

Influence of Social Emotional Learning and Social Presence: A Qualitative Case Study

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Abstract

The problem was the lack of SEL and social presence practices in online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic, which caused student engagement to decline. The purpose was to explore educator perceptions of how SEL social presence practices affect student engagement during the transition from traditional learning. Grounded in social constructivism and social presence theories, this study aimed to fill the gap in the literature review, emphasizing the need for further investigation into the combined effects of SEL instruction and social presence practices on student engagement. Key research questions were used to answer how educators perceive the impact of explicit SEL instruction and social presence practices on student engagement online. The study employed an intrinsic qualitative case study methodology, targeting educators teaching grades 5–12 from 2018–2022. A purposive criterion sampling method was utilized to select 15 educators who shifted from traditional to online teaching during the pandemic. The five analytic phases model for content analysis combined with open coding and in vivo coding identified patterns and themes in data collected from individual interviews and a focus group. Findings revealed two major themes: the necessity of SEL and social presence to enhance student engagement online and the challenges and opportunities in implementing SEL and social presence online. The conclusion was that these practices must be incorporated into virtual learning. Recommendations include changes to policies and practices such as training and parental involvement. Findings benefit learners, educators, policymakers, and researchers as they shape the future of engaging and effective online learning.

Keywords: COVID-19, educator perceptions, online learning, social and emotional learning, social presence, student engagement

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to those who have been my pillars of strength and inspiration. To my beloved parents, Terry and Gaspar Garcia and Hector Rivera, your unwavering support and the examples of faith, hard work, and resilience you've set throughout your lives have been my guiding light. I am grateful for your love, your compassion, and for setting an example of the kind of parent I strive to be.

The sudden passing of my brother, Vincent G. Garcia, in 2021 was a poignant reminder of life's fleeting nature. My dear brother, I miss you. In his memory, I aim to leave a legacy my children can look upon with pride.

To my children, Benjamin, Christopher, and Nicholas Santana, you are my world. Your presence in my life has made this journey brighter and more meaningful. Ben, your willingness to lend a hand and offer insight has been an invaluable source of support. Chris, I admire your strength, determination, and charisma; may you continue to greet life with courage and light-heartedness. Nick, your hard work and perseverance are impressive; these traits will take you very far in life. Each of you, in your unique way, has contributed to making me the person I am. You are the best people I know, and I am immeasurably grateful for the privilege of being your parent. Your support, understanding, and endless love have not only been my greatest joy but also my strongest support. It is to you, my dear sons, that I dedicate this achievement. May this work inspire you as you have inspired me, to chase your dreams with courage, face challenges with resilience, and live a life filled with purpose and passion. Remember, you can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth you (Philippians 4:13). May these pages serve as a testament that with faith and determination, anything is possible.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Education has undergone significant changes in recent years, with the COVID-19 pandemic forcing schools and universities worldwide to shift from traditional instruction to remote learning. While the transition to online learning allowed students to continue their education, it also presented a new challenge: low student engagement (Kuhfeld et al., 2020). Student engagement is a key indicator of positive behavior and academic success (Sauve & Schonert-Reichl, 2019). The lack of social and emotional learning instruction and teacher social presence practices during the transition to online learning resulted in a regression in student engagement, conduct, and academic success (Boulay & McChesney, 2021; Bozkurt et al., 2022; Garcia & Weiss, 2020; Marín, 2022; Nickerson et al., 2019; Racine et al., 2021). Understanding the role of social and emotional learning and social presence practices in promoting student engagement in online learning is critical for developing effective strategies for supporting student engagement in the virtual classroom.

This qualitative intrinsic case study explored the perceptions of secondary school educators who transitioned from traditional to online learning during the pandemic regarding the influence of social and emotional learning practices and social presence during online learning to understand better how student engagement was impacted. This study's findings benefit students, teachers, researchers, and policymakers. Implementing effective social and emotional learning and social presence strategies for virtual learning is inherently advantageous to stakeholders. Additionally, the study contributes to the existing body of research on increasing student engagement in online learning. This chapter provides an overview of the study, including background and statement of the problem, purpose and significance of the study, research questions, methodology, and theoretical framework. Additionally, presented within are the

definition of terms, assumptions, scope and delimitations, limitations, and chapter summary.

Background of the Problem

The COVID-19 pandemic profoundly impacted students, educators, and stakeholders worldwide, producing worry, anxiety, and financial concerns (Garcia & Weiss, 2020; McCallops et al., 2019; Racine et al., 2021). According to a national study by the American Institutes for Research in May 2020, 85% of districts estimated the daily instruction period dropped to under 4 hours, a reduction of over an hour compared to the pre-pandemic national average of 5 teaching hours per day (Rickles et al., 2020). In a separate study conducted in the fall of 2020, researchers determined that students learned approximately 65% of the math and 85% of the reading their grade-level peers would have customarily learned, equating to a three-month loss in math learning and a two-month loss in reading learning during the pandemic (US Department of Education, 2021). In addition, the pandemic exacerbated socioeconomic disparities in education. As of March 2021, students of color were less likely to be enrolled in full-time, in-person education than white counterparts; 58% of white students were enrolled compared to 36% of Black students, 35% of Latinx students, and 18% of Asian students (Institute of Education Services, 2021).

This lack of engagement led to academic and behavioral regressions influencing overall student performance in K–12 settings since the return to traditional learning (Nickerson et al., 2019). Social and emotional learning competencies and educators' social presence strategies are essential for student engagement and have been found to be beneficial for student academic progress (Chuang, 2021; Davidson et al., 2018; Meyers et al., 2019). Social and emotional learning offers a positive and secure learning atmosphere for students and enables educators to enhance students' academic success (Sauve & Schonert-Reichl, 2019), while social presence

facilitates trust and open communication among students, resulting in a more inclusive classroom environment (Elverici, 2021; Yavuzalp & Bahcivan, 2021). Bozkurt et al. (2022) stated, “There is an urgent need to develop effective strategies to ensure the continuity of online education in the future, and it is essential to respond proactively to such crises with resilience and adaptability.” As a result, this study explored the role of social and emotional learning practices and social presence in promoting student engagement in online learning environments.

Theoretical frameworks play a vital role in research by providing a lens through which to explore the data. Vygotsky's (1978) social constructivism theory posited that individuals actively construct knowledge and reality by combining prior knowledge and new experiences, emphasizing the importance of prior experiences in shaping individuals' understanding of new information (Kimmons & Caskurlu, 2020; Yeravdekar & Raman, 2022). Similarly, social presence theory highlights the significance of social bonds and open communication in creating a sense of belonging and trust in the classroom, ultimately enhancing student engagement (Elverici, 2021; Gunawardena, 1995; Yavuzalp & Bahcivan, 2021).

It was necessary to investigate the state of social and emotional learning instruction and teacher social presence practices in K–12 online learning environments to contextualize the study's importance further. This study explored how integrating social constructivism and social presence theories can inform educators in delivering effective online instruction to enhance student engagement. The specific problem statement is discussed in the following section, building on the broader perspective presented in this section.

Statement of the Problem

The problem was the lack of social and emotional learning instruction and teacher social presence practices in the online learning setting during the transition from traditional learning

during the COVID-19 pandemic, resulting in the regression of student engagement. The COVID-19 pandemic necessitated a rapid shift from traditional in-person K–12 learning to online learning. The sudden transition put many educators into survival mode as they learned to teach online, which led to a regression in student engagement, presenting a significant challenge to educators and policymakers in the wake of the pandemic (Giusti et al., 2021; Hadwin et al., 2022; Hirsch et al., 2022; Lee et al., 2021; Luchetti et al., 2020). As online learning increased during the pandemic, research indicated that students struggled to engage with the material and remained motivated (Boulay & McChesney, 2021; Mondy & Reynolds, 2020; Roff, 2021). Lack of SEL practices and teacher social presence may have contributed to the problem. According to a study of nearly 1,000 K–12 teachers, 74% of educators pointed to student engagement being much lower during the pandemic’s online learning than traditional learning (Huck & Zhang, 2021). The study further revealed that teachers found 25% of their students to be “essentially truant” during online learning (Huck & Zhang, 2021).

Little research has been conducted on the influence of social and emotional learning practices and teacher social presence on student engagement in online learning, despite the increasing popularity of online education. Consequently, there was a gap in the literature regarding the effects of these practices on student engagement in K–12 online learning environments. This study addresses the gap by investigating the impact of educator perceptions of SEL skill instruction on the regression of student engagement in an online setting. Specifically, the study utilized social constructivism and social presence theories to guide the research. Exploring educator perceptions of online SEL and social presence practices provides insight into how educators can enhance student engagement in the online learning setting.

The problem was current, relevant, and significant given the recent widespread shift

towards online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic and the regression of student engagement, highlighting the need for effective strategies to promote engagement in this setting. The significance of this research lies in its potential to inform and enhance online learning practices and contribute to the existing literature. By exploring the influence of SEL practices and teacher social presence, this study contributes to what is known about promoting student engagement in the online learning setting. The findings provide valuable information for educators and policymakers to enhance online instruction practices, ultimately improving student engagement and behavioral outcomes for all.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose was to explore educator perceptions of social and emotional learning instruction and teacher social presence practices in the online setting during the transition from traditional to online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic and its influence on student engagement. This study explored how educators adapted teaching approaches to foster social and emotional learning, maintain strong teacher-student connections, and support student engagement in a digital environment amid the unprecedented challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. The research goals and objectives were achieved through data collection and analysis procedures, including interviews and a focus group, using the application of social constructivism and social presence theories to guide the analysis. Using a qualitative case study design and intrinsic case study approach, the study explored the experiences of a selected group of educators, allowing for an in-depth exploration of the phenomenon and leading to a rich and detailed understanding of the area of study. Qualitative research enabled the assessment of complex social issues and human experiences, yielding rich and detailed information about how the phenomenon was perceived and experienced (Creswell & Creswell, 2022). The sampling

method was non-probability sampling and criterion purposive sampling. According to Yin (2018), 15–20 participants yield a manageable amount of data for collection and analysis, allowing a researcher to conduct multiple rounds of data collection, thoroughly analyze the data, and achieve saturation. The research methodology and data instruments have been described in detail, emphasizing the strengths and limitations of the approach and how they align with the overall goals and objectives of the study.

Significance of the Study

The significance of this study was its potential to offer valuable insights into effective practices to enhance student engagement and success in online learning environments. This study's findings benefit learners, educators, and society. The findings may lead to changes in professional development programs and policies to support educators in online teaching environments, resulting in positive social change by improving student academic outcomes and increasing engagement. This research identified best practices for promoting student engagement in online learning settings, significantly contributing to the existing literature on SEL and social presence. Practices and policies can help children and adults gain and apply the information, skills, and attitudes required to understand and control emotions, develop and sustain meaningful relationships, and make responsible choices, as encompassed within social and emotional learning (Corcoran et al., 2018; Ross et al., 2019; Weissberg, 2019).

Research Questions

The research questions functioned as the core component for exploring the issue and objectives of the study. Questions were congruent with the problem statement, purpose statement, and data collection tools. The study sought to offer insights into educators' perceptions concerning the efficacy of social and emotional learning instruction and teacher social presence

practices during the shift from conventional to online learning environments. Furthermore, the research questions aligned with the data collection instruments and methodologies, encompassing surveys and interviews conducted with educators.

Research Question 1: What are the perceptions of educators on whether explicit social and emotional learning instruction can improve student engagement outcomes in the online learning environment?

Research Question 2: What are the perceptions of educators on whether explicit teacher social presence practices can improve student engagement outcomes in the online learning environment?

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical underpinnings of this study were grounded in social constructivism and social presence theories (Bruner, 1960; Dewey, 1938; Garrison et al., 2000; Gunawardena, 1995; Piaget, 1952; Short et al., 1976; Vygotsky, 1978). Social constructivism, originating from Vygotsky's (1978) work, posited that individuals actively create their knowledge and reality by synthesizing prior information and novel experiences, with personal experiences acting as a filter through which individuals encounter new information (Vygotsky, 1978; Yeravdekar & Raman, 2022). Bruner (1960) expanded upon Vygotsky's ideas and emphasized the role of culture and language in shaping human cognition. Dewey's (1938) work stressed the importance of experiential learning and the role of social interaction in knowledge construction. Piaget's (1952) ideas about the role of social interactions in cognitive development are integrated into the social constructivist framework (Yeravdekar & Raman, 2022). Social constructivism learning theory bears relevance to social and emotional learning, as students construct new knowledge based on antecedent experiences (CASEL, 2022; Weissberg, 2019).

The community of inquiry (COI) framework, encompassing social presence, also held pertinence to the study. This widely acknowledged theoretical model for online learning accentuated the educator's role in devising and guiding the learning experience (Garrison et al., 2000; Gunawardena, 1995; Short et al., 1976). Garrison et al. (2000) developed the COI framework, which integrates social presence with cognitive presence and teaching presence to better understand the dynamics of online learning environments. Short et al. (1976) pioneered social presence theory, which states that the degree of social presence in a communication medium affects the nature and quality of the interaction, with greater social presence leading to more effective communication. Gunawardena (1995) extended the social presence theory in the context of online learning, highlighting the importance of social presence for successful online learning environments.

This study's theoretical framework drew on social constructivism and social presence theories relevant to the research questions by exploring how social and emotional learning instruction and teacher social presence practices impacted student engagement outcomes in online learning environments. Social presence is the psychological distance one feels from others, fostering a bond through perceived connectedness and proximity (Elverici, 2021; Short et al., 1976; Yavuzalp & Bahcivan, 2021). This perspective is particularly significant in online learning, where establishing nonverbal communication cues poses greater challenges. By using a social constructivist and social presence lens, the framework guided the study's approach by prioritizing the integration of existing knowledge and new experiences of participants and learners. This approach informed the development of interview and focus group protocols as data collection instruments. It also guided the analysis process to capture the relationship between social and emotional learning, teacher social presence, and student engagement outcomes. In

chapter two's literature review, the theoretical frameworks are elaborated upon in greater detail.

Definitions of Terms

Concise definitions of key terms and concepts were essential to establishing the foundation of the presented research. Providing explicit definitions for terms improved the study's accuracy and thoroughness and enhanced the reader's comprehension. By defining key terms, the subsequent sections of this dissertation are based on a shared understanding, ensuring a coherent and well-integrated analysis.

Academic outcome is defined as an overall academic achievement based on multiple criteria (Allbright et al., 2019).

Behavioral outcome is defined as a learner's observable behavior (Blazar & Kraft, 2017).

Community of Inquiry (CoI) is defined as a group of people who engage in intentional and reflective learning to create and validate shared knowledge (Garrison et al., 2000). The COI framework comprises three interrelated presences: pedagogical presence, social presence, and cognitive presence.

COVID-19 pandemic is defined as a worldwide outbreak of an infectious disease called coronavirus caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus. The virus was first identified in China in December 2019 and has since spread to multiple countries, prompting the World Health Organization to declare a Public Health Emergency of International Concern on January 30, 2020, and classify it as a pandemic on March 11, 2020 (WHO, 2023).

Immediacy is defined as the psychological distance one maintains from others (Gunawardena, 1995).

Online learning (virtual learning) is defined as a method of education whereby students learn in an entirely virtual environment (Singh & Thurman, 2019).

Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) is defined as the process through which children and adults acquire and effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions (CASEL, 2022).

Social and emotional learning practices are defined as the explicit teaching and practice of social-emotional competencies (Mahoney et al., 2021).

Social constructivism theory is defined as the learning theory developed by psychologist Lev Vygotsky in which individuals actively construct their knowledge and reality by combining previous information and new experiences (Vygotsky, 1978).

Social presence is defined as the degree to which a person is perceived as 'real' during communication (Gunawardena, 1995).

Student engagement is defined as the level of attention, curiosity, interest, optimism, and passion students demonstrate when learning, which results in the motivation to learn (Bond, 2020).

Traditional learning (face-to-face learning) is defined as face-to-face learning interactions that occur in a physical location (Lo & Hew, 2020).

Assumptions

Assumptions in qualitative research are the underlying beliefs, values, and perspectives that shape the researcher's approach to the study, data collection, and data analysis (Yin, 2018).

Addressing assumptions in case study research, encompassing philosophical, theoretical, methodological, and practical elements, is essential (Yin, 2018). By acknowledging and reflecting on these factors, researchers can uphold the study's integrity, validity, credibility, and

trustworthiness (Yin, 2018). In this study, one assumption was that social and emotional learning constitutes a vital component of student development and has the potential to influence behavioral outcomes significantly. This assumption was grounded in the research conducted by the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL), which has formulated a widely accepted framework for SEL utilized by both educators and researchers (CASEL, 2022). Additionally, the study presumed that implementing teacher social presence practices can enhance student engagement in online learning environments, as posited by the COI framework (Kimmons & Caskurlu, 2020). These assumptions were integral to the relevance of the research, which supported the research questions and the theoretical framework employed in the study.

This research assumed that the participants in the case study were open and honest in their responses, as this was essential for obtaining accurate and reliable data. Creswell and Creswell (2022) supported the assumption that participant candor and purported qualitative research are best suited for exploring subjective experiences. Finally, objectivity was maintained throughout the study to avoid any biases influencing the interpretation of the data. To ensure researcher objectivity, Creswell and Creswell (2022) advocated using multiple data sources to triangulate findings and minimize bias. Interviews with educators were combined with an educator focus group to gather multiple pieces of data for analysis.

Scope and Delimitations

The scope was essential for maintaining a distinct focus on the research questions and keeping the study manageable and relevant to the intended area of investigation (Yin, 2018). Essential considerations for defining scope included formulating clear research questions, identifying the unit of analysis, selecting appropriate cases, specifying the study's time frame and

context, and establishing a theoretical framework (Yin, 2018). Addressing specific factors maintains focus, manageability, and relevance in case study investigations.

This study's theoretical framework drew from social constructivism and social presence theories, which were relevant to the research questions by exploring how social and emotional learning instruction and teacher social presence practices impacted student engagement outcomes in online learning environments. Fifteen educators were targeted as participants in interviews and focus groups. According to Yin (2018), 15–20 participants yield a manageable amount of data to achieve saturation. The non-probability sampling method, criterion purposive sampling, was utilized. This approach enabled the selection of participants most appropriate for the study, rather than relying on chance, which increased control for certain variables and increased external validity (Stratton, 2021). The purposive criterion sampling method used in this study involved setting specific criteria for participant inclusion, engaging individuals meeting the criteria, and selecting a representative sample, typically smaller than in probability sampling (Creswell & Creswell, 2022). The study's target population consisted of educators teaching grades 5–12 between 2018–2022 who experienced both traditional teaching and the shift to online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. Utilizing the purposive criterion sampling method, this study ensured the inclusion of participants with relevant experience, providing valuable insights into the impact of social and emotional learning instruction and teacher social presence practices on student engagement in online learning settings.

Delimitations, encompassing research questions, theoretical frameworks, data collection and analysis methods, and the participant or case selection help define a study's scope and stress the significance of clearly stating delimitations to establish focus, manageability, and relevance in research (Creswell & Creswell, 2022; Merriam & Grenier, 2019; Yin, 2018). The study was

delimited to the perceptions of educators on whether explicit social and emotional learning instruction and teacher social presence practices can improve student engagement outcomes in the online learning environment. While there were other stakeholders in the online learning setting, educators are the primary facilitators of student engagement in online learning; therefore, their perceptions and practices were critical in understanding how social and emotional learning instruction and teacher social presence practices affected student engagement. Participants were solicited through a Facebook group of 128,000 international educators who taught during COVID-19. Of the total population, this study was delimited to English-speaking educators of students in grades 5–12 between 2018–2022 who taught face-to-face before the shift to online learning during the pandemic. Educators had the desired perspectives for this study, which was a background in traditional teaching and witnessing the shift to online learning first-hand. The study was delimited to include only English-speaking educators to ensure a clear understanding of the collected data transcripts for analysis. Because the interviews and focus groups took place via videoconference, the study was not limited to a specific geographical location, allowing for increased transferability to other regions to include different cultural and educational contexts. This study enhanced its transferability by including participants from diverse geographical locations and various educational contexts, allowing for a broader understanding of the impact of SEL instruction and teacher social presence practices on student engagement in online learning environments across different settings. The scope and delimitations of this study were established to ensure the research was focused, feasible, and relevant to the topic.

Limitations

Limitations in qualitative research are defined as potential weaknesses or constraints within the study design, methodology, or data collection and analysis process, which may impact

the generalizability, reliability, or validity of the research findings (Creswell & Creswell, 2022). Addressing limitations in case study research is vital for promoting transparency, contextualizing results, enhancing credibility, and encouraging future research, as it demonstrates awareness of the study's imperfections and allows for a more nuanced and accurate representation of the findings (Creswell & Creswell, 2022; Merriam & Grenier, 2019). To address limitations related to transferability, there must be a thorough and detailed account of the context, participants, and data collection methods (Barrett et al., 2020). This approach allows readers to assess the relevance of the findings. As suggested by Neuman (2021), using purposive sampling in selecting individuals who provide varied and relevant perspectives can augment the likelihood of transferability. Implementing these methods reduced transferability limitations and increased the likelihood that the study will be replicated with similar results.

To address limitations related to dependability, an interview protocol and a focus group protocol were used as multiple data sources to ensure triangulation to corroborate findings and reduce the impact of potential biases (Patton, 1999). Chapter four of this study presents a clear and systematic outline of the processes undertaken, including research procedures, data collection, and data analysis. This detailed presentation allows others to follow and comprehend the research decisions that were made easily. Personal bias and perspectives could influence the study outcomes. To address this limitation, study participants were provided with the opportunity to review the transcript of their recorded videoconference interview session to make necessary corrections before content analysis to reduce dependability limitations (Elos & Kyngas, 2008). Addressing transferability and dependability limitations enhanced the overall quality and trustworthiness of the findings.

Chapter Summary

The first chapter of this research study introduced the qualitative case study on educator perceptions of the impact of social and emotional learning instruction and social presence practices on student engagement during the shift from traditional to online learning amid the COVID-19 pandemic. The study's purpose, significance, research questions, theoretical framework, assumptions, scope and delimitations, and limitations were thoroughly outlined. Grounded in social constructivism and social presence theories, the research employed interviews and focus groups with educators as its primary data collection methods. Assumptions addressed in the chapter involved the importance of SEL for student development and the positive influence of teacher social presence practices on online student engagement. The chapter outlined the study's scope and delimitations by clarifying research questions, identifying the unit of analysis, selecting appropriate cases, specifying the time frame and context, and establishing a theoretical framework. To address potential limitations of transferability and dependability, purposive sampling was employed, various data collection methods were utilized, a comprehensive account of data analysis methods was provided, and participants were encouraged to review and correct interview transcripts. Addressing limitations was crucial for enhancing the overall quality and trustworthiness of the study's findings.

A comprehensive literature review follows exploring relevant literature and research on social and emotional learning, teacher social presence practices, and student engagement in online learning environments. This research helped establish the foundation for the study and provided the needed background for comprehending the correlation among these factors. Finally, the literature review aided in identifying gaps in the existing knowledge, ultimately emphasizing the need for further investigation into educators' perceptions of social and emotional learning instruction and teachers' social presence practices within the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Social and emotional learning is the process by which children and adults learn and use the knowledge, attitudes, and skills they need to understand and control their emotions, set and reach positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, make and keep good relationships, and make decisions (CASEL, 2022). While adults more often utilize social and emotional learning skills, anyone can develop their social skills and emotional intelligence (Neth et al., 2020). Social and emotional learning skills aid adolescents in building the perseverance and resiliency essential to developing effective coping abilities (Nickerson et al., 2019). Social and emotional learning competencies are essential for the classroom and beneficial for student academic progress (Davidson et al., 2018; Meyers et al., 2019). This is especially important due to the trauma many students have experienced as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic had a global impact on students, educators, and stakeholders, producing worry, anxiety, and financial concerns (Garcia & Weiss, 2020; McCallops et al., 2019; Racine et al., 2021). This trauma led to a regression in students' behavior and academic achievement outcomes during online learning and immediately after their return to face-to-face learning (Nickerson et al., 2019). The return to traditional education exposed significant intellectual and social obstacles. Virtual learning disrupted the development of millions of students and exacerbated well-documented inequities that hurt low-income students (Garcia & Weiss, 2020). The pandemic has worsened opportunity disparities that place low-income learners at a disadvantage compared to their more affluent classmates, owing to a lack of resources, such as food, shelter, and health care (Garcia & Weiss, 2020). Social-emotional learning provides students with a safe and positive learning environment and equips educators with the capacity to enhance students' academic success (Sauve & Schonert-Reichl, 2019).

A literature review follows on social and emotional learning core competencies in the educational setting after the COVID-19 pandemic and its influence on student academic and behavioral outcomes. Social and emotional learning curriculum programs and educators' perceptions in traditional and online environments are presented. The problem was the lack of social and emotional learning instruction and teacher social presence practices in the online learning setting during the transition from traditional learning during the COVID-19 pandemic, resulting in the regression of student engagement. The purpose was to explore educator perceptions of social and emotional learning instruction and teacher social presence practices in the online setting during the transition from traditional to online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic and its influence on student engagement. A literature review identified themes based on social constructivism theory and academic and behavioral regression. It also examined the effects of social and emotional learning instruction on academic and behavioral outcomes, we all as educators' perceptions of the impact of this instruction. The sections for this chapter included the literature search strategy and theoretical frameworks: social constructivism theory and social presence in the online learning environment. Also included are sections that explored the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on student academic and behavioral outcomes, the five social and emotional learning core competencies, the influence of social and emotional learning on academics and behavior, current social and emotional learning curriculum programs, the perceptions of social and emotional learning instruction in the traditional and online learning environments, and the chapter summary. More study is needed to investigate teachers' perspectives on the influence of social and emotional learning instruction on enhancing academic and behavioral outcomes for students.

