browning et al., 2020). Through implementing an e-learning plan on mindfulness and incorporating SEL activities and lessons, 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).

**Need and Value for E-Learning**

Horton (2012) explains e-learning as the use of electronic technologies to create learning experiences. In constructing an effective e-learning plan, design (what we do) and development (how we carry out those decisions) are involved and provide students with a wealth of information and knowledge. BASE Education is described to be an effective e-learning curriculum that inspires students to think and formulate inquiries based on their discoveries, findings, creativity, and self-expression, allowing for increased intrinsic motivation and academic development. Its digital social-emotional learning curriculum allows educators, counselors, and administrators to connect. Assigned educators can access student work, identify any immediate danger, and collaborate with students. The CASEL approved SEL and mindfulness lesson plans and activities embedded in the program can help students build rapport through evidence-based best practices while allowing educators to customize their learning experiences (BASE, 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. The research indicates that 87% of students feel successful when doing BASE coursework, 71% of students reflect on BASE coursework on their own time, 77% utilize what they have learned from the program in their everyday life, and 81% of students say that BASE empowers them to discuss personal matters with their counselor that they could not before the program (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. BASE Education was created to offer students an outlet for personal growth and provide a private and safe space to share and reflect. Incorporating this therapeutic approach can encourage students to make discoveries about themselves while giving them a sense of hope for their future (Edmentum, 2021). The calming design of the program can allow for concentration while the minimal texts actively engage the brain's emotion center. The result is a non-academic look and feel to evoke optimal engagement. Its unique model offers students autonomy to share yet provides a way for educators to quickly connect with and understand their students better (Edmentum, 2021).

Given the vast challenges in the instructional day, educators rarely have the time or resources to provide every student the one-on-one attention they deserve. This program will allow educators to know their students deeper, hear their stories, and provide them with the individualized support they need. Research reports that students who utilized BASE Education as a part of their curriculum felt cared for and heard (Edmentum, 2021). Whether the SEL activities or lessons are utilized in group instruction or for individual 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.

**Research Questions**

The research aims to investigate the correlation, if any, between the implementation of social and emotional learning (SEL) activities and lessons from BASE Education, an e-learning platform, and middle school students' well-being and academic achievement. Three research questions were created to analyze the effectiveness of the SEL lessons on improving students' well-being and academic achievement:

* RQ1: How effective are the social and emotional (SEL) activities/lessons on BASE Education as an instructional design for middle school students' well-being and academic success?
* RQ2: What are the potential challenges educators and students experience while utilizing the SEL activities/lessons on BASE Education?
* RQ3: What are the potential strengths educators and students experience while utilizing the SEL activities and lessons on BASE Education?

**Literature Review**

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

**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. Thus, it is essential to practice mindfulness in our everyday lives, especially during these trying times within the education system. With this notion, many schools are implementing mindfulness and SEL into their curriculum. Mindfulness practices are complementary to SEL, as self-awareness and self-management. Studies show 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 element to 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 potential contributing factors to personal anxiety towards learning. However, the shift from traditional in-class education to remote learning and back to the classroom still requires further evaluation. However, mindfulness practices have been frequently associated with stress relief and improvement in academic achievement. The Center on Reinventing Public Education (CRPE) (2020) explains that education will suffer without face-to-face interactions among students and teachers. Nevertheless, educators delivered instruction—including new content—as effectively as possible under unprecedented circumstances. Some district leaders set a grading policy that limited how much students' grades could drop during the school closure. 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. School 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, regardless of the district, school systems worked closely with families to ensure the safety and best possible education for all students.

**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, engaging in conscious transformation, and establishing a school culture of safety, respect, and rapport (Ergas, 2019). Several successful mindful SEL practices were implemented in school districts, such as breathing techniques, monthly mental health newsletters, and implementing digital e-learning platforms to create and promote mindfulness in education and devise 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 the school district. School districts have reached out to ensure that families had their basic needs met and students held the tools required to learn. Schools also focused on building centralized units of study, which reduces the burden on teachers who are expected to deliver instruction differently, and the potential for variation across teachers and schools (Husne & Oznacar, 2021). This helped district leaders ensure that all students were ready for instruction regardless of their residency. Finally, differentiated digital platforms were provided in school districts to maximize the effect of mindfulness and social and emotional practices for all students' well-being and academic achievement.

**Methodology**

The researcher will conduct a qualitative descriptive research design to investigate the correlation between implementing social and emotional learning (SEL) activities and lessons from BASE Education, an e-learning platform, and charter middle school students' well-being and academic achievement. The researcher's methodological framework, procedures, and rationale will be conducted to study the strengths and weaknesses of BASE Education in supporting well-being and academic achievements. Unlike quantitative research, phenomenology provides insights into a group's lived experiences or person (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Social phenomenon and participants' reflections are the focal points in qualitative research, marking this approach most appropriate to address the research questions (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). As the perception described by the participants is based on their accounts, the qualitative approach will most successfully explain the "how" of each research question (Morse, 2015).

