

2023

## Relationship Between Social-Emotional Learning and Post-Secondary Job Satisfaction

Sean DeMaree

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Relationship Between Social-Emotional Learning and Post-Secondary Job Satisfaction

By

Sean DeMaree

A Dissertation Proposal

Presented to the Faculty of

The College of Education and Human Services

At Murray State University

In Partial Fulfillment of Requirements

For the Degree of Doctor of Education

P20 & Community Leadership

Education Specialist to Doctor of Education

Under the supervision of dissertation chair, Dr. Teresa Clark

Murray, KY

## Abstract

This dissertation aims to respond to two challenges. The first is a gap in literature and research around the impact of social-emotional learning (SEL) beyond graduation from high school. While many studies have been conducted on the impact of SEL in schools, few examine how the use of SEL schools supports students in their post-secondary success. The second challenge centers on the current job market crisis in the Kansas City Metropolitan Area, specifically with job satisfaction and retention of employees. This study invited employees at five large companies in the Kansas City Metropolitan Area to respond to a two-part survey. The first part asked participants to reflect on how well they were taught various SEL skills while in school. The second part had participants rating their job satisfaction in their current place of employment. The desired outcome of the dissertation is to determine if a statistically significant relationship exists between SEL and job satisfaction. A Pearson  $r$  correlation coefficient test and independent-samples test were utilized to analyze the data. At the conclusion of the study, it was found that there exists a positive relationship between receiving SEL in school and job satisfaction, and strong positive relationship between SEL skills and job satisfaction.

## Acknowledgments

I would like to first thank my dissertation chair for their support throughout this process. To Dr. Landon Clark for his valuable feedback and critical questions that pushed my thinking and approach to the final study. To Dr. Sean Simmons support of my data analysis and development of the tool utilized in my final study. To my dissertation chair, Dr. Teresa Clark, thank you for your support throughout my entire education at Murray State University, but especially during this dissertation process. Your understanding paired with continued support provided me with the motivation and drive to complete this dissertation.

Personally, I want to thank my wife, Stepanie DeMaree, and my children, Lucy and Jack. My true motivation for everything I do is for these three, and without whom I would not have had the passion to persevere through the doctoral process. Thank you for standing by my side through the late nights, stress, and of course during the celebrations of this process. I love you all and could not have done this without you.

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## CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

### Introduction and Background

The purpose of education is to prepare students for their life post-graduation. Many studies have been conducted on how schools prepare students for this transition to life after graduation (Ahmed, 2019; Hora, 2019). This preparation includes comprehensive education in reading, writing, and arithmetic, along with developing social-emotional skills. The latter has become a recent focus of many schools and districts as they shift their educational practices to align with the needs of the current job force (CASEL, 2022) and increase opportunities for students to develop social-emotional skills.

The Collaborative for Academic and Social Emotional Learning (CASEL) (2022) framework identifies social-emotional learning (SEL) as the development of social, emotional, and personal skills that support students' ability to care for themselves, maintain positive and healthy relationships with others, and make responsible decisions. Many studies give merit to the focus on SEL in schools by providing evidence of how the focus on SEL can increase academic performance and drive decreases in unwanted behaviors (Brackett & Rivers, 2014; Caparas, 2021; Gueldner et al., 2020). These studies provide foundational reasoning for schools and districts to continue investing in SEL and support further studies in SEL.

Within the research field of SEL, one apparent gap is limited research on the role SEL has on post-graduation student success. As mentioned previously, there is current research that pinpoints the value of SEL within the school system. While there is research that extends beyond 12th grade and examines the role of SEL at the collegiate level (Jones & Doolittle, 2017), the

extension beyond college is limited. One potential connecting point between SEL, and post-graduation life is the relationship between SEL and employability skills, and employability skills and job satisfaction.

Studies that center on the relationship between SEL and employability skills provide additional purpose behind the study of SEL in general. Understanding that the skills taught within SEL have a direct relationship with the employability skills of time management, self-management, motivation, and responsible decision-making, gives value to continued education in the area as these skills impact a person's ability to be successful in their future career (Mahajan et al., 2022). Suppose education is genuinely designed to impact students' future success. In that case, it will stand to reason that SEL would be pivotal in this design to increase students' ability to succeed in the job force.