Literature Search Strategy

For the theoretical framework section, several databases were accessed as a part of the American College of Education (ACE) Library, such as JSTOR, EBSCO, ProQuest Education Database, and SAGE Premier Journals. EBSCO yielded results from the Academic Search Complete, Child Development & Adolescent Studies, Education Source, eBook Collection, and Education Resources Information Center (ERIC) databases. ProQuest was leveraged to search the Coronavirus Research Database, eBook Central, Education Database, ERIC, and publicly available content. The search terms for the theoretical framework section were *social constructivism theory, social presence in the online learning environment, community of inquiry, immediacy, and social presence learning relationships*. For the research literature review, under the section titled COVID's Impact on Students' Well-being, search terms included: *increase in loneliness, lack of coping skills, COVID's impact on academic outcomes, and impact on mental health and behavioral outcomes*. Under the section titled Social Emotional Learning and CASEL, search terms included: *CASEL, CASEL core competencies, SEL intervention programs, the influence of SEL on students' well-being, the impact of SEL on academics and behavior, SEL and the school environment, SEL and school improvement goals, and teacher training and perceptions*. Under the section titled Educational Technology and SEL, search terms included *pedagogy and educational technology frameworks, self-regulated and student-centered learning, learning management systems and personalized learning, and SEL in the online environment*.

Theoretical Framework

Theoretical frameworks are used to build a structure within the study and provide a lens for reviewing the chosen material. This lens helps researchers comprehend academic work via postulated linkages and familiarize themselves with the present investigation (Ross et al., 2019). The theoretical framework for this study centered on social constructivism and social presence

theories (Bruner, 1960; Dewey, 1938; Garrison et al., 2000; Gunawardena, 1995; Piaget, 1952; Short et al., 1976; Vygotsky, 1978).

Social Constructivism Theory

Social constructivism, according to Yeravdekar and Raman (2022), is the learning theory developed by Russian psychologist Lev Vygotsky in which individuals actively construct their knowledge and reality by combining previous information and new experiences (Vygotsky, 1978; Yeravdekar & Raman, 2022). Drawing from Vygotsky's ideas, Bruner emphasized the crucial role of culture and language in shaping human cognition (Bruner, 1960). Similarly, Dewey highlighted the importance of experiential learning and the effect of social interactions on knowledge construction (Dewey, 1938). Based on Piaget's theory of cognitive development, the social constructivist framework integrated Piaget's perspectives on the contribution of social interactions to cognitive development (Piaget, 1952; Yeravdekar & Raman, 2022). Therefore, constructivism is the premise that all learners possess background-based previous knowledge (Kimmons & Caskurlu, 2020; Yeravdekar & Raman, 2022). Individuals receive new information via the prism of their experiences; hence, individuals develop new knowledge based on their prior experiences. Authentic learning, different viewpoints, and collaborative learning are elements of constructivism used in conventional and technological training. Social constructivism theory pertains to social and emotional learning because personal experiences serve as the lens through which individuals experience new information; hence, students construct new knowledge based on their prior experiences (Chuang, 2021). This theory shaped the study, directing it with a social constructivist lens that values the blend of existing knowledge and new experiences in participants and learners.

Community of Inquiry and Social Presence in Online Learning

The Community of Inquiry (COI) framework, which encompasses social presence, is a widely acknowledged theory derived from the social constructivism learning theory (Chuang, 2021; Short et al., 1976). To better understand the dynamics of online learning environments, researchers Garrison, Anderson, and Archer developed the COI framework, which integrated social presence with cognitive presence and teaching presence (Garrison et al., 2000). Short, Williams, and Christie established the social presence theory, which stated that the degree of social presence in a communication medium influences the nature and quality of the interaction, with greater social presence resulting in more effective communication (Short et al., 1976). Gunawardena (1995) extended social presence theory in the context of online learning, emphasizing the importance of social presence in successful online learning environments. The COI framework is acknowledged in this study, emphasizing the educator's role in devising and guiding the learning experience (Garrison et al., 2000; Gunawardena, 1995; Short et al., 1976).

The COI framework is intended to bridge the gap between traditional and online learning by cultivating successful online communities that meet the needs of learners (Chuang, 2021; Short et al., 1976). The COI framework is made up of three interconnected dimensions: pedagogical presence, social presence, and cognitive presence. A community of inquiry is defined as a group of people who engage in intentional, meaningful learning and reflection to validate shared knowledge and generate meaning (Garrison et al., 2000; Kimmons & Caskurlu, 2020).

Social Presence and Immediacy

Social presence occurs when students participate in and establish social bonds that facilitate open communication and trust in the classroom (Elverici, 2021; Lowenthal, 2010; Short et al., 1976; Yavuzalp & Bahcivan, 2021). These students develop bonds that establish a sense of

belonging to the group and promote deeper learning. The significance of social presence in the online learning environment is impossible to overstate. Gunawardena (1995) defined social presence as the degree to which a person is seen as genuine during a conversation. Regardless of distance, it is defined by the potential for physical and emotional engagement. Facial expressions and body language are often used as nonverbal modes of communication in conventional situations. In online settings, it is more challenging to establish a social presence. Effective online communication comprises synchronous and asynchronous text, video, and voice interactions. Gunawardena (1995) defined immediacy as related to the psychological distance one maintains from others. Even in the absence of physical touch, immediacy enhances social presence and develops a feeling of connection and intimacy via a sense of connectedness and proximity. Through immediacy and social presence, course designers and facilitators may compensate for the lack of non-verbal online communication, leveling the playing field between traditional and online learning.

Social Presence and Learning Relationships

According to Lowes (2020), Luft and Ingram developed the Johari Window in 1955 to increase self-awareness and help people realize how to construct connections via discourse. As a kind of communication, individuals are continually exchanging information. In an online context, tone and writing style are of utmost importance. Learners examine the instructor's cues to decide if they can be trusted and respected. Contrary to the instructor's goals, a formal, institutional, or distant tone might establish non-immediacy. It is more probable that students will feel at ease in the classroom if a relaxed environment is established and a feeling of community is fostered. Consequently, the amount of effort involved in online communication reflects the immediacy or lack thereof.

The online social presence of an instructor has a major influence on the overall learning process, according to Kashian (2022). The study indicated that assuming a courteous approach and providing information freely are effective communication strategies for developing connections and promoting immediacy. Social presence pertains to the notion of social and emotional learning because it determines how the student perceives and trusts the teacher and the learning environment that is being created for the student's growth and development, regardless of whether the setting is traditional or online (Lowenthal, 2010; Stewart et al., 2021). This theory helped organize the study by directing the research through a social presence lens, in which social and emotional learning and relationship building are valued.

Research Literature Review

Although social and emotional learning as a field of impact goes back to the mid-1980s, its progression from idea to policy to standardization to legislation experienced a big boost in the twenty-first century, when states started establishing social and emotional learning laws enforcing compliance in schools (Clark et al., 2022). Evidence-based programs, practices, and policies through which children and adults gain and apply the information, skills, and attitudes required to understand and control emotions, develop and sustain meaningful relationships, and make responsible choices are encompassed within social and emotional learning (Corcoran et al., 2018; Ross et al., 2019; Weissberg, 2019). An integral component of education and child development occurs when individuals can hone their ability to autonomously control their emotions, acquire healthy social skills, and make responsible and aware choices. The development of social and emotional skills in children is just as important as intellectual development, and politicians, policymakers, and other stakeholders have committed time and money to make social and emotional learning a focus of contemporary education, especially in

the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic (Clark et al., 2022).

COVID's Impact on Students' Well-being

In March 2020, millions of individuals throughout the United States were instructed to remain at home to prevent the spread of COVID-19 (CDC, 2021). Although these measures were essential for controlling the pandemic, research suggests that restrictions on social events and less in-person interaction contributed to an increase in sentiments of isolation (Holmes et al., 2020). Children were exposed to psychological and physical hardships, such as isolation, food shortages, illness, or the death of a loved one when schools were closed due to the pandemic (Bruhn et al., 2022). Aishworiya and Kang (2020) noted that the social, emotional, and behavioral needs of K–12 students received minimal attention throughout the pandemic. Researchers agreed that students with emotional or behavioral difficulties and mental health concerns such as anxiety or depression were at the highest risk for academic setbacks, school dropout, and interaction with the law (Canet-Juric et al., 2020; Lipscomb et al., 2017; Racine et al., 2021). Therefore, when schools do not encourage adequate social and emotional development, children often report feeling uncomfortable, insecure, disconnected, and uncared for, while academic performance and behavioral issues worsen (Sauve & Schonert-Reichl, 2019). This study's findings resulted in the need for explicit traditional and online social and emotional skill instruction based on social presence learning theory.

Increase in Loneliness, Lack of Coping Skills

Loneliness happens when a person feels like they do not have enough social connections. The link to a higher risk of depression and death from things like heart disease and suicide is connected to loneliness (Law et al., 2022; McClelland et al., 2020). In a multiple regression analysis of 125 adults living under lockdown during the COVID-19 pandemic, Law et al. (2022)

found that loneliness affects health outcomes and is a major stressor damaging general health and well-being. Both Li and Wang (2020) and Killgore et al. (2020) found an increase in self-reported loneliness after the widespread shutdown and stated that those who felt alienated from others or dissatisfied with their relationships may have lacked the social support to act as a stress barrier. As a means of coping with loneliness, individuals might engage in unhealthy habits such as stress eating and reduced physical activity (Law et al., 2022). Loneliness may lead to inadequate stress management and become a factor in decreased academic and behavioral outcomes for learners. In a negative spiral of loneliness, maladaptive coping practices and emotional pain may lead to self-defeating thoughts and self-isolation. Despite the re-opening of several schools after the pandemic, subsequent studies by the same researchers found spikes in overall loneliness ratings; individuals sheltering in place also reported higher levels of loneliness than those who were not. It is vital to discover strategies to prevent the negative effects of loneliness and remain socially connected (Law et al., 2022). Luchetti et al. (2020) observed no change in loneliness levels during the month before and after the compulsory stay-at-home order among individuals who reported maintaining close social connections despite limits on in-person interactions. Individuals may combat loneliness with emotional support and preserving connections, whether it be in person or online (Li & Wang, 2020). Conceivably, protective factors against loneliness during the pandemic may have included an online educator's infusion of social presence learning theory, which would have built connections between the educator and learners, no matter the distance.

COVID's Impact on Academic Outcomes

Academic achievement is an established criterion for evaluating the effectiveness of the education and educational activities provided by a school, so promoting students' academic

achievement in school can increase the likelihood that they will attain their educational and developmental goals in life (Allbright et al., 2019; Atik & Ozer, 2020). In a study focused on academic challenges experienced by undergraduate students during the COVID-19 pandemic, Giusti et al. (2021) indicated that perceptions of deficiencies in attention and focus, as well as high COVID anxiety during online learning, increased the risk of students' perceiving low academic achievement. According to Giusti et al. (2021), over 200 Italian college students participated in an anonymous online cross-sectional survey in late 2020 to gather perceptions on learner experiences with distance learning. Multiple regression analyses were conducted, resulting in 50% of the sample reporting significant impairment in concentration and learning abilities during online learning, which researchers stated was a predictor of poor academic performance. Researchers concurred that pandemic-related psychological stresses may have decreased students' academic performance by increasing metacognitive and motivational obstacles during online learning (Hadwin et al., 2022; Hirsch et al., 2022; Luchetti et al., 2020). Lee et al. (2021) investigated protective behaviors for emotional well-being and student views about online learning and academic motivation. Poor attitudes were associated with decreased academic achievement. Therefore, theoretically, the infusion of skill instruction on positive thinking may increase academic achievement in students.

Individuals who need academic or social assistance in a traditional school context are at the greatest risk for distance learning. A synthesis of research concludes that the combination of COVID-19 closures and remote learning exacerbated learning loss, which disproportionately affected Black children, indigenous children, children of color, and all students living in poverty due to circumstances such as a lack of parental support, technology, and the capacity to work independently (Boulay & McChesney, 2021; Mondy & Reynolds, 2020; Roff, 2021). According

to a study that examined 200 million student test results by Boulay and McChesney (2021), before COVID-19, schools were already concerned that students' academic abilities might decline during instances in the typical academic year when there is no school, such as summer and winter vacations. Their study found that, depending on grade, the typical student loses between 17 and 28 percent of school-year gains in English language arts over the summer, and in arithmetic, the typical student loses between 25 and 34 percent of their school-year gains. Additionally, for the fifth year in a row, the researchers found that more than half of American elementary school students suffered summer learning loss, which is more apparent among learners in grades K–3 as their time away from regular practice makes them more prone to forgetting (Boulay, & McChesney, 2021). These statistics are especially concerning since the primary grades provide the groundwork for future academic indicators, work habits, and attitudes of self-confidence and education. Furthermore, a recurring finding in summer learning loss research indicated that students from low-income homes tended to lose substantial reading skills and comprehension during the summer. There is universal agreement that the pandemic resulted in severe learning loss, which has been exacerbated by systemic disadvantages that have pushed children of color and those living in poverty farther behind their peers from white and wealthy homes (Boulay & McChesney, 2021; Garcia & Weiss, 2020; Roff, 2021).

During the pandemic, Leech et al. (2022) declared that online learning instructors of all grade levels encountered obstacles, including student engagement, curriculum adaptation to the digital format, and the loss of the human connection of teaching. Of particular note, elementary teachers reported struggling more with varying parental attitudes toward remote learning and adjusting their curriculum to an online format, while secondary teachers reported student engagement and a general sense of being lost or unsupported in their teaching as challenges

(Leech et al., 2022). The pandemic provided educators with various new and unique challenges compared to the traditional classroom setting. Teachers' expectations to convert their courses to a wholly remote style may have alleviated some difficulties, such as classroom misconduct, while exacerbating others, such as social isolation (Atik & Özer, 2020). These issues gave significant background for the remote teaching experience and what support instructors needed to continue remote teaching.

Impact on Mental Health and Behavioral Outcomes

In addition to purely academic obstacles, the pandemic presented major social and emotional barriers that adversely affected students' academic performance. Adolescence is a crucial time for brain growth and behavioral and emotional development. Numerous students had minimal experience with online education and were living and studying under new pandemic-related pressures (Daniel, 2020). Researchers agreed that the rapid transition to online learning presented significant issues (Aishworiya & Kang, 2020; Bruhn et al., 2022; Correia, 2020; Daniel, 2020; Giusti et al., 2021). Research on the well-being of children during quarantine discovered that children were unduly agitated and apprehensive, as shown by sleeping difficulties, failure to adapt to eLearning, lack of socializing, difficulty concentrating, loss of energy, and frequently unhealthy eating (Giusti et al., 2021; Segre et al., 2021). Additionally, academic obstacles connected with the shift to distance learning may have been exacerbated by pandemic-specific stresses such as economic hardship, social isolation, and health insecurity. Children who were exposed to psychological despair during isolation and physical hardships like hunger may have developed emotional behavior problems, resulting in disruptive behaviors and mental health issues (Hirsch et al., 2022). Similarly, Hadwin et al. (2022) demonstrated that since the pandemic, students have reported an increase in depression and anxiety symptoms, as well as

a decline in psychological well-being, such as elevated levels of psychological distress and panic disorders. Giusti et al. (2021) revealed that 40% of adolescents were susceptible to psychological issues, and 14% had post-traumatic symptoms during the pandemic. The researchers went on to find that home isolation hindered the opportunity for students to fully experience campus life, affecting academic outcomes and reducing the capacity to obtain support, which has proven to play a vital role in navigating the challenges of the learning environment (Giusti et al., 2021).

This lack of social and emotional support, along with physical isolation and the feeling of uncertainty, was linked to poor mental health and resulting negative behaviors. According to Paolini (2021a), students with underdeveloped social skills were associated with poor school adjustment, disruptive conduct in school, and anxiety. These adolescents with deficient social skills were found to encounter a higher frequency of unpleasant social interactions, such as bullying, depression, or disciplinary consequences, which led to more peer rejection and isolation from the school community (Magelinskait-Legkauskien et al., 2018). Sande et al. (2019) contended that some psychological health issues, such as depression, aggression, and drug abuse, worsen or develop throughout adolescence; therefore, these individuals must acquire cognitive, social, and emotional competencies to manage the developmental demands and obstacles associated with this life stage. Students with these underdeveloped skills, in tandem with the implications of social isolation and the sudden need for self-directed learning, experienced behavioral and academic disadvantages during the pandemic. This study is intended to demonstrate the need for explicit social and emotional skill instruction to enhance the protective factors embedded in social presence learning theory, which aids learners through feelings of social disconnectedness and leads to positive student outcomes.

Social Emotional Learning and CASEL

The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) was founded in 1994 to promote evidence-based, high-quality social and emotional learning as an integral aspect of education from preschool through high school (CASEL, 2022). This was the leading organization in researching how the brain develops to explain why young people's social, emotional, and intellectual development relates to fundamental physiological requirements such as nourishment and rest (Weissberg, 2019). CASEL comprises social and emotional learning programs as well as policy training, research, and advocacy, and its mission is to improve the science of social and emotional learning and offer evidence-based programming for prekindergarten through twelfth-grade students (Weissberg, 2019).

CASEL

According to studies by Corcoran et al. (2018), Muñiz (2020), and Ross et al. (2019), social-emotional learning skills result from the interaction of several factors and have a substantial influence on the lives of individuals which may be summed up as an awareness of one's feelings and those of others. Five competencies encompass social and emotional learning: self-awareness, self-management, responsible decision-making, interpersonal skills, and social awareness. These skills grow along a continuum that begins with self-to-world in the early developmental stages of life with a focus on self-awareness and self-management, followed by the application of self-regulation as the child's emotional development expands (Omasta et al., 2021; Papadopoulos, 2020; Weissberg, 2019). CASEL competencies can be leveraged to apply the information, skills, and attitudes necessary to create healthy identities, regulate emotions, accomplish personal and communal objectives, feel and demonstrate empathy for others, build and sustain supportive relationships, and make responsible and caring choices. Blyth et al. (2019), Mahoney et al. (2019), and Weissberg (2019) concurred that the five competencies are

embedded with diverse approaches for supporting children, including the most recent research from neuroscience, trauma-informed practices, equity initiatives, character education, mindsets approaches, and multicultural competence.

CASEL Core Competencies

According to CASEL, self-awareness involves grasping one's emotions, beliefs, and values and how they impact behavior across situations, as well as acknowledging one's talents and limits while maintaining a grounded level of confidence and motivation. Scientific evidence for the relevance of the five competencies during adolescence has been found in the association between psychosocial health and that a higher level of self-awareness is positively related to psychosocial health (Dusenbury & Weissberg, 2018; Sande et al., 2019). Additionally, self-management competency involves the ability to employ patience, manage stress, maintain motivation, and empower oneself to achieve personal ambitions and group objectives in various circumstances (Weissberg, 2019). CASEL (2022) posited that enhancing juvenile self-management promotes academic success and good conduct and protects against psychological health issues and violence. Similarly, the social awareness competency facilitates the formation of healthy connections and constructive interactions with others as it centers on the ability to feel empathy, sympathize with the viewpoints of others, comprehend wider historical and social standards for conduct in varied contexts, particularly those from varied origins, cultures, and situations; and identify family, school, and community resources and supports (Muñiz, 2020; Sande et al., 2019). Furthermore, relationship skills competency includes forming bonds based on healthy and sustained interactions and navigating situations with varied persons and groups successfully (Dusenbury & Weissberg, 2018). Muiz (2020) observed that these skills are characterized by the abilities to communicate, listen actively, cooperate, work collaboratively to

solve problems and negotiate conflict constructively, navigate settings with varying social and cultural demands and opportunities, provide leadership, and seek or offer assistance when needed which may shield teenagers against aggression, psychological stress, and drug abuse. Equally importantly, the competency of responsible decision-making is the ability to make considerate and productive choices about personal conduct and social relationships in various contexts (Corcoran et al., 2018). Sande et al. (2019) suggested that competent decision-making may safeguard teenagers from drug abuse and sexual risk behaviors because it hinges on the ability to analyze the advantages and repercussions of different acts for personal, societal, and communal well-being. With this knowledge, educators can craft effective learning experiences using the principles of social constructivism, allowing individuals to feel valued by actively constructing their knowledge and reality by combining previous information and new experiences.

SEL Intervention Programs

Experts assert that evidence-based initiatives promoting social and emotional learning may lead to positive developmental outcomes for learners (Corcoran et al., 2018; Meyers et al., 2019; Weissberg, 2019). Social and emotional skills can be explicitly taught, modeled, and practiced so that children, adolescents, and adults can successfully manage everyday tasks, interactions, and situations (Blyth et al., 2019). Researchers have identified evidence-based social and emotional curriculum programs that effectively foster social and emotional learning in students (Mondi & Reynolds, 2020; Zinsser et al., 2019).

In a study of over 2,500 Chicago public school prekindergarten students of racially and ethnically diverse and low-income backgrounds, Mondt and Reynolds (2020) investigated the connections between the supports and resources that assisted children's social and emotional learning. Their findings suggest that early social and emotional learning intervention programs

can potentially increase skills that promote academic and behavioral protective factors among at-risk populations, which may contribute to decreasing socioeconomic disparities in well-being and academic achievement. Similarly, Zinsser et al. (2019) conducted a qualitative matrix comparison of surveys and interviews of Chicago prekindergarten teachers in low-income and racially and ethnically diverse public schools regarding their classroom emotions leading to disciplinary decisions after implementing a social and emotional learning curriculum. Their findings suggested that teachers who implement social and emotional teaching competencies experience less stress in the classroom due to decreased behavioral issues with students, making the educators less likely to experience student behavior concerns and decreasing student expulsions. In comparing the findings in these studies, it is evident that explicit social and emotional learning skill instruction is an effective intervention that led to significant improvements in children's relationships with their classmates, academic behavior, social skills, emotional knowledge, school learning skills, and school behavioral and social adjustment. The findings also supported social and emotional learning instruction in the primary grades as an early intervention to reduce expulsions and educator stress (Mondi & Reynolds, 2020; Zinsser et al., 2019).

Sande et al. (2019) conducted a literature review of 32 social and emotional learning programs within 40 studies and performed a comprehensive meta-analysis to identify which competencies are found most frequently in programs designed for secondary students and which had the greatest impact on their psychosocial health. Findings suggested that most programs target relationship skills, self-awareness, self-management, and relationship skills and demonstrated that social emotional learning programs have moderate to substantial beneficial impacts on social, emotional, and psychosocial health outcomes (Sande et al., 2019). The

literature gap remains in identifying the programs that consistently produce the best results by delivering explicit instruction of the five competencies. Another need for further research is identifying the social and emotional programs that provide the best results at delivering effective instruction of the competencies in the distance learning setting.

Influence of SEL on Students' Well-being

It may be argued that the fundamental objective of the contemporary education system and pedagogical practices is to encourage not only academic performance but also the well-being and happiness of students (Kasikci & Ozhan, 2021). Researchers found that implementing social and emotional learning in kindergarten classes predicted teenage academic achievement, and employing these programs at a young age can result in increased academic progress (McCormick et al., 2019; Zinsser et al., 2019). To elaborate further, student achievement is directly related to social emotional learning abilities as it allows students to achieve academically, including grade point averages, career preparedness, rigor, and involvement in school as well as emotionally including sentiments of connectedness and inclusion (Paolini, 2021b).

Correia (2020) and Magelinskait-Legkauskien et al. (2018) reported that students struggled to feel connected to their teachers during online instruction during the pandemic. According to Magelinskait-Legkauskien et al. (2018), providing learners with self-regulatory techniques and skills to adapt to a new school and personal stresses may improve academic results. Correia (2020) supported this conclusion and further stated that students value educators with a calm demeanor, a positive mindset, empathy, adaptability, and a strong sense of humanity through recognizing their concerns about their well-being. The skills described by these researchers are directly related to the benefits of immediacy embedded within social presence learning theory. By investing proactively in social and emotional learning, educators have the

potential to enhance online learning outcomes and position institutions and students to respond to future life pressures and global events more proactively (Hadwin et al., 2022). Research demonstrated the need to observe the impact of distance learning to meet students' psychological needs by incorporating therapeutic interventions based on customizable variables that appear to compromise students' psychological health and academic outcomes (Giusti et al., 2021; Hadwin et al., 2022).