From this methodology, themes and trends will emerge from implementing social and emotional activities and lessons from BASE Education and students' well-being and academic achievement. Qualitative research encourages exploring the phenomena when participants are observed in their natural environment (Torres & Oluwole, 2015). This qualitative descriptive design provides a detailed explanation of the phenomenon disclosed by employing interviews and focus groups. Utilizing semi-structured interviews relating to the research questions will produce the desired data. Sohn et al. (2017) emphasize the importance of understanding the participants' experiences from their perceived interpretations. As such, a qualitative descriptive approach is most appropriate for this study, unlike quantitative research that addresses statistical or numerical data analysis (Yin, 2018).

**Population and Sample Size**

The BASE Education e-learning platform is approved by The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) and is designed to provide educators with the tools necessary to teach and reinforce SEL concepts such as empathy, compassion, and mindfulness to students (CASEL, 2021). The target population selected for this proposed study includes educators and students in urban charter schools (middle school campuses) located in Passaic, New Jersey. The sample student population from the four urban charter schools in Passaic, New Jersey, is approximately 4,000 students. The e-learning plan will incorporate a variety of over 100 digital SEL activities and lessons, empowering students to control their emotions and behaviors, improve relationship skills and social awareness, and exercise critical decision-making to plan for their futures (Edmentum, 2021).

The researcher will utilize convenience sampling to recruit participants. Convenience sampling or non-probability sampling will allow participants to be recruited since student availability is difficult due to class scheduling. Utilizing convenience sampling will also allow participants to deliberately self-select based on their experience with the phenomena, serving the researchers convenience (Acharya et al., 2013). While convenience sampling presents the advantage of a cost-efficient option to acquire the necessary sampling, the researcher's goal is to acquire a diversified sample of charter middle school students' responses to the e-learning platform.

**Instruments, Equipment, and Resources**

 New Jersey City University first acquires initial approval for the researcher's study. Site authorization from the charter middle schools and educators, students, and parents will also be required. Informed consent reports will be utilized to abide by the ethical standards to protect the study participants' rights and well-being (Koç & Fidan, 2020). Each interview will take place in the participants' natural environment (school building). The informed consent form, signed by the participants, will be reviewed during this time. Participants will be informed of their right to terminate participating in the research study. The researcher will ensure confidentiality and that there are no personal ties to the participants.

The instruments utilized in this research study are a survey constructed in and distributed via Google Forms, personal interviews, and focus groups. The study will conclude after the ending of one full marking period. This is approximately three to four months. The researcher will travel to the charter middle schools to conduct interviews and focus groups with educators and students. The resources utilized during the interviews will include a voice recorder, notebook, and a question guide to help write responses corresponding to the participants' inquired questions. The findings from this research study will add to the literature by addressing the charter middle school educators' and students' reactions to the SEL activities and lessons from the e-learning platform BASE Education. The findings will answer if the program aided in students' well-being and academic achievement. The interviews will comprise of the following questions:

1. What are your thoughts or experiences with transitioning from online, hybrid, to in-person learning?
2. Has your school or teachers helped you with transitioning back to the classroom?
3. What did your school or teachers do or utilize that was helpful for your well-being and academic achievements during this time? Follow up if needed: Did you find the BASE Education program to be one of them?
4. How effective do you think BASE Education was for you/your students' well-being and academic achievements?
5. What do you feel were the strengths and weaknesses of the BASE Education program?

**Timeline for Research Study**

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|  | **January** | **February** | **March** | **April** |
| Week 1 | -Background research  -Initial approval for the researcher's study from NJCU  -Site authorization from the charter middle schools | -Observations of BASE Education SEL activities and lessons from the different charter middle school campuses. | -Data analysis of google form surveys  -Begin setting interviews with teachers and students in the different charter middle school campuses | -Organize collected data  -Data analysis |
| Week 2 | -Send out informed consent form to teachers, students, and parents in the charter middle schools about the research study and approval to participate | -Observations of BASE Education SEL activities and lessons from the different charter middle school campuses. | -Interview teachers and students in the different charter middle school campuses  -Begin setting focus groups of students and teachers in the different charter middle school campuses | -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 different charter middle school campuses. | -Interview focus groups of students and teachers in the different charter middle school campuses | Final report draft |
| Week 4 | -Observations of BASE Education SEL activities and lessons from the different charter middle school campuses. | -Observations and send out google forms survey questions to participants (students and teachers) | -Collect and organize data | Final report |

**Conclusion**

While academia is vital for student success, well-being and mental health are the core to motivation and engagement (Geertshuis, 2019). Decades of research demonstrate that education promoting social and emotional learning (SEL) achieves positive results. The findings are congregated from multiple fields of 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, the research proposal aims to utilize BASE Education, an e-learning platform approved by The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL). The BASE Education program will present students and educators in charter middle schools in Passaic, New Jersey with various SEL activities, impactful social and emotional 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). Lastly, the researcher will examine the collected data and utilize it to assess the continuation of the e-learning program for the 2022-2023 fiscal school year.

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