Impact of SEL on Academics and Behavior

Corcoran et al. (2020) found that positive, productive, and less stressful school climates are associated with successful student performance in academic and social learning, while Kuhfeld et al. (2020) and Muiz (2020) further stated that improvements in academic achievement, good relationships, and personal growth development have been seen as a consequence of social and emotional learning instruction. Social and emotional learning lessons that include the five core competencies increased students' academic performance by eleven percentage points (Corcoran et al., 2018). Caldarella et al. (2019) posited that social-emotional learning offers children a secure learning environment and prepares educators with the tools to improve students' academic performance, while Sande et al. (2019) highlight the most important benefit as the reduction in adolescents' psychosocial issues. Corcoran et al. (2018) and Meyers et al. (2019) believed that evidence-based programs promoting social and emotional learning may result in beneficial developmental outcomes for children and adolescents and have shown a link between student emotional involvement and a decrease in behavioral concerns after the use of social and emotional learning interventions. According to Zolkoski et al. (2020), social and emotional learning curriculum deployment in schools boosted students' academic and psychological well-being, with students who had strong self-regulation and time and task

management to study well in an online environment. Blyth et al. (2019) and Mahoney et al. (2019) agreed that well-implemented school-based social and emotional development programs provide various short and long-term favorable outcomes, and consistently favorable outcomes include better social and emotional skills and attitudes, more positive and decreased negative behaviors, higher emotional well-being, and increased academic accomplishment.

According to a meta-analysis by Kamei and Harriott (2021), teenagers who exhibit problematic behaviors and struggle academically benefit from explicit social and emotional learning instruction to build preventative measures, such as enhanced school support and caring relationships. Similarly, Katz et al. (2020) and Blyth et al. (2019) found that adolescents who engaged in a school-based social and emotional learning intervention program with specialized skill instruction had greater self-esteem, emotional awareness, emotional expressiveness, and positive behavior. Papadopoulos (2020) concurred and stated that children with excellent social skills and emotional literacy are better able to retain friendships and build a trustworthy social environment, which encourages resilience in the face of adversity and promotes learning. Consequently, this study demonstrated the need for explicit social and emotional skill instruction and the principles of social constructivism to enhance the protective factors embedded in social presence learning theory, which leads to positive student outcomes.

SEL and the School Environment

Schools are a natural environment for teaching and learning and the development of social and emotional skills, promoting students' psychosocial health. A safe and supportive school environment is necessary for fostering student growth and development (Sande et al., 2019). The need to establish safe and supportive learning environments is also described in the Aspen Institute's recent National Commission on Social, Emotional, and Academic

Development report (2019) as an obligation for educational stakeholders to utilize their influence in innovative and effective ways to assist students. Helping children to learn the broad array of skills, attitudes, and values to succeed in school, careers, and in life is central to the educational enterprise and the goal of education to foster in children the knowledge, skills, and character that enable children to make better lives in a better country. The report encouraged the implementation of social and emotional learning and wraparound support by all stakeholders through involvement, high expectations, and mentorship programs. The Aspen Institute's report (2019) suggested that investing in social and emotional programming has wide-ranging social advantages that may endure throughout a child's school career if favorable adult impact begins and continues early.

Taylor et al. (2017) conducted an international meta-analysis on the short and long-term effects of 82 social and emotional learning interventions involving almost 100,000 participants in grades K–12. The finding suggested that individuals who engaged in the programs had considerably greater favorable outcomes, including an 11-percentage-point increase in achievement; additionally, well-implemented programs were more likely to create successful results (Taylor et al., 2017). Very important to note in this study was that the benefits were similar regardless of students' gender, socioeconomic background, race, or school location. According to Taylor et al. (2017), social and emotional learning curriculum improves students' social-emotional abilities by building caring, cooperative, culturally sensitive, well-managed, participative, and safe classroom and school cultures, climates, and circumstances for learning. The suggestion is that social-emotional competencies can be taught, that schools are suitable settings for teaching them, and that social and emotional learning may positively impact the lives of young people. Weissberg et al. (2015) concurred and further specified that programming for

school-wide, systemic social and emotional development should occur at the classroom and school levels in collaboration with families and the community.

SEL and School Improvement Goals

Extensive studies have shown that CASEL competencies, when taught in the classroom, promote positive development while simultaneously lowering problem behaviors and enhancing students' academic accomplishment (Blyth et al., 2019; CASEL, 2022; McCormick et al., 2019; Weissberg, 2019). Social and emotional learning instruction combined with academic curricular practices improved short-term results, including enhanced self-image, enhanced view of others, enhanced learning, and enhanced view of the school (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020). As a result of the Collaborating Districts Initiative (CASEL, 2022), an increasing number of districts were integrating social and emotional learning into all aspects of their operations. These districts explicitly taught social and emotional learning competencies and integrated social and emotional learning with math, language arts, history, and other academics. In these districts, the strategic plans, budgets, school climate activities, and equity measures were driven by social and emotional learning (Anthony et al., 2020). Based on this research, school districts dedicated funding allocations to social and emotional learning to suit school improvement goals. Additionally, as part of the Collaborating States Initiative (CASEL, 2022), CASEL's materials have been used in all 50 states and at least 186 countries. The collaborating states produced social and emotional learning standards, guidelines, evaluation methodologies, and other tools to assist school districts in implementing social and emotional learning effectively (Dusenbury & Weissberg, 2018; Melnick et al., 2018). With such large funding investments, it will be imperative to address the gap in research of educator perceptions on the influence on student outcomes of online social and emotional learning to meet the needs of students best now and in

the future.

Teacher Training and Perceptions

Researchers Nickerson et al. (2019) and Schonert-Reichl (2017) implored educators to invest in training in social and emotional learning skills to fully grasp how best to engage children in behavioral and emotional learning domains. Meyers et al. (2019) claimed that these professional development initiatives must be executed and maintained with integrity to achieve beneficial effects. Schonert-Reichl (2017) studied social and emotional learning programs and their impact on learners and concluded that American teacher preparation programs must improve to better meet the needs of teacher candidates to improve their own and their students' social-emotional aptitudes. Both Nickerson et al. (2019) and Schonert-Reichl (2017) agreed that significant teacher preparation must be embraced before social and emotional learning can be properly and consistently applied in classrooms. Classrooms with warm teacher-child connections that promoted deep learning and social and emotional development had improved academic outcomes; however, Schonert-Reichl (2017) cautioned that when educators fail to manage the social and emotional demands of teaching, pupils' academic progress and behavior may worsen.

Paolini (2021b) and Caldarella et al. (2019) asserted that social and emotional learning skills cannot be extended to the whole student population in a classroom with a one-size-fits-all approach. Regardless of the learning style and variety of educational institutions, a range of variables such as demographic features, learning environment, occupation, and income may impact students' academic success (El Refae et al., 2021). Recognizing that each individual has unique characteristics and learning capacities compels educators to prioritize the particular learning styles of each child.

According to researchers, social and emotional learning abilities are a complex interplay of cognitive functions that enhance students' capacity to understand and regulate their emotions and interactions (Loeb et al., 2019; Weissberg et al., 2015). Nickerson et al. (2019) and Schonert-Reichl (2017) further asserted that while instructors' feelings on social and emotional learning and its effectiveness were substantially connected to teacher-student interactions, they were not tied to students' emotional and behavioral challenges. Students in the study were more likely to identify their interactions with educators regarding academics or school-related topic learning. In contrast, instructors saw student relationships as a result of behavioral and emotional development, with academic learning as a later byproduct. Thus, there is a gap between students and instructors' conceptions of the role of student-teacher interactions (Nickerson et al., 2019; Schonert-Reichl, 2017).

When focusing on the educator's thoughts on implementing such instruction, researchers found that these changes were as advantageous for the instructor as they were for the learner (Neth et al., 2020). Shriver and Weissberg (2020) found that 90% of teachers and parents felt that social and emotional development is crucial for education, and at least two-thirds of current and previous high school students agreed. In addition to providing students with skills for success in every aspect of their lives, social and emotional learning is also useful for educators because it improves their working conditions in the school setting (Loeb et al., 2019; Weissberg et al., 2015). Zinsser et al. (2019) found a beneficial side-effect of social and emotional learning skill instruction is that the intervention also reduced stress and boosted teachers' employment experiences for those experiencing students demonstrating chronically bad behaviors. While an increasing body of research demonstrates that social and emotional learning increases student academic achievement and good behaviors while decreasing negative outcomes such as school

suspensions and drug abuse (Taylor et al., 2017), the gap in research lies in the lack of educator perceptions on the influence on student outcomes of online social and emotional learning.

In a dynamic and highly competitive environment, in addition to a solid academic foundation, students must also exhibit well-developed intrapersonal and interpersonal social emotional soft skills to be successful in school and after graduation (Paolini, 2021b). The research is clear that teacher-centered instructional approaches and feedback have failed to assist students to become more engaged (Caldarella et al., 2019). With this knowledge, educators can craft effective learning experiences using the principles of social constructivism, allowing individuals to feel valued by actively constructing their knowledge and reality by combining previous information and new experiences. This study demonstrated the need for explicit social and emotional skill instruction to enhance the protective factors embedded in social presence learning theory, which aids learners through feelings of social disconnectedness and leads to positive student outcomes.

Educational Technology and SEL

El Refae et al. (2021) found that creative teaching approaches employed via distance learning helped preserve student interest and made learning more productive and engaging, resulting in improved academic achievement. Online learning can afford students numerous advantages over traditional learning, including unrestricted access to learning materials such as recorded lectures, networking with persons from different geographies and cultures, convenient scheduling, duration, and transportation (El Refae et al., 2021). In the online learning environment, studies have identified gender, demographics, motivation, goal orientation, self-efficacy, organizational skills, home learning environment, willingness to seek assistance, technology comfort level, instructional strategies, and cognitive ability as predictors of academic

performance (El Refae et al., 2021).

Pedagogy and Educational Technology Frameworks

According to Herodotou et al. (2018), pedagogy is the art and science of teaching and the study of different teaching methods. Prakash and Litoriya (2022) explained Bloom's Taxonomy, which was developed in 1956, as involving three hierarchical models, including cognitive (knowledge-based), affective (emotion-based), and psychomotor (action-based), to classify educational learning objectives into levels of complexity (Prakash & Litoriya, 2022). These basics provide insight into educational technology advancements and their place in the instructional landscape. The Substitution, Augmentation, Modification, and Redefinition (SAMR) model is a four-level, taxonomy-based approach created by Puentedura to select, use, and evaluate technology in K–12 settings (Blundell et al., 2022). Blundell et al. (2022) suggested that researchers effectively use the SAMR model to describe and categorize the integration of digital technologies in educational practices. Furthermore, the Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge (TPACK) framework is a concept that aids educators in evaluating how they may successfully educate and engage students using technology (Goradia, 2018). TPACK highlights the connection between technology, content, and pedagogy to enhance student comprehension and identifies three categories of knowledge indicators essential for effective educational technology integration: Content Knowledge, Pedagogical Knowledge, and Technological Knowledge (Goradia, 2018). Content Knowledge is the teachers' knowledge about the subject matter to be taught. Pedagogical Knowledge is a teacher's in-depth understanding of the teaching and learning processes and practices. This is the teacher's knowledge of learning, classroom management skills, lesson preparation, and student evaluation (Punya, 2019). Technological Knowledge is the educator's comprehension of technology, tools, and resources.

The intersections within the framework are crucial because they represent deeper levels of comprehension and occur when the teacher interprets the subject matter, finds multiple ways to represent it, and adapts and customizes instructional materials to alternative conceptions and students' prior knowledge (Goradia, 2018; Punya, 2019).

Self-Regulated and Student-Centered Learning

Self-regulated learning is a goal-directed process in which pupils take active and strategic control of their learning, distinguished by the ability to adapt to and react constructively to problems that emerge during learning and are linked to academic success (Hadwin et al., 2022). These abilities and competencies may be taught and developed and are the center of effective distance learning building blocks for learners who are capable of self-directed learning. Hadwin et al. (2022) investigated the role of self-regulated learning competencies in reducing the impact of COVID-19-related psychological distress on academic outcomes and discovered that self-regulatory learning practices that promote adaptation to new learning contexts, tasks, and situations, combined with explicit instruction, can help reduce the impact of COVID stressors on academic performance.

Similarly, student-centered learning may enhance student results in the instructional technology industry by empowering the learner, promoting the teacher as a facilitator, increasing engagement and deepening learning, offering individualized learning, and preparing students for college and life (Marín, 2022). Technology allows students to be cognitively challenged, encounter varied learning resources, and experience real-world problem-solving (Goradia, 2018). This allows learners to analyze critically and synthesize knowledge individually and in groups.

Davenport-Kellogg and Stevenson (2022) posited that the relationship between hyper-personal online communication via social media sharing platforms and social and emotional

development is understudied. When students develop CASEL abilities such as self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship-building, and decision-making, hyper-personal communication allows them to think and act responsibly in peer-supporting partnerships. Self-editing is the primary distinction between hyper-personal internet communication and conventional face-to-face contact, and hyper-personal communication enables generally shy or introverted individuals to interact with others; therefore, those who use social networking sites to interact might consider how they want to be seen by others and portray themselves accordingly (Davenport-Kellogg & Stevenson, 2022). These social and emotional learning skills are the same skills needed to leverage effective self-regulated and student-centered learning.

In a study focusing on academic challenges experienced by undergraduate students during the COVID-19 pandemic, Giusti et al. (2021) found mixed results in terms of attention and learning capacity when comparing online learning to conventional learning. Most students cited the loss of face-to-face interaction and the difficulties in communicating with lecturers during online courses as the most significant disadvantages of distance learning. For students who flourished online, contentment with distance education seemed to buffer against judgments of low academic achievement (Giusti et al., 2021). Programs that educate learners in social and emotional skills resulted in considerable improvements in student conduct, sentiments about school, and, most crucially, success (Aspen Institute, 2019). Therefore, incorporating technology increases student accomplishment across all subject areas, helps students learn more rapidly and retain material for longer, and improves student attitudes toward learning compared to conventional teaching techniques alone (Punya, 2019). The student-centered approach addresses the need to enhance both social and emotional development and culturally relevant instruction. Student-centered learning is when the instructor prioritizes the student's needs in the learning

environment by offering student choice and student voice (Dong et al., 2019). Consequently, students may be empowered to become active learners and accountable for making decisions and monitoring their learning as active participants.

Learning Management Systems and Personalized Learning

According to Bradley (2021), learning management systems can support inclusive learning environments and reinforce the learning process in the online setting for academic progress with structures that promote online collaborative groupings, professional training, discussions, and user communication. Learning management systems allow instructors to facilitate and model discussions, plan online activities, set learning expectations, provide learners with options, and assist in problem-solving processes for decision-making (Bradley, 2021; Kamei & Harriott, 2021). Therefore, an instructor's social presence and immediacy within the learning management system can create an engaging learning environment and improve student well-being.

Walkington and Bernacki (2020) asserted that personalized learning is an instructional approach optimized for each learner's needs, where objectives, approaches, and content sequencing vary based on the learner's style and are driven by the learner's interests. According to Shemshack and Spector (2020), personalized learning can increase learners' motivation and engagement in learning activities, resulting in improved learning results. Personalized learning promotes student autonomy by affording the exploration of student interest based on self-motivation and student or choice, allowing for differentiation and individualization in pacing and preferences as an efficient approach to increase motivation, engagement, and understanding (Shemshack & Spector, 2020; Walkington & Bernacki, 2020).

Conversely, Brady and O'Reilly (2020) found that some academics used learning

management systems as repositories of materials with some additional use for managing assessment and made little use of communication, administration, or monitoring features. Consequently, these researchers found lower levels of student engagement when academics used learning management systems in ways and for purposes that suited them. Thus, when personalized learning and learning management systems are leveraged, they can create a positive impact for learners, and when they are not, online learners suffer.

SEL in the Online Environment

COVID-19 is one of the deadliest pandemics in modern history, posing significant challenges to student learning in school districts throughout the United States (Garcia & Weiss, 2020; Kuhfeld et al., 2020). Economic, professional, and mental health concerns were heightened with the emergence of COVID-19 and the move to distance learning. The remote learning topic created issues for professors and students since they dealt with a technical learning curve, barriers, and health and well-being challenges (Naamati Schneider et al., 2020). Social and emotional learning must continue to develop and adapt as learning contexts change (Portnow et al., 2018; Ross et al., 2019), including the online learning setting. As evidenced by the pandemic, using social and emotional learning to continue academic performance demands teacher education. Yeravdekar and Raman (2022) stated that they do so when teachers are allowed to develop their skills and knowledge via peer group contact. As new internet technologies continue to improve education by adopting a social constructivist approach to learning, instructors may be exposed to and learn new technologies engagingly and efficiently (Lowenthal, 2010).

According to experts, social and emotional development should be a priority during this COVID-19 crisis so that students do not fall behind in their education (Daniel, 2020; Garcia &

Weiss, 2020; Kuhfeld et al., 2020). The notion that social and emotional development is overlooked or excluded from online education might exacerbate future scholastic disparities when students return to the classroom (Garcia & Weiss, 2020; Gonzalez et al., 2020). Social presence is vital to both traditional and distance learning as it connects students with instructors and fosters a secure atmosphere (Lowenthal, 2010). Creating emotionally secure learning environments may be accomplished by integrating social and emotional learning into the curriculum (Daniel, 2020; Wang et al., 2020). Schools focus more on developing online classrooms, integrating research-based social and emotional learning methods to help students and families during building closures, and recognizing that such tactics are advances over the previous online education platform (Kuhfeld et al., 2020). Gaps in the research persist in educator perceptions of the influence on student outcomes of online social and emotional learning. This study explored educator perceptions of the impact and influence of social and emotional learning instruction and implementation on student academic and behavioral outcomes in the online learning environment.

Chapter Summary

The COVID-19 pandemic resulted in academic and behavioral declines among students. Regressions in behavior created delays and negatively influenced academic achievement. The effects of academic and behavioral regressions may have long-term academic and psychological ramifications. State-level political policymakers in the United States have progressively formalized their advocacy for social and emotional learning in schools; as of 2019, all 50 states have established social and emotional learning competencies or standards for preschool children, with some also adopting K–12 requirements (Omasta et al., 2021).

Few studies explored instructors' views on the significance of social and emotional

learning. Further study was needed to investigate teachers' perspectives on the influence of social and emotional learning instruction on enhancing academic and behavioral outcomes for students. This research was necessary to determine if these academic and behavioral regressions react favorably to social and emotional learning intervention and whether instructors can limit their influence in the classroom. Other academic works have analyzed the CASEL key competencies, with relatively limited research investigating the historical application of social and emotional learning, the influence of its past usage on its present value, or the total social and emotional learning abilities (Caldarella et al., 2019; Mondy & Reynolds, 2020). This research sought to fill the gap regarding educator perceptions of online social and emotional learning instruction. The study may help children, parents, instructors, and educational institutions through academic and behavioral outcome improvements.

The literature review evaluated evidence on the impact and importance of social emotional learning. Many experts felt that when explicitly taught, social and emotional learning is beneficial and that more educators should undergo explicit training. School-based social and emotional learning interventions improved students' social and emotional abilities, academic performance, social skills, and mental health, according to the research. The following section describes this study's approach, problem, and research questions. Scholarly sources also clarified the methodology, study design, sampling, data gathering, and analysis. The material clarified the overall approach leading to the answers to the research questions.

Chapter 3: Methodology

The shift to online learning due to the COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the importance of student engagement in virtual classrooms. While technology allowed students to continue their education remotely, it also brought new challenges, including the lack of social presence and the need for effective social and emotional learning practices. COVID-19 affected children, educators, and stakeholders worldwide, resulting in anxiety, fear, and financial worries (Garcia & Weiss, 2020; McCallops et al., 2019; Racine et al., 2021). This trauma resulted in a regression in student conduct and academic success throughout online learning and since their return to face-to-face instruction (Nickerson et al., 2019).

This qualitative research intrinsic case study explored the influence of social and emotional learning practices and social presence on student engagement during online learning. The study focused on the perceptions of a selected group of educators who transitioned from traditional to online learning during the pandemic to understand how student engagement was affected. The findings from this study provided valuable insights into the role of social and emotional learning practices and social presence in promoting student engagement in online learning environments and inform the development of effective strategies for supporting student engagement in the virtual classroom.

The problem was the lack of social and emotional learning instruction and teacher social presence practices in the online learning setting during the transition from traditional learning during the COVID-19 pandemic, resulting in the regression of student engagement. The purpose was to explore educator perceptions of social and emotional learning instruction and teacher social presence practices in the online setting during the transition from traditional to online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic and its influence on student engagement. This study

attained data collected from focus groups and interviews using criterion purposive non-probability sampling. There were two research questions.

Research Question 1: What are the perceptions of educators on whether explicit social and emotional learning instruction can improve student engagement outcomes in the online learning environment?

Research Question 2: What are the perceptions of educators on whether explicit teacher social presence practices can improve student engagement outcomes in the online learning environment?

What follows is an outline of the study, including research methodology, design, rationale, role of the researcher, research procedures, and the population and sample selection for this study.

Research Methodology, Design, and Rationale

This section provides a comprehensive overview of the approach to studying the influence of social and emotional learning practices and social presence on student engagement during online learning. Intrinsic case study design allowed for an in-depth exploration of the experiences of a selected group of educators and how they understand student engagement to have been affected by the presence or absence of social and emotional learning practices and social presence during online learning. Methodology is described in this section, including data collection and analysis procedures used to ensure the credibility and rigor of the findings. A rationale for selecting a qualitative case study design and the specific methods were explained in detail, highlighting the strengths and limitations of the approach and how they align with the overall goals and objectives of the study.

Methodology

According to Creswell and Creswell (2022), qualitative research in a dissertation aims to investigate and understand a specific phenomenon, problem, or issue by collecting and analyzing data using methods such as observations, interviews, and document analysis. This method allows the researcher to gain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon in its natural setting by providing a detailed, in-depth understanding of the phenomenon being studied (Mohajan, 2021). Qualitative research allows for the exploration of complex social issues and human experiences, which can provide rich and detailed information about how the phenomenon is perceived and experienced by those involved (Creswell & Creswell, 2022). Its benefits include exploring participants' perspectives and experiences, understanding the phenomenon's meaning and context, and generating new insights and theories (Mohajan, 2021). Given the exploratory nature of the research questions, a qualitative case study design was selected as the most appropriate method for capturing the complexities and richness of the perceptions of educators who taught during the pandemic. An approach using quantitative methods would not have been appropriate as it would not yield the desired results.

Case Study Design

According to Iglesias-Pradas et al. (2021), case study research is a qualitative approach to analyzing a particular event in its real-world setting. Case study research is important for grasping challenging issues in real-world scenarios and for learning participants' viewpoints using instruments including interviews, focus groups, questionnaires, and observation (Iglesias-Pradas et al., 2021). Stake (1995) stated that researchers should see a case as a separate, complex, functional entity inside a limited system and explore it as an object rather than a process, which is perfect for studying programs and people. Yin (2018) believed that case study research entails choosing a case or cases to explore, gathering data using observations,

interviews, and document analysis, and then evaluating the data to uncover themes and patterns.

The case study research approach was suited for this study because it permitted an in-depth exploration of instructor attitudes, which led to data collection through interviews and a focus group. The rationale for using this method was that it allowed for in-depth exploration of complex phenomena, such as individuals, groups, organizations, or social systems. It provided rich and detailed information about how those involved perceived and experienced the phenomenon.

Intrinsic Case Study

According to Reynolds and Zhang (2022), the rationale behind intrinsic case studies is to focus on a unique individual to understand a particular phenomenon within its real-life context. Its benefits include providing a rich and nuanced understanding of the phenomenon being studied and the opportunity to identify patterns and relationships that may not have been apparent in other types of research (Reynolds & Zhang, 2022). Intrinsic case studies provide a detailed and in-depth exploration of a specific instance or situation to understand better the underlying processes, dynamics, and complexities involved (Janis, 2022). The aim of such studies is not only to understand the subject better but also their history and how they interact with everything around them. An intrinsic case study was appropriate for this study because it lent itself to exploring unique perspectives that could not be fully understood through other research methods. The next section discusses the role of the researcher, research procedures, and population and sample selection for this study.

Role of the Researcher

The role of the researcher in a qualitative case study is a critical aspect of the research process. According to Stake (1995), in a qualitative case study, the researcher serves as the

primary instrument for collecting and analyzing data, and their role can significantly impact the validity and reliability of the findings. In intrinsic qualitative case study research, the researcher's role is to immerse themselves in the studied context and gather rich, detailed data that provides a comprehensive understanding of the investigated phenomenon (Stake, 1995). In this study, I played a key role in conducting interviews and a focus group with a selected group of teachers to collect and analyze data and interpret the findings. I was also responsible for ensuring that ethical considerations were addressed and that the data collection and analysis procedures were rigorous and systematic.

To ensure that all participants met the research criteria, site permission was obtained from the research site administrator (see Appendix A), and the recruitment invitation (see Appendix B) was posted to the research site. The informed consent document (see Appendix C) included permission to record the interviews and focus group sessions to ensure the data from the responses were accurately recorded and transcribed. A set of field-tested interview questions (see Appendix D) and focus group questions (see Appendix E) that were approved by subject matter experts (see Appendix F and Appendix G) were used to gather participant perspectives on the influence of social and emotional learning and social presence on learners who transitioned between traditional and online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. Individuals demonstrated interest in participating by answering questions collected by a Google form (see Appendix H), accessed by educators via the social media research recruitment posts in a Facebook group (See Appendix I). The Google form collected answers to the three qualifying questions and demographic data and provided a link to the informed consent document (See Appendix J) for qualified respondents. Each study participant was interviewed individually via Microsoft Teams, a videoconference platform. Collectively, a group of 15 participants met via

Microsoft Teams for the focus group session.

Research Procedures

This section discusses the recruitment process, participation criteria, and data collection methods, including instrumentation for this study. The study adopted a qualitative case study approach and focused on the experiences of a sample of teachers selected from a specific population. The research procedures provided a detailed discussion of the steps taken to gather data and ensure the validity and reliability of the findings.

Population and Sample Selection

The research site was the Facebook group [REDACTED]. The group consisted of 128,000 members internationally. The sampling method was non-probability sampling and criterion purposive sampling. Purposive criterion sampling is a non-probability sampling method used when looking for a specific type of participant who meets certain criteria (Neuman, 2021). The rationale for using this method is that it allowed the selection of participants who were the most appropriate for the study rather than relying on chance to determine who was included in the sample. According to Stratton (2021), purposive sampling is often used when the population is small or difficult to access or when searching for a specific type of participant that is not easily obtained through other sampling methods and allows control for certain variables and increases external validity (Stratton, 2021).

The process of recruiting using purposive criterion sampling involves identifying the criteria that participants must meet to be included in the study, engaging participants who meet those criteria, and then selecting a sample from that group; the sample size is typically smaller than in probability sampling, but it is meant to be representative of the target population (Creswell & Creswell, 2022). This study's targeted participants were educators who taught

grades 5–12 between 2018–2022. These educators also taught in the traditional environment before the COVID-19 pandemic and transitioned to online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. Permission from the five administrators of the research site, Facebook group [REDACTED] (see Appendix A), was sought via Facebook Messenger on February 7, 2023, February 15, 2023, and April 10, 2023 (see Appendix A). Upon researching Facebook's guidelines and the rules for the individual group, explicit permission was not required to post in the group to solicit participation in the research study as the post does not violate any rules or guidelines. The site administrator approved soliciting participants via the Facebook Group on April 11, 2023 (see Appendix A).

The next step was to post the recruitment invitation (see Appendix B) for participants meeting the criteria for an interview and focus group on teacher perceptions on the impact of social and emotional learning practices and social presence on student engagement during online learning to the Facebook Group. Qualifying questions included: Are you an educator who has taught grades 5–12 between 2018–2022? Did you teach in the traditional (face-to-face) learning environment before the COVID-19 pandemic? Did you transition from traditional to online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic? Individuals who met these qualifications were invited to participate in the study. To ensure that all participants met the research criteria, the recruitment invitation posted to the research site contained a link to a Google form (see Appendix H) that collected answers to the three qualifying questions. If any answers were no, the prospective participant did not meet the criteria and was prompted to submit the form. They were excluded from the study and did not receive the informed consent form. The form collected email addresses for direct communication with participants in the future. No members of the research site were familiar with the individual conducting the study to mitigate bias.

To ensure participants were demographically diverse, the second section of the Google form (see Appendix H) collected optional demographic data such as state/country, ethnicity, years of teaching, teaching levels, school type, and community type. Individuals were advised that this information was optional. If more than the minimum number of participants qualified to participate in the study, this information would be used to ensure that individuals were demographically diverse. Individuals with a balance of representation in each demographic response area: state/country, ethnicity, years of teaching, teaching levels, school type, and community type were identified to participate. If it were found that more than the desired number of qualified participants responded and also duplicated representation in demographic responses, participants would have been selected by the earliest date/time stamp collected from the Google Form.

The third section of the Google form (see Appendix H) offered a link and QR code to the informed consent document (see Appendix C) via DocuSign. Respondents were asked to follow the link or use the QR Code to view and electronically sign the informed consent document. Individuals who clicked the informed consent link were taken to a PDF of the document in DocuSign (see Appendix J), a respected online software designed to protect electronic signatures through authentication and encryption (DocuSign, 2023). After reading the document, respondents were prompted to sign electronically. After doing so and clicking the Finished button, DocuSign automatically emailed a copy of the informed consent document, and participants could download or print a copy for their records. Afterward, each qualified participant was contacted via email to schedule their videoconference interview and follow-up focus group session.

The goal for the actual sample size was a minimum of 15 participants. The population of

the research site was 128,000 members, so the initial sample size focused on a minimum of 30 educators who met the participation criteria. Fifteen educators participated in the study, which is an appropriate sample size because it provides a detailed understanding of the phenomenon, is not generalizable, and is manageable for data collection and analysis (Neuman, 2021; Yin, 2018). Limiting the sample size to 15 participants allowed for multiple rounds of data collection, thorough analysis of the data, and saturation (Neuman, 2021; Yin, 2018). According to Neuman (2021), saturation is the point at which no new information is being generated, and data collection can stop.

For these educators, informed consent (see Appendix C) was obtained, which demonstrated the principles of respect, beneficence, and justice. Communication took place in a comprehensible format, and participants were made aware of the voluntary nature of their agreement to participate (Pritchard, 2021). Participants were also provided with information on how their data would be used and measures that would be taken to protect their privacy using confidential storage and the destruction of data upon completion of the study (Pritchard, 2021). To further uphold these principles, adherence to the legal requirements for human subjects protection and related ethical guidelines, such as the United States Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) regulations (45 CFR 46) and the American Educational Research Association (AERA) Code of Ethics (Yoon et al., 2021), was observed. Any ethical issues, such as conflicts of interest and authority differentials that may have arisen among the qualified participants, were also considered (Yoon et al., 2021). The next section discusses the data instrument for this study.

Interview Protocol

Semi-structured qualitative one-on-one interviews were conducted with 15 educators,

utilizing an interview protocol that included questions designed to understand educators' perspectives. The interview protocol (see Appendix D) was a scripted set of open-ended, reflective questions that guided the data collection process and helped ensure the reliability and validity of the findings. The questions focused on the study's two research questions to understand individuals' perspectives and meanings of their experiences and actions.

Consideration was made for the influence of cultural, historical, and societal factors on their perspectives, which provided a comprehensive framework for exploring and understanding the socially constructed nature of human experiences and actions (Stake, 1995). According to Yin (2018), semi-structured qualitative interviews are advantageous in ethnography since they allow for follow-up questions and illuminate the background and rationale of a participant's experience. Qualitative interviews uncover normally unreachable information via structured interviews or surveys and allow the interviewer to access the most significant narrative to the interviewee via open-ended replies (Yin, 2018).

Focus Group Protocol

According to Yin (2018), a focus group is a method of qualitative research in which a small group of people come together to discuss a particular topic so the researcher can understand the participants' experiences, perspectives, opinions, and attitudes. A focus group of nine diverse educators was conducted to gather perspectives on the two research questions. It was understood that the original interview group members could have chosen not to participate in the focus group session. According to Krueger and Casey (2015), the number of respondents invited to a focus group discussion can range from four to 15, with six to eight considered sufficient. A group of 10 is optimal for diverse perspectives and manageable size, while more than twelve can lead to difficulty in management and fragmentation (Krueger & Casey, 2015).

The discussion was moderated by leading participants through the focus group discussion protocol (see Appendix E). This type of data instrument is beneficial in qualitative research because it allows for data collection from a group of individuals, providing diverse perspectives and leading to a deeper understanding of the topic being studied (Yin, 2018).

Social constructivism theory indicates that knowledge and reality are constructed through social interactions and relationships (Yeravdekar & Raman, 2022). Through this lens, individuals' experiences and actions are shaped by the cultural, historical, and societal factors that make up their social context (Yeravdekar & Raman, 2022). An intrinsic qualitative case study seeks to understand the experiences and actions of individuals within a specific context (Reynolds & Zhang, 2022). Social constructivism theory, intrinsic case study design, interview protocols, and focus group protocols all supported one another throughout this study by collecting educator perceptions through qualitative interview data and analyzing them in a detailed and thorough manner to gain an in-depth understanding of the case.

Interview Protocol Subject Matter Expert Validation

Constructing validity is the process of validating the appropriateness of research study methodologies (Yin, 2018). Since no set of validated research interview questions was developed to answer the specific questions related to this research topic, open-ended questions for the interview protocol were developed. Three subject matter experts (SME) were consulted to validate the interview protocol questions for alignment with the research questions, clarity, and relevance to the study issue (see Appendix F). The subject matter experts are comprised of experts in the field of instructional technology and social presence theory or the field of social and emotional learning. Using feedback from the subject matter experts, the protocol was edited for clarity and to scaffold participant responses effectively through the interview.

One SME holds an Educational Specialist (Ed.S.) degree in Guidance and Counseling. In her work as the Supervisor of Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) at Broward County Public School's (BCPS) School Counseling Department, she oversees the identification, implementation, and monitoring of research-based SEL programs that are delivered to K–12 students district-wide. She also oversees SEL professional development and bi-annual student surveys from ReThinkEd that gather student data on growth toward the SEL core competencies. This individual was a suitable subject matter expert to validate the protocol as the focus of her work centers upon employing research-based SEL strategies that serve 260,000 students in the school district.

The second SME also holds an Educational Specialist (Ed.S.) degree in Guidance and Counseling. As the Guidance Director for a public middle school in Broward County, she works directly with teachers and students to implement SEL programs and training. This individual worked in this capacity during the transition from traditional to online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic and has first-hand experience with its impact. She is an expert in the SEL core competencies, instructional programs, teacher development programs, and data collection tools used to measure student SEL progress. She is also adept at implementing and training in the area of social presence theory and pedagogy. She was a suitable subject matter expert to validate the protocol as the focus of her work centers upon working with students and teachers to implement research-based SEL strategies.

Another SME holds a Doctor of Education (Ed.D.) degree in Instructional Technology. In her work as an Instructional Technology Facilitator for the BCPS Innovative Learning department, she researches, implements, creates professional development, and monitors the implementation of effective educational technology in the school district. This individual is a

credentialed expert on Canvas. Her education and experience provided her with expertise on the pedagogical aspects of social presence learning theory and instructional technology, which qualifies her as a suitable subject matter expert to validate the data collection protocol for this study.

Focus Group Protocol Subject Matter Expert Validation

As with the interview protocol validation process, no validated set of focus group questions was established to address the research questions of this study. To assess the validity of the focus group protocol (see Appendix G), the same three subject matter experts were contacted to review the open-ended focus group protocol questions. After receiving replies from subject matter experts, comments were considered for inclusion in the final focus group protocol.

Data Collection

The data instruments aligned with the research question on educators' perceptions of the influence of social and emotional learning and social presence on student engagement in the online learning environment. The purpose of this research was to glean insights into educator perceptions on the influence of social and emotional learning instruction on student behavior. Data collection began by inviting qualified educators to participate in this research study (see Appendix B). Communication with participants took place through email. Efforts were taken to reach out to each participant individually. In cases where multiple participants were being contacted, using the blind carbon copy (BCC) line in the email platform was employed to maintain the confidentiality of email addresses among participants.

Once educators expressed interest in participating, informed consent documents (see Appendix C) were provided and explained to participants. Once received, a videoconference meeting with each participant for the interview portion of the study was scheduled. Prior to the

interviews, each participant was made clear about the contents of the informed consent document, and any questions were addressed and clarified. Once the participants were ready to proceed, the videoconference sessions were recorded to create transcripts of the sessions for qualitative content analysis (Elos & Kyngas, 2008). Additionally, each participant was notified that they would receive a copy of the interview transcript and have the opportunity to make necessary corrections to reduce the dependability limitations of the study.

Once all interviews were completed, a focus group videoconference meeting was scheduled, and all educators who participated in the one-on-one interviews were invited to attend. Nine of the 15 initial educators participated in the focus group session. According to Krueger and Casey (2015), the number of respondents invited to a focus group discussion can range from four to 15, with six to eight considered sufficient.

For the focus group session, similar to the first stage, each participant reviewed the contents of the informed consent document before getting started, and the opportunity was provided to clarify any questions. Once the group was ready to proceed, the videoconference session was recorded to create a transcript of the session for content analysis. Interview and focus group video recordings were transcribed.

Data Analysis

Converted, coded data from transcripts and recordings from interviews and focus groups were used to perform a content analysis (Krippendorff, 2018). Content analysis is a method of analyzing and making sense of qualitative data by categorizing, coding, and identifying patterns in the data (Elos & Kyngas, 2008; Krippendorff, 2018). This method was used to analyze both interview and focus group data to gain a deeper understanding of the experiences and perspectives of educators on the influence of social and emotional learning and social presence

on student engagement during online learning. Yin (2018) suggested several protocols for data analysis, including coding for descriptive labels so that words are categorized into relevant categories before being structured for comparison, sorting for patterns to construct themes and a sense of probable connections between the data, identifying outliers which do not fit in with the rest of the data, generalizing constructs to make sense of the data acquired, and notes with reflecting remarks to keep track of assumptions throughout the analysis. Data were classified, summarized, tabulated, and explored to identify and evaluate themes that led to insights into teacher perceptions (Stake, 1995). The data were also reviewed for discrepancies and contradictions.

A software program was used to perform content analysis. ATLAS.ti is a qualitative software program that analyzes social and cultural phenomena using mixed methods and qualitative data. Using a software program such as this allowed for visualizing words and phrases, which increased insights during research data analysis.

Reliability and Validity

For this study, data were carefully triangulated from content analysis transcripts of interviews and focus groups. According to Patton (1999), conducting both qualitative interviews and focus groups in case study research can help ensure dependability and credibility while increasing the richness and validity of the data through triangulation. Using multiple data collection methods, researchers can triangulate to verify findings, increasing the validity and reliability of the results (Patton, 1999). A researcher will gain a deeper understanding of educator perspectives as individual interviews lend themselves to exploring participants' experiences. At the same time, focus groups provide a group dynamic that allows for exploring group dynamics and exchanging perspectives (Yin, 2018). Conducting both can provide a more comprehensive

understanding of the case and a rich and diverse data set.

Qualitative researchers must validate the reliability and validity of their study. Validity is the degree to which test findings reflect what is measured and assure that the research was properly designed, carried out, and reported (Leung, 2015). Potential threats include sampling technique, educator and researcher bias, and flawed transcripts and/or field notes. Measures were taken to ensure the research was unbiased (Noble & Smith, 2015). The limitations of purposive sampling include running the risk of researcher bias. To reduce potential bias in the selection process, steps were taken to include participants from diverse backgrounds and perspectives who met the requirements of the study. Additionally, every effort was made to ensure respondents were comfortable and willing to share their perspectives, which were treated with respect and confidentiality. Measures were taken to build positive relationships with study participants to build credibility and establish dependability and trustworthiness throughout the study.

Ethical Procedures

In research, ethical considerations are vital. According to Goodwin et al. (2020), using human subjects in research has resulted in significant scientific achievements and contributions; nonetheless, certain previous methodologies featured questionable, if not inhumane, practices. Growth and improvement cannot be achieved without participation in research; to continue to advance scientific research, demonstrate moral and ethical value to humankind, and maintain public trust in the research area, researchers must follow universal ethical practices (Goodwin et al., 2020). According to Taquette and Borges da Matta Souza (2022), the first step in ensuring impartiality is to dedicate oneself to one's own self-definition as an individual, researcher, and professional committed to assisting others. Throughout the study, every effort was made to avoid personal bias and communicate the results accurately and objectively.

The World Medical Association devised a code of safeguards to promote ethical research, which resulted in the Belmont Report in 1978, also known as Common Rule (Office for Human Research Protections, 2023b). This systematized and standardized set of ethical principles and practices governs the ethical conduct of research involving human subjects. The Common Rule provides a common understanding of research ethics and fosters societal trust to encourage the engagement of interested volunteers by providing researchers and Institutional Review Boards (IRB) with explicit advice to prevent exploitation.

According to the Office for Human Research Protections (2023b), individuals must voluntarily consent to participate in a research study. Adherence to the principles for informed consent was maintained, which involved disclosing all necessary information to enable participants to make informed decisions about their participation in the study. The goal, risks, and benefits of the research, as well as an outline of what the participant would be asked to undertake during the study, were included in all required disclosures. In addition, the disclosure demonstrated that participation was voluntary and may be canceled at any time by the participant. All communication materials were written at a suitable reading level for the intended audience and did not contain any wording referencing the volunteer's rights being waived (Office for Human Research Protections, 2023a). The consent included the number of study participants, contact information, and a description of how and for how long personally identifiable information will be retained and safeguarded. There were no prior relationships with participants. Should any relationships have come to light, those participants would have been excluded from the study to mitigate bias.

For this study, once educators expressed interest in participating, informed consent documents were provided and explained (see Appendix C). Individualized communication was

prioritized in all efforts to ensure the confidentiality of participants. When communicating with multiple participants, using the blind carbon copy (BCC) line in the email platform was employed to maintain the confidentiality of email addresses among participants.

Before conducting the interviews and focus groups, the participants were fully aware of the contents of the informed consent document, and any questions were addressed. Once the participant was ready to proceed, the videoconference session was recorded to generate a transcript for content analysis. Participants were informed that they would receive a copy of the interview transcript and could make any necessary corrections.

All files related to the study were securely stored on a personal laptop that is password protected. On the transcripts, pseudo names of the educators were coded in the transcripts to maintain participant confidentiality and privacy during and after the study. The data will be kept for 3 years and destroyed per federal regulations that require research records to be retained for at least 3 years after the completion of the research (Yoon et al., 2021). Microsoft's security tool, Cipher, will be used on the personal laptop to encrypt and overwrite deleted documents audio, and video data files permanently (Microsoft, 2023). Any printed documents will be shredded to expunge the confidential data after 3 years.

Chapter Summary

The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted reduced student engagement during the transition to online learning (Garcia & Weiss, 2020; McCallops et al., 2019; Racine et al., 2021). Research methodology, design, procedures, and data analysis plans presented herein supported the exploration of the influence of social and emotional learning practices and social presence on student engagement during online learning. Focus group and interview protocols were used to gather data from a selected group of educators and to provide valuable insights into the role of

social and emotional learning practices and social presence in promoting student engagement in virtual classrooms. Intrinsic case study design was selected as the most appropriate method for capturing the complexities and richness of educators' perceptions during the pandemic. The findings from this study provide valuable insights into the role of social and emotional learning practices and social presence in promoting student engagement in online learning environments and inform the development of effective strategies for supporting student engagement in the virtual classroom. What follows is the presentation of research findings that support this outlined methodology.

Chapter 4: Research Findings and Data Analysis Results

The shift to online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic has had a profound impact on students, educators, and stakeholders, resulting in mental health concerns as well as behavioral and academic regressions (Garcia & Weiss, 2020; McCallops et al., 2019; Nickerson et al., 2019; Racine et al., 2021). In the face-to-face learning environment, social and emotional learning competencies and educator social presence strategies benefit student engagement and academic development (Chuang, 2021; Davidson et al., 2018; Meyers et al., 2019). Developing effective strategies is essential for ensuring online education's continuity and responding proactively (Bozkurt et al., 2022). As a result, the study explored the role of social and emotional learning practices and social presence in online learning environments to promote student engagement and improve outcomes to ensure future education continuity and adaptability.

The problem was the lack of social and emotional learning instruction and teacher social presence practices in the online learning setting during the transition from traditional learning during the COVID-19 pandemic, resulting in the regression of student engagement. The purpose of this research was to investigate educator perceptions of social and emotional learning instruction and teacher social presence practices in the online setting during the transition from traditional to online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic and its influence on student engagement.

The following research questions functioned as the core component for exploring the issue and objectives of the study.

Research Question 1: What are the perceptions of educators on whether explicit social and emotional learning instruction can improve student engagement outcomes in the online learning environment?

Research Question 2: What are the perceptions of educators on whether explicit teacher social presence practices can improve student engagement outcomes in the online learning environment?

Educators believe explicit social and emotional learning instruction significantly improves student engagement in online environments. There is consensus that teacher social presence practices in eLearning settings enhance student engagement, mirroring traditional classroom environments. The methodology was strictly followed, emphasizing reliability through data triangulation and ensuring validity through diverse participant selection and purposive sampling. This research underscores the need to prioritize human connection in eLearning, suggesting that SEL integration and active teacher social presence are vital in online education. Presented within are the research results, covering all steps from data collection to analysis. Detailed respondent information is provided, including demographics and deviations in sampling. Codes and themes stemming from the research instruments are presented in response to the research questions. A discussion of strategies used to ensure reliability and validity is provided.

Data Collection

This research study solicited 15 educators in one-on-one interviews to gather data using a non-probability criterion purposive sampling method. Five social media posts to the Facebook group [REDACTED] (see Appendix I) included links to the Recruitment Letter (see Appendix B) and a three-page Google Form (see Appendix H) used to collect participant interest in the study. The first page of the Google Form collected basic information, including the participant's first and last name, email address, and responses to qualifying questions. The second page collected demographic information such as: participant's state/country, ethnicity,

length of teaching career, levels taught, school type, and community type (see Appendix H). The final page of the Google Form prompted qualified participants to click a link to complete the Informed Consent document via DocuSign (see Appendix J). DocuSign is a respected online software designed to protect electronic signatures through authentication and encryption (DocuSign, 2023). DocuSign allowed participants to read the Informed Consent document and sign electronically. When the participants clicked the Finished button, DocuSign automatically emailed a copy of the Informed Consent document and allowed participants to download or print a copy for their records.

In the five weeks between Saturday, June 17, 2023, and Wednesday, July 19, 2023, only 59 of the 144 individuals who responded to the recruitment solicitation elected to continue the research by electronically signing Informed Consent. Several emails were sent to the qualified participants between Saturday, July 8, 2023, and Saturday, July 22, 2023. The first email thanked prospective participants for their willingness to participate in the research study and confirmed receipt of the Informed Consent document (see Appendix K). Individuals were offered several dates and times for a one-on-one videoconference via Microsoft Teams and were directed to reply with their preference (see Appendix L). One-on-one interviews began on Saturday, July 8, 2023, and ended on Friday, July 21, 2023. Of the 32 potential participants, 15 attended the one-on-one interviews. The interviews ranged from 18 to 30 minutes, averaging 23 minutes. Before the Focus Group session, emails were sent to the 15 participants who attended the one-on-one interview to confirm and remind them about the Focus Group session via Microsoft Teams on July 22, 2023, at 1:00 p.m., via Microsoft Teams (see Appendix M). Nine of the fifteen individuals who participated in the one-on-one interviews attended the Focus Group session. The Focus Group session lasted 2 hours and 6 minutes.

Demographics

Participants in this study were demographically diverse. Based on the information shared by the 15 participants (see Table 1), each demographic area was represented, including those from various ethnicities; 11 different states; male and female; length of time teaching between 5 to 25+ years; elementary to secondary school levels; public and private / charter school types; and urban, suburban, and rural community types.

Table 1

Demographics and Level of Participation

Coded Name	State/Country	Ethnicity	Years Teaching	Levels Taught	School Type	Community Type	Participation
1	Georgia	White	25+	Mixed	Public	Rural	Interview & Focus Group
2	Tennessee	White	6–10	High School	Mixed	Suburban	Interview only
3	Florida	Hispanic / Latin(a/o)	0–5	Elementary	Public	Urban	Interview only
4	Indiana	Black / African American	6–10	High School	Public	Urban	Interview only
5	Pennsylvania	Black / African American	6–10	High School	Public	Urban	Interview only
6	Florida	Hispanic / Latin(a/o)	25+	Mixed	Public	Suburban	Interview only
7	Texas	White	11–24	Middle School	Public	Suburban	Interview & Focus Group
8	Georgia	Hispanic / Latin(a/o)	6–10	Mixed	Public	Suburban	Interview & Focus Group
9	Florida	White	11–24	High School	Public	Suburban	Interview & Focus Group
10	Florida	Hispanic / Latin(a/o)	0–5	Mixed	Private / Charter	Urban	Interview & Focus Group
11	California	Hispanic / Latin(a/o)	11–24	Middle School	Public	Suburban	Interview & Focus Group
12	New York	Black / African American	11–24	Mixed	Public	Suburban	Interview & Focus Group

Coded Name	State/Country	Ethnicity	Years Teaching	Levels Taught	School Type	Community Type	Participation
13	Virginia	Hispanic / Latin(a/o)	11–24	Mixed	Mixed	Rural	Interview & Focus Group
14	Colorado	White	0–5	Mixed	Mixed	Mixed	Interview only
15	Massachusetts	White	11–24	Elementary	Public	Urban	Interview & Focus Group

No significant events or circumstances during data collection caused deviation from the research plan. There were, however, two minor deviations to discuss. As stated, the Google Form was created using branching so that if a respondent answered no to the three qualifying questions on the first page, Google would automatically submit the form. The deviation is that branching did not function as expected and sporadically allowed respondents who answered No to one or more questions to move on through the form. Of the 144 submitted forms, 25 prospective participants did not qualify. To address this deviation and ensure only qualified participants were included, the Google Form results were filtered to exclude the unqualified 25 individuals, bringing the number of qualified completed forms to 119.

Furthermore, during the IRB process, feedback was provided that led to the creation of the Google Form to solicit participation and qualify participants. The initial plan was to email respondents to ensure qualifications and collect informed consent. When the plan was updated, the section about qualifications was replaced with the Google Form; however, the section about emailing informed consent remained. In practice, it was noted that prospective participants who completed the Google Form were not following through with emailing their signed informed consent as originally planned. Asking participants to email informed consent seemed to present a barrier. As a resolution, a DocuSign link was created and posted to the Google Form so qualified participants could automatically sign informed consent and experience a seamless recruitment process.

Data Analysis and Results

.....The five analytic phases model by Yin (2018) for content analysis was combined with open coding and in vivo coding to identify patterns and themes in the data. Open coding was used to identify words and phrases used as codes for categorization (Williams & Moser, 2019). In vivo coding was also used, as some of the codes identified were created from the words or phrases used by participants (King, 2008). Additionally, ATLAS.ti software was used to perform the content analysis. Using a software program allowed for expeditious highlighting, searching, coding, and theme identification during research data analysis.

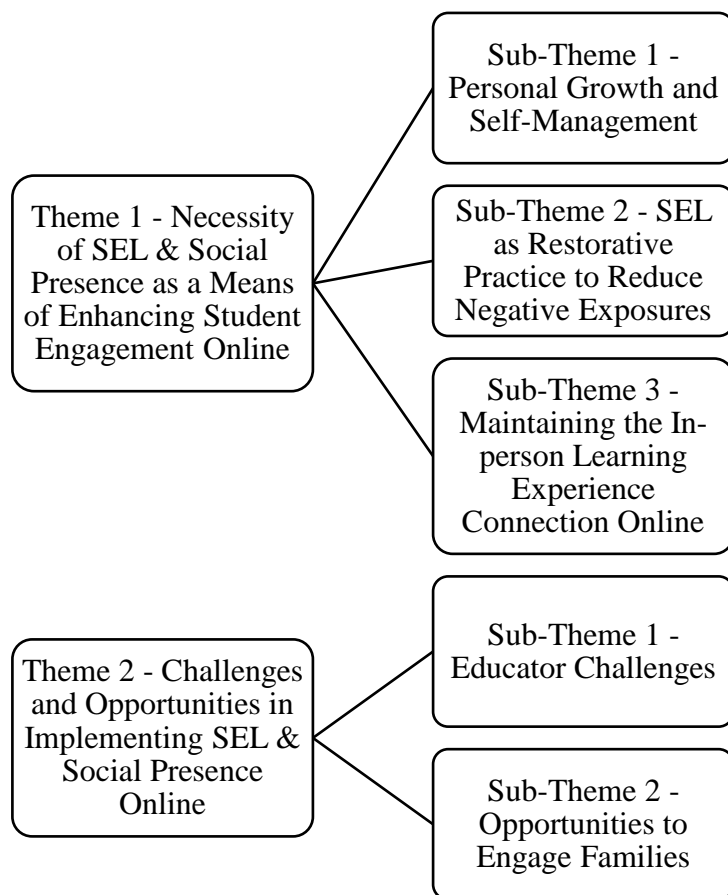
Using the five analytic phases model (Yin, 2018), data from one-on-one interview transcripts and focus group transcripts were coded and compiled. These data were then disassembled prior to uploading to a data analysis software program. All transcripts were compiled into one document, and all responses were organized under the appropriate question to facilitate semantic analysis and the identification of patterns in the responses. In the next phase, data were uploaded into ATLAS.ti software where codes were generated using automated coding as a first pass at the data analysis. Based on the text, the software created codes and applied them to pertinent quotations. Next, manual open coding and in vivo coding were completed to verify and correct initial codes. An iterative process of merging codes and identifying new codes was conducted until patterns emerged from the texts. Careful interpretation of the patterns identified overarching themes, which resulted in the answers to the study's research questions.

SEL and Social Presence as a Means of Enhancing Student Engagement Online

Two themes emerged from the study (see Figure 1). Theme 1 is the need for SEL and social presence to enhance student engagement online, generating three sub-themes: personal growth and self-management, SEL as a restorative practice to reduce negative exposures, and

maintaining the online in-person learning experience connection. Evidence suggests that there is a necessity for SEL and social presence as a means of enhancing student engagement online.

According to Participant 13, “SEL instruction is needed whether you're online or not. Explicit SEL instruction allows the teacher to teach the child to help regulate their emotions, so they can care for themselves even when the teacher is not there.” In online learning, the educator does not get the same in-person cues that signal distress or crisis; therefore, equipping learners with the skills needed for self-management is necessary for personal growth and engagement in learning. Furthermore, Participant 1 pointed out, “They get their brains full of all the other stuff going on in their lives that they can't learn. Helping them deal with that comes first, or learning in the classroom isn't going to soak in. It's not happening.” Many learners deal with many social, emotional, and family concerns. Until those are addressed or students are given the resources to manage themselves, engagement in learning and academic growth will be below optimal. Participant 15 went on to say that SEL instruction gives students different ways to try to get themselves refocused and back on track. Learners can be equipped with the tools for self-awareness and self-management for personal growth. This theme is rooted in social constructivism and social presence theories, emphasizing the importance of genuine human interaction. Establishing connections in online educational contexts is vital for promoting engagement and academic achievement.

Figure 1*Themes and Sub-Themes****Personal Growth and Self-Management***

Within the first sub-theme of Personal Growth and Self-Management, evidence exists that SEL instruction is invaluable for learners. Participant 12 stated, “When we do SEL, especially self-reflection, it gets them to think about themselves and find ways to be productive. They can be taught to identify their obstacles and learn the resources to get help.” Preparing learners with the skills needed to be self-aware improves academic productivity. In light of this, it is clear that SEL, particularly self-reflection exercises, provides students with an opportunity for introspection. The emphasis on recognizing personal challenges and actively seeking

assistance highlights SEL's impact on fostering resilience and autonomy in learners. It is not only about academic ability but also about developing a sense of self-efficacy. Participant 15 stated that SEL practices help students to “identify how they're feeling, why they're feeling that way, and understand it's OK to feel that way. Feelings are natural things. It's about finding healthy ways of balancing our minds, as well as our hearts, to achieve the best.” The evidence suggests that SEL goes beyond identifying emotions. It goes into greater detail about comprehending emotions, accepting them, and ensuring they do not hinder one's academic endeavors. The sentiment conveyed highlights the holistic approach of SEL, balancing students' cognitive and emotional needs for healthy development.

Restorative Practices to Reduce Negative Exposures

Evidence shows that students may have been exposed to negative examples, which falls under the second sub-theme of SEL as a restorative practice to reduce negative exposures. Students would benefit from strategies to reduce those exposures, improve behavior, and allow learning to occur. Participant 1 stated that the modeling students experienced at home dealing with emotions during a crisis may not have been the best, “We now see those behaviors in the classroom. It's not healthy, and it's not helpful. So, it is important to give them different strategies to help them understand and deal with their emotions so they can be learners.” This comment sheds light on the ripple effects of external modeling on student behavior, highlighting the urgent need for emotional processing and comprehension strategies. Social and emotional learning instruction may help learners process their emotions in a way that allows for appropriate responses to stress both in and out of the learning environment. Explicit SEL instruction provides the counterbalance for exposure to poor role models of self-management during a crisis. Learners require explicit tools to help manage themselves to be able to focus on learning. Participant 2

stated, “SEL’s a way to help students get to know themselves and how to deal with other people. It's like giving students a toolbox for knowing themselves, handling stuff, understanding others, being good at relationships, and making smart choices.” Participant 2's comparison of SEL to a toolbox shows that this kind of teaching gives students a wide range of skills, not just for self-awareness and self-management but also for building healthy relationships with others and making good decisions. By providing explicit SEL instruction, educators can equip learners with the tools needed to manage themselves, resulting in reduced negative coping behaviors and the ability to focus on learning in the classroom. Social and emotional learning is a restorative practice that serves as a tool learners can use to process negative exposures and be better equipped to regulate their emotions, reduce negative behaviors, and allow themselves to be engaged in their learning.

The Importance of Maintaining the In-Person Learning Connection Online

Sub-theme three discusses the importance of maintaining the online learning connection. Here, evidence exists that social presence is a tool educators can use to maintain their connection with learners online to mirror the in-person learning environment to maintain or improve student engagement and, subsequently, improve student learning outcomes. All participants agreed that social presence is the precursor to student engagement. Participant 10 stated, “There’s a direct link between social presence and student engagement. Kids don't learn from teachers who don't care about them.” A teacher's social presence and a student’s level of engagement go hand-in-hand. This shows the importance of the idea that students are likelier to learn when they think the teacher cares about them. Educators feel that they must establish positive relationships with students to achieve the desired outcome of student learning and achievement. Social presence is a component that educators use to build their connection with learners. Participant 1 stated, “I

think at the beginning of the school year, the number one thing for the first few weeks is not necessarily learning. It's connecting and building relationships with them. Otherwise, learning won't happen ever during the school year.” Educators feel that one of the keys to student engagement stems from cultivating a positive relationship between student and teacher. This sets the tone and connects the student and the teacher. During online learning, educators need to mirror the in-person learning environment by establishing a social presence and building relationships with students to generate student engagement. Participant 1 went on to state, “I guess I just took it for granted that the way I built relationships with my students in person would transfer to online learning. I’ve been doing it for so long it just kind of did itself.” Overall, educators indicated that they must work harder to build connections online because in-person proximity and body language methods do not directly translate. They agreed that improved student learning outcomes begin only after establishing a positive relationship. Educators saw the value in implementing strategies that build connections with their students and expressed that social presence is integral to maintaining student engagement to impact student achievement.

Social and emotional learning works in tandem with social presence to result in student engagement. Participant 13 stated, “There’s a dual purpose to teaching SEL. You get them to regulate their emotions, to be able to function, but also build a relationship. If they don’t think you care, they're just going to shut you off.” By combining SEL instruction and social presence practices, educators can enhance student engagement, decrease negative coping skills, and deepen learning. Participant 15 stated, “It’s a cycle: as we engage in SEL instruction, we generate social presence, which then increases student engagement. They are intertwined. So, if you have one, it's going to increase the others as you go along.” Social and emotional learning and social presence work together online to mirror the in-person learning experience.

Furthermore, Participant 9 asserted, “It's a trifecta (*SEL, social presence, and student engagement*). To have buy-in with students, you need a social presence that creates student engagement. If you don't have buy-in with students, you're not going to get them to work effectively.” Educators believe that SEL and social presence nurture relationships and personalized interactions between students and themselves. In a hierarchy, teachers place engagement first and learning second. Especially in the online setting, these practices can reduce feelings of isolation and promote a sense of belonging. Educators can use social presence to maintain their connection with online learners to replicate the in-person learning environment to maintain or enhance student engagement and, consequently, student learning outcomes.

Challenges and Opportunities in Implementing SEL and Social Presence Online

The second theme is challenges and opportunities in implementing SEL and social presence online, which generated two sub-themes: our learners changed, challenges, and opportunities to engage families. Evidence suggests many challenges and opportunities in implementing SEL and social presence online. Some of the challenges discussed included a shorter attention span, a lack of concentration, and increased distractions; regressions in academic and social development, as well as maturity level; negative impacts on socialization; student refusal to turn on their microphones and cameras during online learning; and limited attendance and/or participation in online classes. Participant 14 stated, “In person, I can gain that connection to get them to engage because, physically, there's nowhere for them to hide. But virtually, there's everywhere they can hide.” Teachers felt that there were many challenges and the largest was the loss of proximity and being able to reach students. To meet students' ever-changing needs, educators can employ social presence practices in combination with SEL instruction to ensure student engagement and achievement in the online setting. Participant 8

stated, “I learned to really engage them more online and try to have parents more engaged. Making sure that I had a connection if anything like that had happened again, the students would be more prepared to work from home.” Adaptive SEL and social presence strategies are vital for educators to foster meaningful connections and ensure student readiness for future online learning environments. Learners underwent significant changes as a result of their shift to online learning. Teachers redesigned or abandoned their lessons due to declining students' attention spans or lack of participation. Some students focused on the social aspect upon their return to school, which resulted in academic regression. The online learning environment holds unique challenges and opportunities for educators. It is important to note that, according to social presence theory (Gunawardena, 1995), the absence of an instructor's presence can potentially undermine engagement, culminating in diminished motivation and participation.

Educator Challenges

The first sub-theme under theme two explores educators' challenges during the transition to online learning. Evidence exists that educators felt underprepared for the shift to online learning. Through exploring these perceptions, clear evidence emerges that professional development for educators on social presence pedagogy and explicit SEL instructional techniques in the online learning environment would have benefited educators and students during the shift to eLearning. Participant 12 stated, “It didn’t seem like we had the skills yet to do anything with social presence online. The teachers were not ready for it; the schools didn’t tell us anything about it.” Due to the abrupt shift to online learning, school districts and organizations did not have time to train teachers on effective eLearning strategies. Educators also felt the challenge of not knowing their students like they did during in-person learning. Additional challenges expressed by teachers were the unrealistic demands they felt were placed

on them. Overall, educators felt that the demands of teaching online and hybrid while being evaluated and expected to assess learning and make academic gains was an impossible task. Participant 7 stated, “When I started teaching, I would have never thought I would be splitting my attention between kids in front of me and kids on the computer. It was a balancing act of giving them the same education.” Students and educators felt the stress of taking the in-person learning model to the online setting. Participant 6 stated, “It felt like the world's most difficult job because I was being evaluated on doing both simultaneously. It was very, very difficult. I had to learn how to teach online.” Educators felt that there was a disconnect and became unsure of their roles in this new environment. Overall, educators felt that they rose to the occasion and did the best with what they had during online learning. Although there were challenges, educators may minimize the impact posed by implementing SEL instruction and social presence practices to maintain engagement with learners online.

Opportunities for Family Engagement

The last sub-theme explores opportunities for family engagement during the shift to online learning. Upon reflection on what they would have liked to have known going into online learning or what they would do differently if allowed to do it, several educators expressed that building relationships with families is key to student engagement and achievement. Participant 12 stated, “Families were having a tough time, so I think that the lessons on SEL are so appropriate. It was so needed. They may not have access to the resources, or they may not have known about them.” Educators felt that SEL lessons should be shared with families to provide relief to struggles they may be experiencing and to have a uniform message sent to their students. Participant 12 stated, “I'm thinking of the parents who have special needs students or are new to the country and didn't know how to access resources or the expectations of the school system.

These people were in survival mode.” Educators felt that additional resources for families, especially more vulnerable populations, would aid in maintaining contact and providing support to the school community. Furthermore, Participant 8 stated:

If I had it to do over again, I would do something differently. I would not just reach out to my students; I would reach out to build relationships with parents, too. I try to make a lot more contact with parents now than I did before the pandemic because I realized how much of an impact that connection with the parents made. I think that was a component of having students engaged, as well. I tend to use SEL and social presence not just with my students, but with parents too. Parents need to know that you do care about their child and that you're there for anything they need. ‘We’re a team.’ That's one of the things that I found. Yes, having a good relationship with the students is wonderful. But, especially online, having a good relationship with the parents is really helpful to make sure that when we are not there, the parents can also use their influence over the child to help them engage in learning as well.

Families faced a myriad of traumas during the pandemic. To impact student learning positively, educators can engage families by sharing SEL and relationship-building social presence practices with the community. These strategies may positively impact learners in the classroom and also benefit their families and communities. Additionally, teachers can intentionally establish a social presence with families to engage them in their child’s learning and build a bridge between home and online education.

Educators shared extensively regarding the effective social presence practices used in their traditional and online learning experiences. Strategies are broken into two broad categories: personal connection and acknowledgment and engagement and interaction. Within the personal

connection and acknowledgment category are three sub-sections: personal greetings and goodbyes/check-ins, understanding the individual and honoring their feelings, and building relationships beyond academics. These strategies center upon building connections with the student on a basic level to meet their emotional needs and get them to buy into academics. As Participant 7 stated, “Kids want to be seen.” The Engagement and Interaction section centers upon activities that effectively engage students in learning activities that result in learning and achievement. As Participant 15 illustrates, “I usually focus on the personal side first, and then go to academics because then I’ve built their confidence a little bit before the academic part.” Activities include check-ins, chats, personalized learning, student choice, and gamification.

Discrepant Cases

Discrepant cases ensure the validity and comprehensiveness of findings. While the research remained open to discrepant cases, none emerged from the data. With a different sample, discrepant cases may emerge.

Answers to Research Questions

Research Question 1 asked how educators viewed the impact of social and emotional learning instruction on student engagement in the online environment. Educators indeed perceive that explicit social and emotional learning instruction can be pivotal in improving student engagement in the online learning environment. Social and emotional learning not only helps bridge the gap left by the lack of physical presence but also nurtures the emotional and social aspects essential for holistic learning.

Research Question 2 sought educator perceptions on the influence of teacher social presence practices on student engagement during eLearning. Educators agreed that explicit teacher social presence practices can enhance student engagement outcomes in online learning.

Educators can mirror the traditional learning environment's dynamics by actively establishing their presence. Based on social constructivism theory and social presence theory, this study emphasized the need to balance technology and human connection. It asserts that authentic connection during online learning is crucial for engagement and achievement.

Reliability and Validity

The strategies outlined in the methodology were closely followed. Reliability was established as data were carefully triangulated from a content analysis of two data collection instruments: interview and focus group transcripts. The combined transcripts provided a rich and diverse data set. Additionally, sufficient data from 15 research participants exist, and saturation has been achieved. Member checking was performed to ensure accurate transcripts and mitigate potential threats to the study (see Appendix N).

Confidentiality was carefully explained, and every effort was made to nurture a trusting relationship with participants. A positive and professional tone was used in communication to establish credibility. Information with a consistent message was shared, and responses were prompt to build dependability and trustworthiness. The goal was to ensure respondents felt comfortable and respected, allowing them to share their honest perspectives.

Moreover, to mitigate potential educator or researcher bias, steps were taken in the selection process to include participants from diverse geographical locations and various educational contexts and perspectives who met the requirements of the study. There were no prior relationships with participants. Providing in-depth descriptions of the research context and including diverse participants enhances this study's transferability, allowing readers to assess the relevance and applicability of findings to similar settings. For example, in-depth descriptions of the research context were presented. This explains the setting, participants, and occurrences

under investigation. Additionally, participant selection was another component in ensuring transferability. Participants were purposefully selected to represent a variety of experiences and backgrounds. Furthermore, minor divergence from the methodology in obtaining informed consent via DocuSign in lieu of email occurred as it was less practical. The change was implemented as a result of the goal of transferable findings. The thorough documentation process also supports transferability. Because of the study's clarity, others can reproduce it and test whether the results are applicable in other contexts.

In addition to these areas of reliability, an effective sampling technique and accurate transcripts were implemented for validity. Purposive sampling captures insights that enable a deeper comprehension of the phenomenon and ensure validity. Furthermore, confirmability has been achieved by clearly documenting the research procedures and data to ensure the research study's verifiability.

Chapter Summary

Two themes were identified in this study: the significance of social and emotional learning in increasing online student engagement and the challenges and benefits of integrating SEL and social presence in online settings. Educators believe explicit instruction in SEL significantly improves student engagement in online learning, filling the void created by the lack of physical interaction and fostering the emotional and social development essential to comprehensive learning. They concurred that maintaining a social presence during eLearning is essential. Such practices recreate a traditional classroom environment and maximize student engagement on digital platforms. This research is grounded in social constructivism and social presence theories, emphasizing that authentic interpersonal connections in online learning, which mirror traditional classroom dynamics, are important for effective engagement and

comprehension. Both theories emphasize the need for a balanced integration of humans and technology in educational settings. These insights provide an understanding of the role of social and emotional learning practices and educators' social presence in online educational environments. They also highlight how crucial they are to promoting engagement.

The significance of these findings can pave the way for practical applications and policy changes in online education. The next chapter provides a detailed examination of the implications of these findings, recommendations, and areas for further exploration in the changing field of online learning. In addition, potential areas for future research will be highlighted, stressing the need for ongoing research and adaptation.

Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusions

The temporary shift from face-to-face instruction to remote learning during the pandemic presented many challenges to learners and educators. A major challenge noted by educators was the lack of student participation and engagement during online learning. The lack of student engagement can negatively impact academic success. Educators identified many barriers that contributed to the lack of engagement; however, they agreed there are practices, when explicitly used, that can create a stronger feeling of connectedness. Because student engagement is a major part of meaningful learning, strategies must be implemented in the distance learning environment to ensure student engagement. To ensure the future continuity of online education, SEL and social presence practices must become priorities in course design and facilitation.

This qualitative intrinsic case study of educators who transitioned from traditional to online learning during the pandemic was conducted to explore their perceptions on the influence of SEL and social presence practices during online learning to understand how student engagement was impacted. The research was conducted to explore two central questions focused on educators' perspectives on student engagement in online learning environments.

Research Question 1: What are the perceptions of educators on whether explicit social and emotional learning instruction can improve student engagement outcomes in the online learning environment?

Research Question 2: What are the perceptions of educators on whether explicit teacher social presence practices can improve student engagement outcomes in the online learning environment?

The research findings and data analysis results revealed insights into decreased student engagement during the shift to online learning. Educators were aware of significant mental

health, behavioral, and academic issues impacting students and their families during the pandemic. These issues manifested in a lack of student participation and engagement in online learning. The findings highlight the impact the shift to online learning had on students, educators, and stakeholders. Perceptions of educators were uncovered through the research, emphasizing the critical role of SEL and teacher social presence in enhancing student engagement in online settings. The analysis, combining the five analytic phases model (Yin, 2018) with other coding strategies, affirms the absence of discrepant cases, reinforcing the validity of the findings. Findings show a consensus among educators that explicit SEL instruction and strong teacher social presence can form relationships between students and teachers, which increases student engagement in the online learning environment. The educators agree that SEL and social presence can bridge the physical gap in online learning, highlighting the need for authentic connections to strengthen engagement and academic achievement in virtual educational settings. The findings of this study contribute to the existing body of research on increasing student engagement in online learning and have the potential to benefit students, teachers, researchers, and policymakers. An overview of the findings, interpretations, conclusions, limitations, recommendations, and implications for leadership are discussed.

Findings, Interpretations, and Conclusions

The results from the qualitative intrinsic case study revealed educators' perceptions of the impact of SEL practices and social presence on student engagement during online learning. A content analysis of data collected via one-on-one interviews and a focus group revealed two major themes: the significance of social and emotional learning in increasing online student engagement and the challenges and benefits of integrating SEL and social presence in online settings. Knowledge is confirmed and extended due to the connection to the presented literature

review. Findings are also in alignment with social constructivism and social presence theoretical frameworks.

Researchers have an obligation to the academic community to present complete and honest limitations of a presented study (Ross & Bibler, 2019). Several precautions were taken to ensure interpretations, inferences, and conclusions did not exceed the study's data, findings, and scope. The collected, analyzed, and reported data were not altered. Direct quotes were used to develop themes and findings. Interpretations were also derived from the data, and no assumptions beyond the scope of the data were made. Conclusions are limited to the data's demonstration, ensuring they remain directly related to the observed data. These precautions were taken to ensure the validity and reliability of the study's results.

Findings Related to Literature Review

Research shows that SEL competencies and online social presence are major influences on overall learning and are beneficial for student academic progress (Davidson et al., 2018; Kashian, 2022; Meyers et al., 2019). Knowledge is confirmed and extended due to the connection to the presented literature review. The findings and literature review explored the impact of the pandemic and the transition to online learning on the well-being of students and educators. The concepts of educational technology, SEL and CASEL, were also explored.

COVID's Impact on Students' Well-being

The literature review revealed that during the pandemic, children may have been exposed to a number of psychological and physical hardships, which may have negatively impacted their overall well-being (Bruhn et al., 2022). Those who felt loneliness or dissatisfaction in their relationships may have lacked the social skills to act as a stress barrier (Killgore et al., 2020; Li & Wang, 2020). As a means of coping with loneliness, individuals may engage in unhealthy

habits (Law et al., 2022). During the pandemic, online learning educators also encountered challenges, including lapsing student engagement, adaptation to the virtual setting, and losing the human connection inherent in teaching (Leech et al., 2022). In addition to purely academic obstacles, the pandemic presented major social and emotional obstacles that adversely affected students' academic performance. Children with poor social skills experience a higher frequency of unwanted social interactions, such as bullying, depression, or disciplinary consequences, which leads to more peer rejection and isolation from the school community (Magelinskait-Legkauskien et al., 2018).

In connection with this study, the literature review confirms and extends knowledge. Educators revealed that the pandemic negatively impacted students. Educators noted that online learners exhibited signs of distress and loneliness, a lack of coping mechanisms, and a deterioration of student-teacher relationships during virtual learning. Participants observed students who lacked effective coping strategies and became disengaged in learning, as evidenced by a lack of attendance or participation and a reluctance to turn on the camera or microphone during online instruction. Furthermore, teachers also shared that the rapid transition to online learning led to a loss in the student-teacher relationships they had cultivated. The perceptions shared by the educators illustrate the impact of the pandemic on students' well-being, both academically and emotionally, and emphasize the crucial role of explicit SEL and social presence practices in mitigating these effects.

Social Emotional Learning and CASEL

The literature review revealed that CASEL competencies equip individuals with the skills needed for emotional regulation, empathy, relationship-building, and responsible decision-making (Blyth et al., 2019; Mahoney et al., 2019; Weissberg, 2019). Additionally, exposure to

CASEL competencies during adolescence has been associated with higher self-awareness and psychosocial health (Dusenbury & Weissberg, 2018; Sande et al., 2019). By investing proactively in social and emotional learning, educators have the potential to enhance online learning outcomes and position institutions and students to respond to future life pressures and global events more proactively (Hadwin et al., 2022).

Educators revealed the key role that SEL practices play in online learning, noting that when these competencies are in place, they promote emotional and social well-being and lead to academic achievement. Participants shared instances of social presence implementation or SEL skill practices and the impacts they perceived were made on their students. Teachers noted that learners felt *heard* and *seen*, which led to deeper student engagement. Educators implementing SEL practices create learning experiences based on the principles of social constructivism. This enables students to feel valued by actively constructing their knowledge and reality by combining previous and new experiences.

Educational Technology and SEL

The literature review revealed that incorporating technology into programs that educate learners in SEL skills improves student conduct, positive feelings about school, and improved learning results (Aspen Institute, 2019). Additionally, creative teaching approaches, including student-centered and personalized learning via distance learning, increase student engagement (El Refae et al., 2021; Walkington & Bernacki, 2020). Learning management systems (LMS) can also support inclusive learning environments and reinforce the learning process in the online setting for academic progress (Bradley, 2021).

Educators revealed the importance of a teacher's virtual social presence to replicate the *natural in-person feeling* in the classroom. Participants felt underprepared for the transition to

distance learning and felt that more training in this area was needed. They indicated that maintaining their online social presence took a lot of creativity. Overall, educators felt that their social presence could create an engaging learning environment and improve student well-being. These perceptions highlight the importance of integrating technology and SEL methodologies, reinforcing the literature's emphasis on improved student outcomes and attitudes toward education.

Findings in the Context of the Theoretical Framework

Findings are in alignment with social constructivism and social presence theoretical frameworks. Social constructivism is where individuals construct their knowledge and reality by combining background knowledge and new experiences (Vygotsky, 1978). Culture and language (Bruner, 1960) and social interactions (Dewey, 1938; Piaget, 1952) shape human cognition. Individuals receive new information through the lens of their own experiences; therefore, different viewpoints are at the crux of authentic and collaborative learning (Kimmons & Caskurlu, 2020; Yeravdekar & Raman, 2022). Social constructivism theory connects to social and emotional learning because personal experiences serve as the lens through which individuals experience new information; hence, students construct new knowledge based on their prior experiences (Chuang, 2021).

Social presence learning theory posits that the degree of one's perception of being personally connected with others in a digital learning environment can significantly impact their learning experiences and outcomes (Short et al., 1976). How the learner perceives and trusts the learning environment is crucial to the student's growth and development (Lowenthal, 2010; Stewart et al., 2021). Therefore, educators can be empowered to create and facilitate engaging online learning experiences to make learners feel connected and, therefore, allow deeper learning

to take place (Garrison et al., 2000; Gunawardena, 1995).

Necessity of SEL and Social Presence as a Means of Enhancing Student Engagement Online

The findings show that there is a need to implement SEL and social presence practices as a means of enhancing student engagement online. Educators believe explicit instruction in social and emotional learning and an emphasis on social presence in online learning are vital for personal growth and self-management in students. If students are explicitly taught self-management strategies, they will be better able to regulate themselves and cope with their emotions. This insight aligns with social constructivism, highlighting the importance of personal experiences as a lens through which students process and understand new information, contributing to their personal and academic growth.

Many learners and their families experienced stress and/or trauma during the pandemic. The findings also reveal that social and emotional learning strategies and the connections made through the implementation of social presence can help reduce negative behaviors during online learning. Educators believe students would benefit from explicit strategies to reduce those exposures, improve behavior, and allow learning to occur. Educators view SEL as a restorative practice that reduces negative interactions in the online learning environment. This aligns with social presence learning theory, where the perceived personal connection in virtual environments can positively influence learning outcomes, further emphasizing the restorative potential of SEL.

Findings further suggest the necessity of creating the feeling of an in-person learning connection in the online environment. Educators shared numerous strategies to build social presence connections in the in-person setting. During their transition to online learning, many searched for ways to create the feeling of an in-person learning setting. Teachers who could use technology to maintain an in-person learning connection reported higher student engagement.

This aligns with social constructivism, emphasizing the significance of social interactions in shaping human cognition and facilitating meaningful learning experiences.

Challenges and Opportunities in Implementing SEL and Social Presence Online

Findings also reveal educators' numerous challenges in online SEL and social presence implementation. Educators reported implementing the following strategies into their online classrooms: personal greetings and goodbyes/check-ins, group activities and games/social connection, and engagement triggers for learning, such as audio feedback or brain breaks. Teachers also made attempts to understand individual students to respect their feelings and build relationships beyond academics. While educators searched for ways to create the feeling of an in-person learning setting, they reported several barriers to effectively translating in-person strategies to a digital format. Educators noted major challenges with student attention span and concentration. Teachers also noticed regressions in socialization and maturity, citing challenges such as limited attendance and/or participation and challenges in consistently engaging students in online learning with their cameras on. This challenge connects to the framework of social presence learning theory, highlighting the critical role of educators in creating environments where students feel personally connected and engaged.

The findings also show that, in hindsight, educators saw a large opportunity to involve learners' families online to engage students more effectively. Educators indicated that many families were struggling during the pandemic and did not effectively model healthy coping mechanisms. Additionally, educators shared that many families may not have been aware of student expectations or the available resources for the transition to online learning. Teachers noted that better informing and involving families may have increased student engagement and deepened learning. Family engagement in student learning connects to both social constructivism

and social presence learning theories. The emphasis on collaborative learning and social interactions to construct knowledge reinforces the importance of family engagement in enhancing online learning experiences.

Conclusions

Findings presented within the qualitative intrinsic case study revealed two major themes, including the necessity of SEL and social presence to enhance student engagement online and challenges and opportunities in implementing SEL and social presence online. According to the data, incorporating SEL and social presence practices is critical for increasing student engagement online. Furthermore, using SEL strategies and fostering connections through social presence can help reduce negative online learning behaviors. The findings also demonstrate the importance of simulating an in-person learning environment in a digital setting to foster human connection and engagement. Findings further highlighted educators' numerous challenges when implementing SEL and social presence online. Data showed that educators saw an untapped opportunity to increase student engagement by involving learners' families in online learning. The following conclusions have been reached upon the findings from the major themes of this study. Data suggested a clear need to incorporate SEL and social presence practices in online learning. Their inclusion is critical for increasing student engagement and providing a well-rounded educational experience. Additionally, findings highlighted the effectiveness of SEL strategies and the connections made possible by social presence in reducing negative behaviors during online learning. This emphasizes the role of SEL and social presence in fostering a positive online culture and academic achievement. Furthermore, an important conclusion drawn from the data is the significance of establishing a human connection and simulating the nuances of an in-person learning environment in the online setting. The sense of connection, belonging,

and real-time interaction that characterizes traditional classrooms can significantly improve student engagement online. Notwithstanding, during the shift to online learning, educators encountered a number of difficulties when trying to combine social presence and SEL. This highlights the need for educator training and resources in online SEL and social presence practices and to improve learning management systems to support these advances. Finally, educators expressed the desire to involve learners' families in the online educational process actively. Effectively engaging families is a chance to build more cohesive and supportive learning communities beyond the virtual classroom.

Limitations

Constructing validity is the process of validating the appropriateness of research study methodologies (Yin, 2018). Since no set of validated research interview questions was developed to answer the specific questions related to this research topic, open-ended questions for the interview protocol were developed. To address dependability limitations and ensure these questions aligned with the research and were clear and relevant, three experts in instructional technology, social presence theory, and social and emotional learning were consulted to validate the protocols. The validated interview protocol and focus group protocol were employed as multiple data sources to ensure triangulation to corroborate findings and reduce the impact of potential biases (Patton, 1999). Reliability was established as data were triangulated from a content analysis of the two combined transcripts, which provided a rich and diverse data set.

To address limitations related to transferability, a thorough and detailed account of the context, participants, and data collection methods (Barrett et al., 2020) has been provided, allowing readers to assess the relevance of the findings. Providing in-depth descriptions of the research context using a thorough documentation process enhanced this study's transferability,

allowing readers to assess the relevance and applicability of findings to similar settings. This explains the setting, participants, and occurrences under investigation. Confirmability has been achieved by clearly documenting the research procedures and data to ensure the research study's verifiability. Because of the study's clarity, others can reproduce it and test whether the results are applicable in other contexts.

It is recognized that personal bias and perspectives could influence the study outcomes. To address this limitation, the study employs reflexivity (Barrett et al., 2020). To reduce potential bias in the selection process, steps were taken to include participants from diverse backgrounds and perspectives who meet the requirements of the study. Participants were purposefully selected to represent a variety of experiences and backgrounds. As suggested by Neuman (2021), implementing purposive sampling in selecting individuals who provide varied and relevant perspectives increases transferability and the likelihood that the study can be replicated with similar results.

Member checking was performed to ensure accurate transcripts and mitigate potential threats to the study (see Appendix N). Study participants were allowed to review their recorded videoconference interview transcripts to make necessary corrections before content analysis to reduce dependability limitations (Elos & Kyngas, 2008). Every effort was made to ensure respondents were comfortable and honestly willing to share their perspectives, which were treated with respect. Confidentiality was carefully explained, and every effort was made to nurture a trusting relationship with participants. Measures were taken to build positive relationships with study participants to build credibility throughout the study. A positive, professional tone, clear, consistent information, and prompt responses established dependability and trustworthiness. Addressing transferability and dependability limitations enhances the

overall quality and trustworthiness of the findings.

The results of this study may be applied in other settings and populations. While every effort was made to limit bias and ensure the veracity of participants' responses, changes in the participant sample or research environment could affect the consistency of future replications. A limitation exists in the time of year of the study. Data were collected in the summer of 2023 when many educators may have been on vacation or unplugged from work. Notwithstanding, the findings presented can be replicated with diverse participants in varied settings.

Recommendations

There are several recommendations as a result of this study. This section will offer insights into potential changes in policies and practices that can improve learning experiences based on the research. Additionally, identified are potential areas for further research.

Changes in Policies and Practices

The most important change to current policies and practices relating to online learning should be implementing social and emotional learning and social presence practices to enhance student engagement. Social and emotional learning competencies are essential for the classroom and beneficial for student academic progress (Davidson et al., 2018; Meyers et al., 2019). Given the positive correlation between SEL and social presence practices and online student engagement, institutions should integrate these practices as core components in their online curriculum design. SEL provides students with a safe and positive learning environment and equips educators with the capacity to enhance students' ability to succeed academically (Sauve & Schonert-Reichl, 2019). These practices are connected to personal growth, self-management, and restorative practices to reduce negative exposures by maintaining the in-person learning feeling of human connection. SEL skills may aid adolescents in building the perseverance and resiliency

essential to developing effective coping abilities (Nickerson et al., 2019).

Effective training for teachers must be in place to ensure that educators are properly prepared to implement such pedagogical practices. Weissberg et al. (2015) stated that programming for school-wide, systemic social and emotional development should occur at the classroom and school levels in collaboration with families and the community. Taking it a step further for professional development in the online setting, educators must become comfortable with the tools available and implementation strategies as best practices. Meyers et al. (2019) stated that to achieve beneficial effects, professional development initiatives must be executed and maintained with integrity. This would enable educators to implement these strategies effectively and understand their impact on student engagement and learning outcomes.

Equally important is the need to engage families in online learning: Policymakers and school leaders should develop guidelines and strategies for involving families in online learning. Families' active participation can significantly improve the effectiveness of SEL practices in online settings. The engagement of families in their children's lives, both at home and in school, predicts their success, underscoring the essential nature of relationships among families, schools, and communities (Kelty & Wakabayashi, 2020). Cultivating these relationships with families is critical for ensuring student engagement and academic achievement in a digital learning environment.

Further Research

Study participants revealed several challenges they experienced with the transition to online learning. Major challenges they experienced with teaching online included student attention span/concentration online, regressions in socialization, the need for explicit digital literacy in students who are expected to be digital natives, limited online attendance and

participation, and the challenge of getting students to turn on their cameras. Further research into these areas should be considered to mitigate the major challenges experienced during online learning. By understanding the challenges, educators can develop strategies for smoother online learning implementation.

Another area for further research is the expansion of this research. Researchers should replicate this study with other diverse participants to enhance its external validity and transferability. The aim should include a more diverse sample population from different states, school types, ages, and cultures. The study can include a broader age range to compare grades K–5, 6–12, and post-secondary school students. It would be interesting to learn how pedagogy intersects with psychology in the future of educational technology to create a better online environment for all learners.

Implications for Leadership

Findings from the study have a potential impact on positive social change. There are several implications for leadership on the individual, family, organization, and societal/policy levels. On the individual level, the research will bring the importance of integrating SEL and social presence practices in the online setting to light. This awareness will encourage educators to seek professional development to implement these practices and provide more meaningful online learning opportunities. Stakeholders and leaders can provide professional development and teaching resources to assist educators in seamlessly integrating these practices into their online classes.

On the family level, the research will also bring awareness to the possibility of an online learning environment with higher student engagement and better achievement outcomes. The findings will help families to be more knowledgeable about educator SEL and social presence

practices to support their child's online learning. Stakeholders and leaders can offer outreach programs to families, such as parent training workshops, to build awareness of the importance of SEL and social presence and provide strategies on how parents can reinforce the strategies at home.

On the organizational level, the research will improve student engagement, reduce negative behaviors, and improve academic outcomes in the online setting by implementing SEL and social presence practices. Stakeholders and school leaders should ensure a place for these practices within their organizational instructional frameworks. Courses should be designed to include these elements in both curriculum content and course facilitation. To do so, organizations must offer professional development and teaching resources to help educators and course designers.

On the societal level, the importance of SEL and social presence in online learning will be recognized as an important instructional practice to improve engagement and outcomes in online learning. Organizations can create awareness campaigns to help further this endeavor. Because SEL and social presence are recognized as important on a societal level, policymakers can mandate their implementation as best practices in online learning, making them common practices in the educational system. This research provides many opportunities for positive social change. Most importantly, it allows educators, families, organizations, and society to work together to increase student engagement and improve student learning outcomes.

Conclusion

The future of education may lie in online learning. Educational technology offers advancements in learning, such as accessibility tools, differentiation pathways, immediate feedback, and data and analytics (Bradley, 2021). Even with the most advanced educational

technology, effective course designers and facilitators will be needed (Crompton & Sykora, 2021). The pandemic provided a glimpse of what the transition to virtual learning may look like. Several areas requiring improvement for students and instructors have become apparent during this transition. Effective strategies that combine the best of traditional learning with the best of educational technology must be implemented to create highly effective learning environments. The need for SEL and social presence within an effective online environment was at the core of this transition.

The findings of this intrinsic qualitative case study illuminate the experiences and perceptions of educators who shifted from traditional to online learning during the pandemic. Findings revealed two major themes, including the necessity of SEL and social presence to enhance student engagement online and challenges and opportunities in implementing SEL and social presence online. Educators recognized the value of these practices and their potential to improve academic performance and emotional and social well-being in a virtual environment. As more students move to online learning, SEL and social presence practices will be seen as pedagogical tools connecting educators and students meaningfully. This research shows that when students are in an online environment replicating the warmth and interactivity of a traditional classroom, teachers believe they are more engaged and more likely to succeed academically. The study also revealed educators' issues, such as student attention span and digital literacy issues. Despite these challenges, increasing family involvement is one of the keys to improving online learning outcomes for students.

There are several implications from this study. There is a call for educational institutions to incorporate SEL and social presence practices as foundational elements in online curricula. Furthermore, educators' professional development is necessary to ensure they are equipped and

comfortable with these practices. For policymakers, family engagement gives the community an important role in shaping online educational experiences. Given the implications of this study, individuals, families, organizations, societal policies, and lawmakers can improve online learning through advocacy of effective online learning and innovations to effective practices.

Reflecting on new knowledge based on the study's findings, the nature of education is changing. In the future, more learners and their families may move from face-to-face to virtual learning options. When this happens, classroom walls expand beyond their physical boundaries, making connection, understanding, and emotional well-being key factors in online learning success (Kokko & Hirsto, 2021). This study provides a road map for educators, policymakers, and researchers as they shape the future of online learning. Social and emotional learning and social presence can potentially improve outcomes for learners and remove perceived barriers in the move to non-traditional learning. These practices can change the way society thinks about digital learning. The lessons learned, challenges encountered, and opportunities identified contribute to the advancement of educational practices. Stakeholders can use these insights to ensure that the future of online learning is engaging and effective.

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Appendix A

Site Permission



February 5, 2023

[REDACTED]

Dear Administrators and Moderators of [REDACTED]

My name is Valerie Santana and I am a doctoral candidate at American College of Education (ACE) writing to request permission to post messages in your [REDACTED]

The purpose of my post(s) in your group will be to solicit educators to participate in a voluntary videoconference interview and/or a videoconference focus group to share their perspectives on how Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) and social presence may have impacted student engagement during the transition to online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The target population for this study is educators who have taught grades 5-12 between the years 2018-2022. These educators would have also taught in the traditional environment prior to the COVID-19 pandemic and transitioned to online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. This information will be used for my qualitative intrinsic case study dissertation titled *The Influence of Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) Practices and Social Presence on Student Engagement During Online Learning: A Qualitative Case Study*.

My goal is to recruit a minimum of 15 participants for the interview and focus group. Ethical procedures and respect for the individual's rights and confidentiality will be carefully observed. All participants will receive and have carefully explained informed consent documentation which includes their right to discontinue participation at any time.

Important Contacts for this study include:

Principal Investigator: Valerie Santana

E-mail: [REDACTED]

Phone: [REDACTED]

Dissertation Chair: [REDACTED]

E-mail: [REDACTED]

Thank you for your attention to this issue and prompt response. I appreciate your time and consideration of my request.

Regards,

[REDACTED]

Valerie Santana

The image shows a Facebook interface. The top part is a group page for 'Teaching During COVID-19' with 128,874 members. The page includes a search bar for members, a list of admins/moderators (redacted), and 'Add Friend' buttons. A red circle highlights a profile picture in the chat list. Below, a chat window shows a message from 'Valerie Santana' with a red circle around the name. The message is a request for participation in a study on student engagement during COVID-19. The message text is as follows:

Dear Administrators and Moderators of Teaching During COVID-19:

My name is Valerie Santana and I am a doctoral candidate at American College of Education (ACE) writing to request permission to post messages in your Facebook Group Teaching During COVID-19.

The purpose of my post(s) in your group will be to solicit educators to participate in a voluntary videoconference interview and/or a videoconference focus group to share their perspectives on how Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) and social presence may have impacted student engagement during the transition to online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The target population for this study is educators who have taught grades 5-12 between the years 2018-2022. These educators would have also taught in the traditional environment prior to the COVID-19 pandemic and transitioned to online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. This information will be used for my qualitative intrinsic case study dissertation titled The Influence of Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) Practices and Social Presence on Student Engagement During Online Learning: A Qualitative Case Study.

My goal is to recruit a minimum of 15 participants for the interview and focus group. Ethical procedures and respect for the individual's rights and confidentiality will be carefully observed. All participants will receive and have carefully explained informed consent documentation which includes their right to discontinue participation at any time.

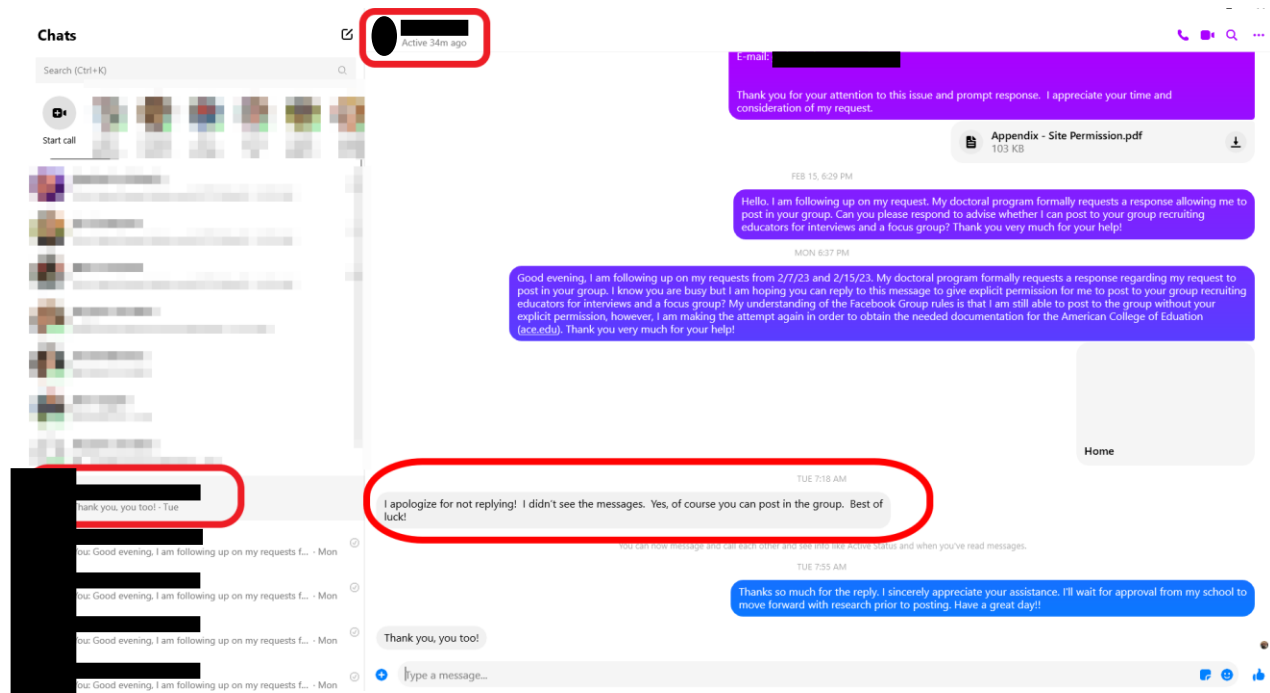
Important Contacts for this study include:

Principal Investigator: Valerie Santana
E-mail: valerie.santana795@ace.edu
Phone: 334-730-4029

Dissertation Chair: Cathy McKay, EdD
E-mail: cathyckay@ace.edu

Thank you for your attention to this issue and prompt response. I appreciate your time and consideration of my request.

Appendix - Site Permission.pdf



Appendix B

Recruitment Letter



June 1, 2023

Members of [REDACTED]

Dear [REDACTED]:

My name is Valerie Santana and I am a doctoral candidate at American College of Education (ACE) and I am writing to seek your participation in my dissertation research study.

Brief description of the study:

I am working on a qualitative intrinsic case study titled *The Influence of Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) Practices and Social Presence on Student Engagement During Online Learning: A Qualitative Case Study*. Educators are being invited to share their perspectives on how SEL (the process of developing self-awareness, self-control, and interpersonal skills) and Social Presence (the feeling of being together) may have impacted student engagement during the transition to online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. The goal of this study is to advance knowledge by understanding perspectives on the impact of student engagement in the traditional and online learning environments.

Description of criteria for participation:

I am seeking to conduct one-on-one interviews and a small group focus group with educators who have taught grades 5-12 between the years 2018-2022. These educators would have also taught in the traditional environment prior to the COVID-19 pandemic and transitioned to online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. My goal is to recruit a minimum of 15 participants for the interviews and focus group.

Participation in the study will be voluntary. If you wish to withdraw from the research at any time, you may do so by contacting me using the information below. I hope to publish the results of this study, but rest assured that I will not use your name nor share any identifiable data provided. Your information will remain confidential. Ethical procedures and respect for the individual's rights and confidentiality will be carefully observed. If you would like additional information about the study, please contact me.

Candidate Contact Information:

Principal Investigator: Valerie Santana

E-mail: [REDACTED]

Phone: [REDACTED]

Chair Contact Information:

Dissertation Chair: [REDACTED]

E-mail: [REDACTED]

If you meet the criteria above, are interested in participating in the study, and would like to be included in the potential participant pool, please use the link below to access, review, and accept the informed consent.

[Link to approved Recruitment Form and IRB Informed Consent](#)

Thank you again for considering this dissertation research opportunity.

Regards,

[REDACTED]
Valerie Santana

Appendix C

Informed Consent Document



Prospective Research Participant: Read this consent form carefully and ask as many questions as you like before you decide whether you want to participate in this research study. You are free to ask questions at any time before, during, or after your participation in this research.

Project Information

Project Title: *The Influence of Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) Practices and Social Presence on Student Engagement During Online Learning: A Qualitative Case Study*

Researcher: Valerie Santana

Organization: American College of Education - <https://ace.edu/>

Email: [REDACTED]

Telephone: [REDACTED]

Date of IRB Approval: June 1, 2023

Please note that this research study has been approved by the American College of Education Institutional Review Board. The IRB approved this study on June 1, 2023. A copy of the approval letter will be provided upon request.

Researcher's Dissertation Chair: [REDACTED]

Organization and Position: American College of Education [REDACTED]

Email: [REDACTED]

Introduction

I am Valerie Santana, and I am a doctoral candidate student at American College of Education. I am doing research under the guidance and supervision of my Chair, [REDACTED]. I will give you some information about the project and invite you to be part of this research. Before you decide, you can talk to anyone you feel comfortable with about the research. If you have questions, ask me to stop as we go through the information, and I will explain. If you have questions later, feel free to ask me then.

Purpose of the Research

The purpose is to investigate educator perceptions of social and emotional learning (the process of developing self-awareness, self-control, and interpersonal skills) and social presence (the feeling of being together) on student engagement in the K-12 setting during the transition from traditional to online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic and its influence on student engagement. You are being asked to participate in a research study which will assist with obtaining various perspectives on the impact on student engagement in the online learning environment. Conducting this qualitative research study will advance the knowledge base by understanding the influence of student engagement in the traditional and online learning environments.

Research Design and Procedures

The study will use a qualitative research methodology and intrinsic case study research design which focuses on the unique individual to help the researcher understand a particular phenomenon within its real-life context. One-on-one interviews and a small group focus group via videoconference at a mutually agreeable time will be arranged with selected participants. The study will comprise a minimum of 15 participants as a true sample size. Individuals will be asked to provide permission to record the interview and focus group sessions for the sake of having accurate transcripts for data. A transcript of the interview, along with the opportunity to make corrections, will be afforded prior to data analysis.

Participant selection

You are being invited to take part in this research because of your educational experience, which meets the criteria for this study. Criteria: Must be an educator who has taught grades 5-12 between the years 2018-2022, taught in the traditional environment prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, and also have transitioned to online teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic. Your experiences and perspectives can contribute to the richness of the research data.

Participant selection criteria will be based on *purposive criterion sampling* which involves identifying the criteria that participants must meet to be eligible for the study, engaging participants who meet those criteria, and then selecting a diverse, representative sample from that group.

Voluntary Participation

Your participation in this research is entirely voluntary. It is your choice whether to participate. If you choose not to participate, there will be no punitive repercussions.

Right to Refuse or Withdraw

Participation is voluntary. At any time you wish to end your participation in the research study, you may do so by sending me an email explaining you are opting out of the study. There will be no repercussions for leaving the study.

Procedures

We are inviting you to participate in this research study. If you agree, you will be asked to attend a one-on-one interview and/or a small focus group via videoconference. The type of questions asked will range from a demographical perspective to direct inquiries about the topics of: social and emotional learning, social presence, student engagement, traditional learning, online learning, and COVID-19.

Durations

The interview portion of the research study will require approximately 20 minutes to complete. If you are chosen to participate, the time allotted for the interview will be between 15-30 minutes. Individual interviews will be set up at a time that is convenient for you. Prior to the interview, you will be asked to provide permission to have the interview recorded for the sake of having accurate transcripts for data. A transcript of the interview recording may be emailed to the participant with the opportunity to make corrections, as needed, prior to data analysis.

The focus group portion of the research study will require approximately 35 minutes to complete. If you are chosen to participate, the time allotted for the interview will be between 30-45 minutes at a time that is mutually convenient for the group. Prior to an focus group, you will be asked to provide permission to have the focus group recorded for the sake of having accurate transcripts for data.

Risks

The researcher will ask you to share personal and confidential information, and you may feel uncomfortable talking about some of the topics. You do not have to answer any question or take part in the discussion if you don't wish to do so. You do not have to give any reason for not responding to any question.

Benefits

While there will be no direct financial benefit to you, your participation is likely to help us find out more about the impact on student engagement in the online learning environment. The potential benefits of this study will aid the knowledge base by understanding the influence of student engagement in the traditional and online learning environments in the K-12 setting.

Confidentiality

I will not share information about you or anything you say to anyone outside of the interview and/or focus group. During the data analysis portion of the research, names will be redacted from the transcript. Any information about you will be coded and will not have a direct correlation, which directly identifies you as the participant. Only I will know what your number is, and I will secure your information on a password protected computer. During the defense of the doctoral dissertation, the anonymous coded data will be presented to the dissertation committee. The data collected will be kept in a locked file cabinet or encrypted computer file until destroyed. The data will be kept for three years before being destroyed in accordance with federal regulations that require research records to be retained for at least three years after the completion of the research.

Sharing the Results

At the end of the research study, the results will be available for each participant. It is anticipated to publish the results so other interested people may learn from the research.

Questions About the Study

If you have any questions, you can ask them now or later. If you wish to ask questions later, you may contact me at any point. This research plan has been reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board of American College of Education. This is a committee whose role is to make sure research participants are protected from harm. If you wish to ask questions of this group, email IRB@ace.edu.

Certificate of Consent

I have read the information about this study, or it has been read to me. I acknowledge why I have been asked to be a participant in the research study. I have been provided the opportunity to ask questions about the study, and any questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I certify I am at least 18 years of age. I consent voluntarily to be a participant in this study.

Name of Participant: _____

Signature of Participant: _____

Date: _____

I confirm that the participant was given an opportunity to ask questions about the study, and all the questions asked by the participant have been answered to the best of my ability. I confirm that the individual has not been coerced into giving consent, and the consent has been given freely and voluntarily. A copy of this Consent Form has been provided to the participant.

Name of Lead Researcher: Valerie Santana

Signature of Lead Researcher: _____ Date: June 1, 2023

PLEASE KEEP THIS INFORMED CONSENT FORM FOR YOUR RECORDS.

Appendix D

Research Data Instrument: Interview Protocol



Research Data Instrument: Interview Protocol

1. *[Begin videoconference meeting.]* "Thank you for agreeing to help me with my study. I know you've already returned your consent form to me; do you have any questions before we get started?"
2. "I'll be recording this session, is that still ok with you?" *[If participant answers yes - turn on recording.]*
3. "Ok, I've started recording."
4. "So it is captured on the recording, please confirm that it is ok that I record this session."
5. "Welcome. Thanks for taking the time to talk about your perceptions of student engagement during online learning. My name is Valerie Santana, and I am a doctoral candidate student at American College of Education. I am doing research gathering educator perceptions of social and emotional learning and social presence on student engagement in the K-12 setting during the transition from traditional to online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic and its influence on student engagement."
6. "You are being asked to share your perspectives on student engagement during the shift to online learning during COVID-19. You were invited because of your educational experience, which meets the criteria for this study. The criteria is that you must have been an educator of grades 5-12 between the years 2018-2022, taught in the traditional environment prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, and transitioned to online teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic. Your experiences and perspectives can contribute to the richness of the research data."
7. "I have developed a list of questions to address my topic. I hope you will answer all of them, but I do understand if there are some you prefer not to answer. If there is a question you'd like to skip, just let me know and I'll move on to my next question. I expect our interview to last approximately 35 minutes."

Demographic Questions:

- Are you currently teaching?
 - If so, what is your current teaching assignment?
 - Ethnicity
 - State
 - Length of experience
 - Public/private/charter?
 - School demographics (urban/suburban/rural, ELL, ESE, FRL)?
 - Grade level(s)
 - If not, what is your current occupation?

Introductory Questions:

- What is your philosophy on education, student learning, and the role of the educator?
- How would you describe your level of preparedness to teach online?
- Describe how your school/district transitioned to online learning during COVID-19.

Research Question 1: What are the perceptions of educators on whether explicit social and emotional learning instruction can improve student engagement outcomes in the online learning environment?

- What do you know about social and emotional learning? *[Wait for response. Provide research-based definition of social and emotional learning the process of acquiring and applying the skills that aid one in understanding and managing their emotions, thoughts,*

and behaviors, as well as social interactions and relationships with others (CASEL, 2023).]

- Describe how your learners performed during / adjusted to the transition to online learning during COVID-19.
- Describe how your learners performed during / adjusted to the transition back to traditional face-to-face learning after COVID-19? How were they different, if at all?

Research Question 2: What are the perceptions of educators on whether explicit teacher social presence practices can improve student engagement outcomes in the online learning environment?

- What do you know about social presence? [Wait for response. *Provide research-based definition of social presence theory as the concept in communication studies that aims to explain the degree to which individuals feel a sense of "being there" in a given communication situation. The theory proposes that the perceived level of social presence in a communication setting is influenced by the medium of communication, the language used, and the personal characteristics of the participants (Oh, et al., 2018).*]
- How do you typically employ social presence practices in your instruction?
- During COVID-19 online-learning, describe how you employed social presence practices in your online instruction?
- Describe any differences between your in-person vs online social presence practice and the impact you think it had on your learners?

8. "Thank you for taking the time to participate in this interview. Before I turn off the recording, is there anything else you think may aid in this research study? Do you have any questions you would like to ask me about the study?..."
9. "Again, thank you. You have my contact information if you need to reach me later."
10. "Thank you again for participating. At this time I will turn off the recording and end the interview session. Goodbye." [End the recording. Leave the meeting.]

References:

- CASEL. (2023). Fundamentals of SEL. <https://casel.org/fundamentals-of-sel/>
- Oh, C., Bailenson, J. & Welch, G. (2018) A systematic review of social presence: Definition, antecedents, and implications. *Frontiers in Robotics and AI*, 5(114). <https://doi.org/10.3389/frobt.2018.00114>

Appendix E

Research Data Instrument: Focus Group Protocol



Research Data Instrument: Focus Group Protocol

1. *[Begin videoconference meeting.]* "Thank you for agreeing to help me with my study. I know you've already returned your consent form to me; do you have any questions before we get started?"
2. "As a housekeeping note, please take a moment to ensure the screen name in this videoconference includes your first name and last initial. I have posted directions in the chat and will share the directions on my screen momentarily."
3. "I'll be recording this session, is that still ok with you?" *[If all participants answer yes - turn on recording.]*
4. "Ok, I've started recording."
5. "So it is captured on the recording, please confirm that it is ok that I record this session."
6. "Welcome. Thanks for taking the time to talk about your perceptions of student engagement during online learning. My name is Valerie Santana, and I am a doctoral candidate student at American College of Education. I am doing research gathering educator perceptions of social and emotional learning and social presence on student engagement in the K-12 setting during the transition from traditional to online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic and its influence on student engagement."
7. "You are being asked to share your perspectives on student engagement during the shift to online learning during COVID-19. You were invited because of your educational experience, which meets the criteria for this study. The criteria is that you must have been an educator of grades 5-12 between the years 2018-2022, taught in the traditional environment prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, and transitioned to online teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic. Your experiences and perspectives can contribute to the richness of the research data."
8. "I have developed a list of questions to address my topic. I hope you will answer all of them, but I do understand if there are some you prefer not to answer. If there is a question you'd like to skip, just let me know and I'll move on to my next question. I expect our interview to last approximately 35 minutes."

Research Question 1: What are the perceptions of educators on whether explicit social and emotional learning instruction can improve student engagement outcomes in the online learning environment?

- To what extent do you typically employ social and emotional learning practices in your instruction?
- How would you describe the purpose of employing social and emotional learning practices in instruction?
- What are your thoughts on whether explicit social and emotional learning instruction can improve student engagement outcomes in the online learning environment?

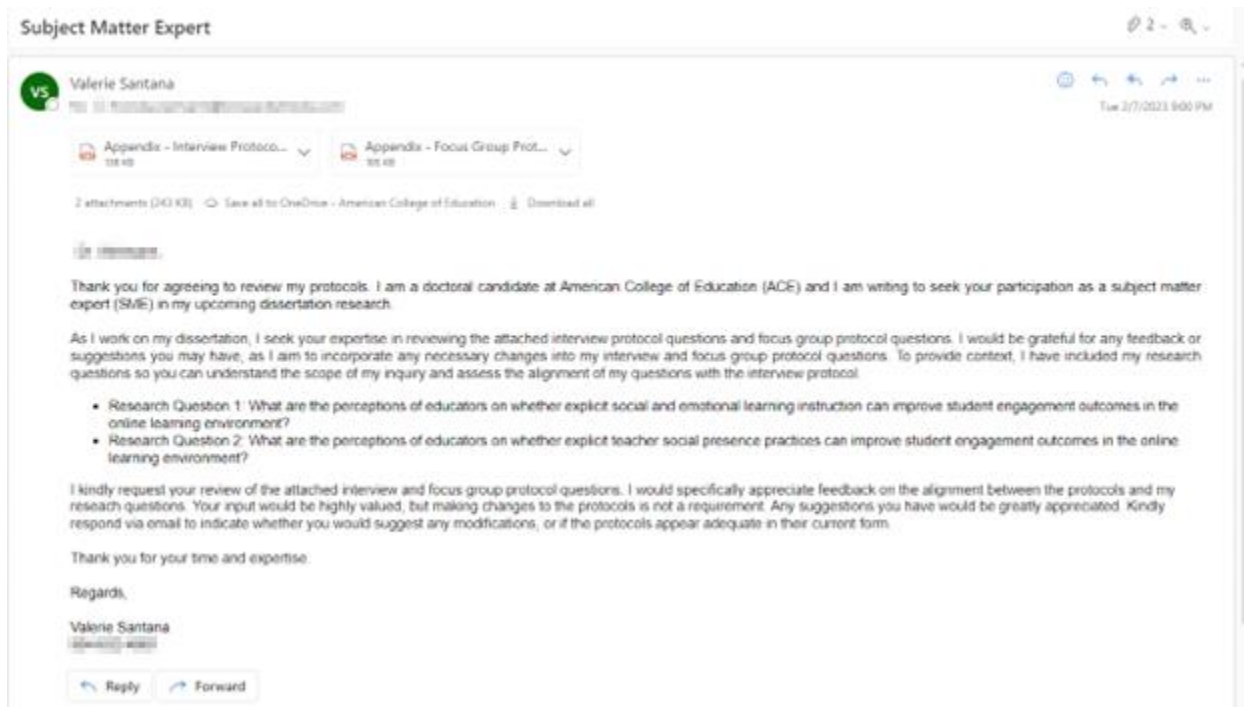
Research Question 2: What are the perceptions of educators on whether explicit teacher social presence practices can improve student engagement outcomes in the online learning environment?

- Describe the relationship between social presence and student engagement.
- What are your thoughts on whether explicit social presence instructional practices can improve student engagement outcomes in the online learning environment?

- If you had to do it over again, what would you have liked to have known about social presence or social emotional learning before transitioning to online learning? What did you learn in hindsight? Is there anything you would do differently?
9. "Thank you for taking the time to participate in this focus group. Before I turn off the recording, are there any final thoughts that may aid in this research study? Do you have any questions you would like to ask me about the study?..."
 10. "Again, thank you. You have my contact information if you need to reach me later."
 11. "Thank you again for participating. At this time I will turn off the recording and end the interview session. Goodbye." *[End the recording. Leave the meeting.]*

Appendix F

Field Testing by Three SMEs - Research Data Instrument: Interview Questions



Re: Subject Matter Expert

From: Valerie Santana <valerie.santana@ace.edu>

Fri 2/24/2023 1:37 PM

To: Valerie Santana

Please be cautious

This email originated from outside of ACE organization

Hi Valerie,

So sorry for the late response, I looked at these documents, and read them over but wanted to make sure I understood the purpose of the questions.

The questions are clear and understandable. The only points I need a little clarification on are:

Introductory Questions

#2bullet Preparedness to teach online

Is this question directed toward Prior to the Pandemic? or Now?

Research Question 1

What is your knowledge base of social-emotional learning instruction? (More specifically) Have you taken any courses? What information have you been given to implement/facilitate social-emotional learning?

Let me know if this is what you are looking for in this process. Do you need any further information?

Let me know, thanks and have a great weekend!

Re: Subject Matter Expert

Valerie Santana [REDACTED]

Mon 4/10/2023 5:32 PM

To: [REDACTED]

From: [REDACTED]

Thank you for reviewing my interview and focus group instruments. I sincerely appreciate your feedback on these items. I have updated my instrument with your feedback as outlined below.

Introductory Questions: See updated question to include the word "current" for clarification.

Introductory Questions:

- What is your philosophy on education, student learning, and the role of the educator?
- How would you describe your **current** level of preparedness to teach online?
- Describe how your school/district transitioned to online learning during COVID-19.

Research Question 1: I have added this question between the first and third bullet as a scaffold to understanding the educator's readiness to teach SEL.

Research Question 1: What are the perceptions of educators on whether explicit social and emotional learning instruction can improve student engagement outcomes in the online learning environment?

- What do you know about social and emotional learning? [Wait for response. *Provide research-based definition of social and emotional learning the process of acquiring and applying the skills that aid one in understanding and managing their emotions, thoughts, and behaviors, as well as social interactions and relationships with others (CASEL, 2023).*]
- What is your knowledge base of social-emotional learning instruction? More specifically, have you taken any courses? What information have you been given to implement/facilitate social-emotional learning?
- To what extent do you typically employ social and emotional learning practices in your instruction?
- How would you describe the purpose of employing social and emotional learning practices in instruction?
- Describe how your learners performed during / adjusted to the transition to online learning during COVID-19.
- Describe how your learners performed during / adjusted to the transition back to traditional face-to-face learning after COVID-19? How were they different, if at all?
- What are your thoughts on whether explicit social and emotional learning instruction can improve student engagement outcomes in the online learning environment?

Again, thank you for your time and expertise. I am grateful for any further feedback.

Respectfully,

Valerie Santana

[REDACTED]

Subject Matter Expert Assistance

Valerie J. Santana <[REDACTED]>

Tue 2/7/2023 8:45 PM

To: [REDACTED] <[REDACTED]>

Good evening [REDACTED]

I hope you are well. I am reaching out in the hopes of your assistance. I am a doctoral candidate at American College of Education (ACE) and I am writing to seek your participation as a subject matter expert (SME) in my upcoming dissertation research.

I am working on a qualitative intrinsic case study titled *The Influence of Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) Practices and Social Presence on Student Engagement During Online Learning: A Qualitative Case Study*. Educators are being invited to participate in one-on-one interviews and a small group focus group to share their perspectives on how SEL (the process of developing self-awareness, self-control, and interpersonal skills) and Social Presence (the feeling of being together) may have impacted student engagement during the transition to online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. The goal of this study is to advance knowledge by understanding perspectives on the impact of student engagement in the traditional and online learning environments.

To this end, I seek your expertise in reviewing my interview protocol questions and focus group protocol questions to provide feedback on how closely my questions are aligned with my research questions. As an expert in Social and Emotional Learning, your feedback is valuable to me.

If you are available to review my protocols, please reply and will send you an email using my institution's email address with the protocols as attachments. You do not need to answer any of the questions, just provide feedback on the alignment between my protocols and my research questions. If you prefer me to use your personal email address, please include it in your reply. Of course, I completely understand if you are not available at this time to provide feedback.

Thank you very much for your time.

Respectfully,

Valerie Santana

Re: Subject Matter Expert Assistance

[REDACTED] <[REDACTED]>

Thu 2/2/2023 2:19 PM

To: Valerie Santana <[REDACTED]>

Cc: [REDACTED] <[REDACTED]>

Please be cautious

This email originated from outside of ACE organization

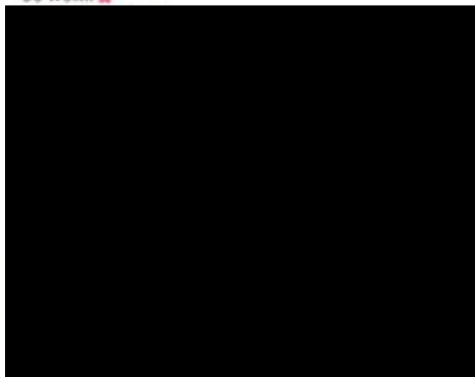
Hello,

I hope this email finds you well. [REDACTED] were finally able to devote time to discussing the interview questions you provided. We were impressed with the structure and excited about your love for SEL. Please refer to the attached document for our feedback. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to reach out.

Continued success!

[\[REDACTED\] Valerie Santana- Interview Protocol Feedback.docx](#)

Be well... 🌸



Interview Protocol/Focus Group Protocol Questions Feedback

~~Research Question and Interview Questions~~

Research Question 1: What are the perceptions of educators on whether explicit social and emotional learning instruction can improve student engagement outcomes in the online learning environment?

Considerations:

Potential additional demographic question: Have you received any form of SEL training (formal or informal)?

1. Is there a reason you did not include any grades lower than 5th grade?
2. Perhaps, as one of the first question, ask participants to describe "what do you know about SEL?"
3. *What is your perception of student engagement outcomes?* Perhaps the participants may not know what that is in reference to (for example, virtual features such as chat, microphone, on camera off camera, turning in assignments on time, emailing, etc.)
4. Would it be helpful to specifically ask what explicit SEL instruction means to the participant and what programs (if any) are used to explore the teachers' perception of SEL practices with students?
5. Would it be helpful to specifically ask for the participant to provide examples of "student engagement outcomes"
6. Perhaps ask *Did you provide a pre and post SEL survey or other form of metric/measurement? If so, describe the difference between pre and post results?*
 - a. Due to your question: "What are your thoughts on whether explicit social and emotional learning instruction can improve student engagement outcomes in the online learning environment?" the answer may come off subjectively and hard to determine if there is or is not a difference in whether explicit SEL instruction can improve student engagement outcomes in the online learning environment.
 - b. Perhaps, question asking "Did your school administer a SEL survey or any SEL metric during online learning?" "If so, do you think explicit SEL instruction can improve student engagement outcomes"

Research Question 2: What are the perceptions of educators on whether explicit teacher social presence practices can improve student engagement outcomes in the online learning environment?

Considerations:

1. What are examples of explicit social presence? Perhaps provide examples or offer that as a question prior to asking them their experience of impact.



Valerie Santana

To: C: [redacted]

Tue 2/7/2023 9:17 PM

Appendix - Interview Protoc...
134 KB

Appendix - Focus Group Prot...
131 KB

2 attachments (245 KB) Save all to OneDrive - American College of Education Download all

Thank you for agreeing to review my protocols. I am a doctoral candidate at American College of Education (ACE) and I am writing to seek your participation as a subject matter expert (SME) in my upcoming dissertation research.

As I work on my dissertation, I seek your expertise in reviewing the attached interview protocol questions and focus group protocol questions. As an expert in social and emotional learning and pedagogy, your feedback is valuable to me. I would be grateful for any feedback or suggestions you may have, as I aim to incorporate any necessary changes into my interview and focus group protocol questions. To provide context, I have included my research questions so you can understand the scope of my inquiry and assess the alignment of my questions with the interview protocol.

- Research Question 1: What are the perceptions of educators on whether explicit social and emotional learning instruction can improve student engagement outcomes in the online learning environment?
- Research Question 2: What are the perceptions of educators on whether explicit teacher social presence practices can improve student engagement outcomes in the online learning environment?

I kindly request your review of the attached interview and focus group protocol questions. I would specifically appreciate feedback on the alignment between the protocols and my research questions. Your input would be highly valued, but making changes to the protocols is not a requirement. Any suggestions you have would be greatly appreciated. Kindly respond via email to indicate whether you would suggest any modifications, or if the protocols appear adequate in their current form.

Thank you for your time and expertise

Regards,

Valerie Santana
[redacted]

Re: Subject Matter Expert Assistance

[Stephanie Erickson <stephanie.erickson@aceonline.org>](#) <stephanie.erickson@aceonline.org>

Mon 4/10/2023 9:35 PM

To: Valerie Santana <[REDACTED]>

Please be cautious

This email originated from outside of ACE organization

Good Evening Mrs. Santana,

It is my pleasure & honor to participate in providing my feedback on the social and emotional learning and teacher presence impacting & improving student engagement online learning environment.

The interview and focus group protocols appear adequate in their current form. Best of luck on your research.

Best Regards,



Re: Subject Matter Expert Assistance

Valerie Santana <[REDACTED]>

Mon 4/10/2023 9:38 PM

To: [Stephanie Erickson <stephanie.erickson@aceonline.org>](#) <stephanie.erickson@aceonline.org>

[Stephanie Erickson](#)

I am so very grateful to you for reviewing my interview and focus group protocols. I sincerely appreciate the time you have invested in me.

Very appreciatively,

Valerie Santana

[\[REDACTED\]](#)

Appendix G

Field Testing by Three SMEs - Research Data Instrument: Focus Group Questions

Re: Subject Matter Expert Assistance

Valerie Santana <[REDACTED]>

Mon 4/10/2023 3:42 PM

To: [REDACTED]

2 attachments (243 KB)

Appendix - Interview Protocol.pdf; Appendix - Focus Group Protocol.pdf

Good evening [REDACTED]

Thank you again for agreeing to review my interview and focus group protocols. As discussed, I am a doctoral candidate at American College of Education (ACE) and I am writing to seek your participation as a subject matter expert (SME) in my upcoming dissertation research.

As I work on my dissertation, I seek your expertise in reviewing the attached interview protocol questions and focus group protocol questions. As an expert in social and emotional learning and pedagogy, your feedback is valuable to me. I would be grateful for any feedback or suggestions you may have, as I aim to incorporate any necessary changes into my interview and focus group protocol questions. To provide context, I have included my research questions so you can understand the scope of my inquiry and assess the alignment of my questions with the interview protocol.

Research Question 1: What are the perceptions of educators on whether explicit social and emotional learning instruction can improve student engagement outcomes in the online learning environment?

Research Question 2: What are the perceptions of educators on whether explicit teacher social presence practices can improve student engagement outcomes in the online learning environment?

I kindly request your review of the attached interview and focus group protocol questions. I would specifically appreciate feedback on the alignment between the protocols and my research questions. Your input would be highly valued, but making changes to the protocols is not a requirement. Any suggestions you have would be greatly appreciated. **Kindly respond via email to indicate whether you would suggest any modifications, or if the protocols appear adequate in their current form.**

Thank you for your time and expertise.

Regards,

Valerie Santana

[REDACTED]

Re: Subject Matter Expert Assistance

[REDACTED]

Mon 4/10/2023 6:52 PM

To: Valerie Santana <[REDACTED]>

Please be cautious

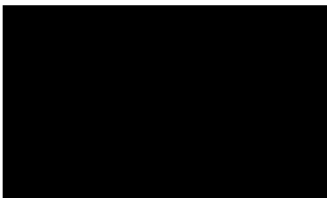
This email originated from outside of ACE organization

Good evening Ms. Santana,

After reviewing the interview protocol questions and focus group protocol questions, the interview and focus group protocols appear adequate in their current form.

Best of luck on your research.

Kind regards,



Re: Subject Matter Expert Assistance

Valerie Santana <[REDACTED]>

Mon 4/10/2023 6:58 PM

To: [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

I am so very grateful to you for reviewing my interview and focus group protocols. I sincerely appreciate the time you have invested in me.

Very appreciatively,

Valerie Santana

[REDACTED]

Subject Matter Expert Assistance

Valerie Santana <[REDACTED]>

Wed 2/8/2023 9:11 PM

To: [REDACTED]

2 attachments (243 KB)

Appendix - Interview Protocol.pdf; Appendix - Focus Group Protocol.pdf

[REDACTED]

Thank you for agreeing to review my protocols. I am a doctoral candidate at American College of Education (ACE) and I am writing to seek your participation as a subject matter expert (SME) in my upcoming dissertation research.

As I work on my dissertation, I seek your expertise in reviewing the attached interview protocol questions and focus group protocol questions. As an expert in social and emotional learning and pedagogy, your feedback is valuable to me. I would be grateful for any feedback or suggestions you may have as I aim to incorporate any necessary changes into my interview and focus group protocol questions. To provide context, I have included my research questions so you can understand the scope of my inquiry and assess the alignment of my questions with the interview protocol.

- Research Question 1: What are the perceptions of educators on whether explicit social and emotional learning instruction can improve student engagement outcomes in the online learning environment?
- Research Question 2: What are the perceptions of educators on whether explicit teacher social presence practices can improve student engagement outcomes in the online learning environment?


I kindly request your review of the attached interview and focus group protocol questions. I would specifically appreciate feedback on the alignment between the protocols and my research questions. Your input would be highly valued, but making changes to the protocols is not a requirement. Kindly respond via email to indicate whether you would suggest any modifications, or if the protocols appear adequate in their current form.


Thank you for your time and expertise.


Regards,

Valerie Santana


[REDACTED]

 Valerie Santana
To: Dr.Brian.Stewart@ace.edu
Tue 2/7/2022 9:00 PM

 Appendix - Interview Protocol.docx
104 KB

 Appendix - Focus Group Protocol.docx
105 KB

2 attachments (243 KB) [Save all to OneDrive - American College of Education](#) [Download all](#)

 [Download](#)


Thank you for agreeing to review my protocols. I am a doctoral candidate at American College of Education (ACE) and I am writing to seek your participation as a subject matter expert (SME) in my upcoming dissertation research.

As I work on my dissertation, I seek your expertise in reviewing the attached interview protocol questions and focus group protocol questions. I would be grateful for any feedback or suggestions you may have, as I am to incorporate any necessary changes into my interview and focus group protocol questions. To provide context, I have included my research questions so you can understand the scope of my inquiry and assess the alignment of my questions with the interview protocol.

- Research Question 1: What are the perceptions of educators on whether explicit social and emotional learning instruction can improve student engagement outcomes in the online learning environment?
- Research Question 2: What are the perceptions of educators on whether explicit teacher social presence practices can improve student engagement outcomes in the online learning environment?

I kindly request your review of the attached interview and focus group protocol questions. I would specifically appreciate feedback on the alignment between the protocols and my research questions. Your input would be highly valued, but making changes to the protocols is not a requirement. Any suggestions you have would be greatly appreciated. Kindly respond via email to indicate whether you would suggest any modifications, or if the protocols appear adequate in their current form.


Thank you for your time and expertise.

Regards,
Valerie Santana


[Reply](#) [Forward](#)

Appendix H

Research Recruitment Google Form



Research Recruitment

Educators who taught during the COVID-19 pandemic are being recruited to participate in an interview and focus group to gather perceptions on student engagement during online learning. More Info [REDACTED]

[Switch account](#)

Not shared

* Indicates required question

Name: Last, First *

SAMPLE

Email Address *

SAMPLE

Are you an educator who has taught grades 5-12 between the years 2018-2022? *

☒ Yes

☐ No

Did you teach in the traditional (face-to-face) learning environment prior to the COVID-19 pandemic? *

☒ Yes

☐ No

Did you transition from traditional to online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic? *

☒ Yes

☐ No

[Next](#) [Clear form](#)

Page 1 of 3

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Google Forms

Research Recruitment

Your email will be recorded when you submit this form

Demographic Information:

The information below is optional. It will be used to ensure study participants that are demographically diverse.

In which state / country do you live?

Your answer

Ethnicity?

☐ American Indian / Alaska Native

☐ Asian

☐ Black / African American

☐ Hispanic / Latin(a/o)

☐ Native Hawaiian / Other Pacific Islander

☐ White

How long have you been a teacher?

☐ 0-5

☐ 6-10

☐ 11-20

☐ 25+

Teaching Level(s):

☐ Elementary School

☐ Middle School

☐ High School

☐ College / University

Teaching Experience(s):

☐ Public School

☐ Private / Charter School

School Communities:

☐ Rural


☐ Suburban

☐ Urban



[Back](#)[Next](#)


Page 2 of 3

[Clear form](#)




Research Recruitment

 [Switch account](#) 

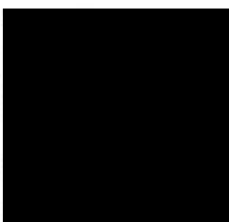
 Not shared


Informed Consent:

Follow the link or use the QR Code to view and sign the [INFORMED CONSENT](#) document. Afterwards, I will reach out to you via email to schedule our videoconference interview.

Questions: Email me at . Thank you!

[!\[\]\(e98a08cd18087ce8e92a28679faf7126_img.jpg\)](https://bit.ly/)



[Back](#) [Submit](#)  Page 3 of 3 [Clear form](#)

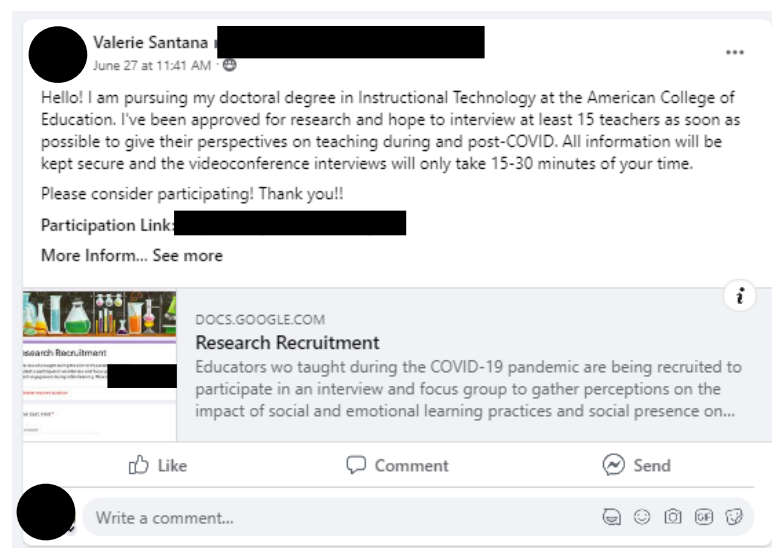
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Google Forms

Appendix I

Five Research Recruitment Posts on Facebook Group



 Valerie Santana [redacted]
June 30 at 7:05 PM · 🌐

Hello! I am pursuing my doctoral degree in Instructional Technology at the American College of Education. Click the link below to participate in videoconference interview and focus group. Seeking teacher perspectives on teaching during and post-COVID. All information will be kept secure. Each will take 15-30 minutes of your time. Please consider participating! Thank you!!

Participation Link: [redacted]
More Information - [redacted]
If ... See more

DRIVE.GOOGLE.COM 

Appendix - Recruitment Letter.pdf

2 comments


 Like  Comment  Send



 [redacted]
I would participate, but time is an issue. I earned a masters and my ED.D from ACE; LOVED IT! The best to you!


 Like  Reply 3w






 Valerie Santana [redacted]
July 3 at 6:38 PM · 🌐

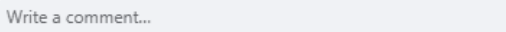
Hello! I am pursuing my doctoral degree in Instructional Technology at the American College of Education. Click the link below to participate in a videoconference interview and focus group. Seeking teacher perspectives on student engagement during and post-COVID. All information will be kept secure. Each will take 15-30 minutes of your time. Please consider participating! Thank you!!

Participation Link: [redacted]
More Information - [redacted]. See more

DRIVE.GOOGLE.COM 

Appendix - Recruitment Letter.pdf

 Like  Comment  Send

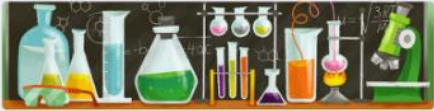


Valerie Santana [redacted]
July 13 at 5:37 AM · [redacted]

Hello! I am pursuing my doctoral degree in Instructional Technology at the American College of Education. Click the link below to participate in a videoconference interview and focus group. Seeking teacher perspectives on student engagement during and post-COVID. All information will be kept secure. Each will take 15-20 minutes of your time. Please consider participating! Thank you!!

Participation Link: [redacted]

If you have any questions, feel free to reply, DM, or email me at [redacted]



Research Recruitment

Educators who taught during the COVID-19 pandemic are being recruited to participate in an interview and focus group to gather perspectives on student engagement during online learning. More info [redacted]

* Indicates required question

Name: Last, First *

Your answer

DOCS.GOOGLE.COM

Research Recruitment
Educators who taught during the COVID-19 pandemic are being recruited to participate in an i...

Like Comment Send

Write a comment...

Appendix J

Informed Consent via DocuSign

Please Review & Act on These Documents

VALERIE SANTANA
VALERIE SANTANA

DocuSign

Please review the documents below.

CONTINUE FINISH LATER OTHER ACTIONS

to ask questions at any time before, during, or after your participation in this research.

Project Information
Project Title: *The Influence of Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) Practice on Student Engagement During Online Learning: A Qualitative Case Study*
Researcher: Valerie Santana
Organization: American College of Education - <https://ace.edu/>
Email: [REDACTED]
Telephone: [REDACTED]
Date of IRB Approval: June 1, 2023

Please note that this research study has been approved by the American College of Education Institutional Review Board. The IRB approved this study on June 1, 2023. A copy of the approval letter will be provided upon request.

[REDACTED]

Introduction
 I am Valerie Santana, and I am a doctoral candidate student at American College of Education. I am doing research under the guidance and supervision of my [REDACTED]. I will give you some information about the project and invite you to be part of this research. Before you decide, you can talk to anyone you feel comfortable with about the research. If you have questions, ask me to stop as we go through the information, and I will explain. If you have questions later, feel free to ask me then.

Purpose of the Research
 The purpose is to investigate educator perceptions of social and emotional learning (the process of developing self-awareness, self-control, and interpersonal skills) and social presence (the feeling of being together) on student engagement in the K-12 setting during the transition from traditional to online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic and its influence on student engagement. You are being asked to participate in a research study which will assist with obtaining various perspectives on the impact on student engagement in the online learning environment. Conducting this qualitative research study will advance the knowledge base by understanding the influence of student engagement in the traditional and online learning environments.

Research Design and Procedures
 The study will use a qualitative research methodology and intrinsic case study research design which focuses on the unique individual to help the researcher understand a particular phenomenon within its real-life context. One-on-one interviews and a small group focus group via videoconference at a mutually agreeable time will be arranged with selected participants. The study will comprise a minimum of 15 participants as a true sample size. Individuals will be asked to provide permission to record the interview and focus group sessions for the sake of having accurate transcripts for data. A transcript of the interview, along with the opportunity to make corrections, will be afforded prior to data analysis.

Informed Consent Document.pdf 1 of 3

Use the Finish Later option to continue signing this document at a later time. [Learn more.](#)


GOT IT

Please review the documents below.

FINISH **FINISH LATER** **OTHER ACTIONS**

DocuSign Envelope ID: CAF582B5-1EDC-4BD8-B4DF-D5FA253CA2A1

START



Prospective Research Participant: Read this consent form carefully and ask as many questions as you like before you decide whether you want to participate in this research study. You are free to ask questions at any time before, during, or after your participation in this research.

Project Information

Project Title: *The Influence of Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) Practices and Social Presence on Student Engagement During Online Learning: A Qualitative Case Study*

Researcher: Valerie Santana

Organization: American College of Education - <https://ace.edu/>

Email: [REDACTED]

Telephone: [REDACTED]

Date of IRB Approval: June 1, 2023

Please note that this research study has been approved by the American College of Education Institutional Review Board. The IRB approved this study on June 1, 2023. A copy of the approval letter will be provided upon request.

[REDACTED]

Introduction

I am Valerie Santana, and I am a doctoral candidate student at American College of Education. I am doing research under the guidance and supervision of my [REDACTED]. I will give you some information about the project and invite you to be part of this research. Before you decide, you can talk to anyone you feel comfortable with about the research. If you have questions, ask me to stop as we go through the information, and I will explain. If you have questions later, feel free to ask me then.

Purpose of the Research

The purpose is to investigate educator perceptions of social and emotional learning (the process of developing self-awareness, self-control, and interpersonal skills) and social presence (the feeling of being together) on student engagement in the K-12 setting during the transition from traditional to online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic and its influence on student engagement. You are being asked to participate in a research study which will assist with obtaining various perspectives on the impact on student engagement in the online learning environment. Conducting this qualitative research study will advance the knowledge base by understanding the influence of student engagement in the traditional and online learning environments.

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The study will use a qualitative research methodology and intrinsic case study research design which focuses on the unique individual to help the researcher understand a particular phenomenon within its real-life context. One-on-one interviews and a small group focus group via videoconference at a mutually agreeable time will be arranged with selected participants. The study will comprise a minimum of 15 participants as a true sample size. Individuals will be asked to provide permission to record the interview and focus group sessions for the sake of having accurate transcripts for data. A transcript of the interview, along with the opportunity to make corrections, will be afforded prior to data analysis.

Please review the documents below.

FINISH **FINISH LATER** **OTHER ACTIONS**

DocuSign Envelope ID: CAF582B5-1EDC-4BD8-B4DF-D5FA253CA2A1

START

Participant selection

You are being invited to take part in this research because of your educational experience, which meets the criteria for this study. Criteria: Must be an educator who has taught grades 5-12 between the years 2018-2022, taught in the traditional environment prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, and also have transitioned to online teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic. Your experiences and perspectives can contribute to the richness of the research data.

Participant selection criteria will be based on *purposive criterion sampling* which involves identifying the criteria that participants must meet to be eligible for the study, engaging participants who meet those criteria, and then selecting a diverse, representative sample from that group.

Voluntary Participation

Your participation in this research is entirely voluntary. It is your choice whether to participate. If you choose not to participate, there will be no punitive repercussions.

Right to Refuse or Withdraw

Participation is voluntary. At any time you wish to end your participation in the research study, you may do so by sending me an email explaining you are opting out of the study. There will be no repercussions for leaving the study.

Procedures

We are inviting you to participate in this research study. If you agree, you will be asked to attend a one-on-one interview and/or a small focus group via videoconference. The type of questions asked will range from a demographical perspective to direct inquiries about the topics of: social and emotional learning, social presence, student engagement, traditional learning, online learning, and COVID-19.

Durations

The interview portion of the research study will require approximately 20 minutes to complete. If you are chosen to participate, the time allotted for the interview will be between 15-30 minutes. Individual interviews will be set up at a time that is convenient for you. Prior to the interview, you will be asked to provide permission to have the interview recorded for the sake of having accurate transcripts for data. A transcript of the interview recording may be emailed to the participant with the opportunity to make corrections, as needed, prior to data analysis.

The focus group portion of the research study will require approximately 35 minutes to complete. If you are chosen to participate, the time allotted for the interview will be between 30-45 minutes at a time that is mutually convenient for the group. Prior to an focus group, you will be asked to provide permission to have the focus group recorded for the sake of having accurate transcripts for data.

Risks

The researcher will ask you to share personal and confidential information, and you may feel uncomfortable talking about some of the topics. You do not have to answer any question or take part in the discussion if you don't wish to do so. You do not have to give any reason for not responding to any question.

Benefits

While there will be no direct financial benefit to you, your participation is likely to help us find out more about the impact on student engagement in the online learning environment. The potential benefits of this study will aid the knowledge base by understanding the influence of student engagement in the traditional and online learning environments in the K-12 setting.

Informed Consent Document.pdf

2 of 3

Please review the documents below. **FINISH** **FINISH LATER** **OTHER ACTIONS**

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START


Confidentiality
I will not share information about you or anything you say to anyone outside of the interview and/or focus group. During the data analysis portion of the research, names will be redacted from the transcript. Any information about you will be coded and will not have a direct correlation, which directly identifies you as the participant. Only I will know what your number is, and I will secure your information on a password protected computer. During the defense of the doctoral dissertation, the anonymous coded data will be presented to the dissertation committee. The data collected will be kept in a locked file cabinet or encrypted computer file until destroyed. The data will be kept for three years before being destroyed in accordance with federal regulations that require research records to be retained for at least three years after the completion of the research.

Sharing the Results
At the end of the research study, the results will be available for each participant. It is anticipated to publish the results so other interested people may learn from the research.

Questions About the Study
If you have any questions, you can ask them now or later. If you wish to ask questions later, you may contact me at any point. This research plan has been reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board of American College of Education. This is a committee whose role is to make sure research participants are protected from harm. If you wish to ask questions of this group, email IRB@ace.edu.

Certificate of Consent
I have read the information about this study, or it has been read to me. I acknowledge why I have been asked to be a participant in the research study. I have been provided the opportunity to ask questions about the study, and any questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I certify I am at least 18 years of age. I consent voluntarily to be a participant in this study.

Name of Participant: _____ Email: _____

Signature of Participant:  Date: 7/26/2023 | 9:13 PM EDT

I confirm that the participant was given an opportunity to ask questions about the study, and all the questions asked by the participant have been answered to the best of my ability. I confirm that the individual has not been coerced into giving consent, and the consent has been given freely and voluntarily. A copy of this Consent Form has been provided to the participant.


Name of Lead Researcher: Valerie Santana
Signature of Lead Researcher: _____ Date: June 1, 2023

PLEASE KEEP THIS INFORMED CONSENT FORM FOR YOUR RECORDS.

Informed Consent Document.pdf 3 of 3

Done! Select Finish to send the completed document. **FINISH** **FINISH LATER** **OTHER ACTIONS**

Save a Copy of Your Document



Your document has been signed
If you would like a copy for your records, select Download or Print and save.

DOWNLOAD **PRINT** **CLOSE**


Confidentiality
I will not share information about you or anything you say to anyone outside of the interview and/or focus group. During the data analysis portion of the research, names will be redacted from the transcript. Any information about you will be coded and will not have a direct correlation, which directly identifies you as the participant. Only I will know what your number is, and I will secure your information on a password protected computer. During the defense of the doctoral dissertation, the anonymous coded data will be presented to the dissertation committee. The data collected will be kept in a locked file cabinet or encrypted computer file until destroyed. The data will be kept for three years before being destroyed in accordance with federal regulations that require research records to be retained for at least three years after the completion of the research.

Sharing the Results
At the end of the research study, the results will be available for each participant. It is anticipated to publish the results so other interested people may learn from the research.

Questions About the Study
If you have any questions, you can ask them now or later. If you wish to ask questions later, you may contact me at any point. This research plan has been reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board of American College of Education. This is a committee whose role is to make sure research participants are protected from harm. If you wish to ask questions of this group, email IRB@ace.edu.

Certificate of Consent
I have read the information about this study, or it has been read to me. I acknowledge why I have been asked to be a participant in the research study. I have been provided the opportunity to ask questions about the study, and any questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I certify I am at least 18 years of age. I consent voluntarily to be a participant in this study.

Name of Participant: SAMPLE Email: SAMPLE@SAMPLE.COM

Signature of Participant:  Date: 7/26/2023 | 9:16 PM EDT

I confirm that the participant was given an opportunity to ask questions about the study, and all the questions asked by the participant have been answered to the best of my ability. I confirm that the individual has not been coerced into giving consent, and the consent has been given freely and voluntarily. A copy of this Consent Form has been provided to the participant.

Name of Lead Researcher: Valerie Santana
Signature of Lead Researcher: _____ Date: June 1, 2023

PLEASE KEEP THIS INFORMED CONSENT FORM FOR YOUR RECORDS.

Informed Consent Document.pdf 3 of 3

FINISH

Appendix K

Research Recruitment Interview Scheduling Email

Research Confirmation and Interview Scheduling: NML

VS

Valerie Santana

To: [REDACTED]

Dear [REDACTED],

Thank you for your willingness to participate in my research. I am pleased to confirm that I have received your signed informed Consent. Your comfort and understanding of the process is of utmost importance.

I am writing to schedule our 1:1 interview via Microsoft Teams. To accommodate your schedule as best as possible, please find the following options (Eastern Standard Time):

1. Saturday, July 8, 2023 (afternoon)
2. Sunday, July 9, 2023 (afternoon or evening)
3. Monday, July 10, 2023 (morning, afternoon, or evening)
4. Monday, July 17, 2023 (morning, afternoon, or evening)

Please reply to advise which date/time works best for you, and I will promptly confirm and provide a link to a Microsoft Teams meeting. Please note the meeting invitation may come from my work email: vsantana@mcneese.edu.

Additionally, we have a tentatively scheduled **Focus Group meeting on Saturday, July 22, 2023, at 1:00 p.m.** All 15 participants will meet as a group via Teams to share perspectives. This is a valuable part of the study necessary to triangulate data and increase validity. I will confirm this calendar item as the date nears to ensure all participants are available. Please confirm your availability for this date.

For more information on the study, [REDACTED] should you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to reach out. Thank you once again for your contribution to this research.

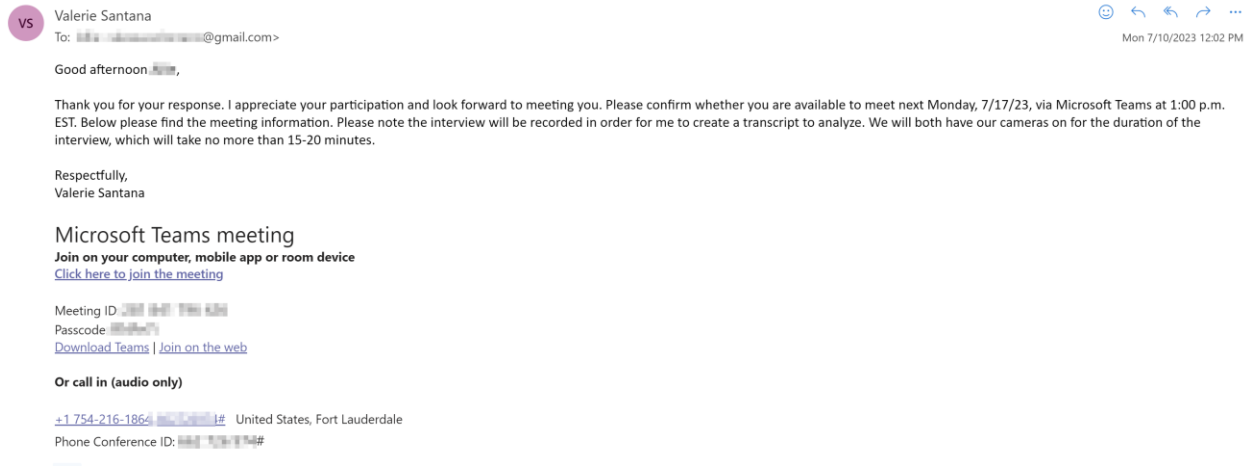
Best regards,

Valerie Santana
Principal Investigator

Sat 7/8/2023 10:19 AM

Appendix L

Research Recruitment Interview Confirmation Email



Appendix M

Research Recruitment Focus Group Confirmation and Reminder Emails

Research Confirmation and Interview Scheduling

VS Valerie Santana
Dear [redacted], Thank you for your willingness to participate in my research. I am pleased to confirm that I have received your signed Informed Consent. Your comfort and understanding of the process is of utmost importance. Please complete the ... Mon 7/10/2023 5:28 PM

See 7 more messages

VS Valerie Santana
To: [redacted]
I [redacted]
I hope you are well. I am writing to confirm our Focus Group session on **Saturday, 7/22/23, at 1:00 p.m.** via Teams. Please find the link below.
I appreciate your participation and I look forward to seeing you then. Please confirm that you are still available to attend.
Respectfully,
Valerie Santana

Microsoft Teams meeting

Join on your computer, mobile app or room device
[Click here to join the meeting](#)

Meeting ID: [redacted]
Passcode: [redacted]
[redacted] Fort Lauderdale
[redacted]

Reminder: Focus Group Today @ 1:00 p.m.

VS Valerie Santana
Bcc: [redacted] + 11 others
Sat 7/02/2023 8:20 AM

Good morning! Thank you again for participating in a 1:1 interview for my research study. The Focus Group will take place today, **Saturday, July 22, 2023 at 1:00 p.m.** via Microsoft Teams. If you are unable to attend, please reply to this email. I sincerely appreciate your time.
I look forward to seeing you there!
Respectfully,
Valerie Santana

Microsoft Teams Meeting

[Click here to join the meeting](#)

Meeting ID: [redacted]
Passcode: eNjun

Sent from my T-Mobile 5G Device
Get [Outlook for Android](#)

Appendix N

Member Checking Email for One-on-One Interview