Further, studies demonstrate a positive relationship between employability skills and job satisfaction (Ibrahim et al., 2022; Hsiao & Lin, 2018). In short, employees who can manage themselves, have relationships with others, and make responsible decisions, are more likely to be satisfied in their work and, of equal importance, have employers who are more satisfied with their employees. Through the lens of transitive law, if SEL has a positive relationship with employability skills, and employability skills have a positive relationship with job satisfaction, then SEL should, hypothetically, have a positive relationship with job satisfaction. The desired outcome of this study is to move beyond the hypothetical and explore the potential relationship between SEL and job satisfaction.

## **Purpose of the Study**

In 2010, the Kansas Department of Education developed new standards for addressing SEL in all Kansas public schools, kindergarten through the 12th grade. Further, in 2018, the department went to identify SEL as a critical measurement for district accreditation (KSDE, 2022). Since these shifts, Kansas district and school leaders have had to determine the best approach to addressing SEL within the classroom. Included in this shift for schools is the need to balance the focus of SEL with the continued focus on rigorous instruction within core content.

To ensure that the approach to SEL is aligned with best practices, school leaders turn to research to ensure that the approach to SEL is more likely to drive student success. Within this research are multiple studies that provide evidence of the impact of SEL on student academic and behavioral success and student ability to manage and succeed at the collegiate level (Brackett & Rivers, 2014; Caparas, 2021; Gueldner et al., 2020; Jones & Doolittle, 2017). However, one gap that is present within the literature is research that centers on the impact school based SEL has on life post-graduation.

This gap is significant to the educational field. One of the primary purposes of education is to prepare students for life post-graduation. As school leaders try to determine how to structure the education of their buildings, they must also determine where to invest the most time educationally. Educational areas like math and reading have known relationships with post-graduation success (García-Pérez et al., 2021). If SEL is to be elevated to the same level of importance as math and reading, there is a need for research to validate this increased focus on SEL.

Beyond education, there currently exists a concern for employability and workforce size. Fortuno (2022) conducted a study in Kansas City that demonstrated a rise in unfilled jobs, job turnover, and underqualified employees in multiple career sectors. While many believe that the current job market crisis in Kansas City reflects a low desire to work, and a response to the pandemic, Fortuno argues that employees do not have high enough job satisfaction needed to maintain a positive work environment and avoid burnout. Other studies provide evidence that training around specific employability skills can be an effective response to increasing job satisfaction, primarily when this training occurs before exiting the educational system (Ibrahim et al., 2022; Hsiao & Lin, 2018). Further research on how schools can impact job satisfaction and the future career force is needed to respond effectively to this current crisis.

### ***Statement of Problem***

The problem centers on a lack of understanding of the relationship between job satisfaction and SEL taught in schools, which could further contribute to the current job crisis. As mentioned previously, if SEL has a positive relationship with employability skills, and employability skills have a positive relationship with job satisfaction, then SEL should, hypothetically, have a positive relationship with job satisfaction. The purpose of this dissertation was to examine this relationship more closely.

Specifically, this dissertation explored the relationship between Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) skills taught during pre-kindergarten through 12th grade and post-secondary career satisfaction. Understanding this relationship creates the potential for schools to address SEL more accurately in a manner that has a more significant impact on post-graduation success for students while also responding to the needs of the current job market.

## Theoretical Framework

Four theoretical frameworks were utilized in the design of this dissertation to ensure that the study outcomes were more reliable. While many frameworks and research studies exist around SEL, the CASEL framework is recognized as the industry standard for SEL in schools (Bridgeland et al., 2013). The CASEL framework includes resources and curriculum guides to support educators in implementing SEL. Of specific importance to this study is how the CASEL framework defines the key components of SEL learning. The following components of the CASEL framework were utilized as the foundation for how SEL was defined in this dissertation.

- **Self-Awareness:** The identification of personal thoughts, feelings, and emotions and the ability to categorize thoughts, feelings, and emotions as either healthy or unhealthy.
- **Self-Management:** The ability to manage thoughts, feelings, and emotions and to remain in control of self when overwhelmed by any unwanted thoughts, feelings, or emotions.
- **Social Awareness:** The ability to recognize the feelings and emotions of others and to respond appropriately to others based on their feelings and emotions.
- **Interpersonal Skills:** Maintaining positive, healthy, and effective relationships with others, including working collaboratively with others.
- **Responsible Decision-Making:** The ability to make healthy and appropriate decisions regarding the situation or impact of others' decisions.

In addition to the CASEL framework, SEL for this study was viewed through the Kansas Department of Education's (KSDE) framework of SEL for Kansas public schools. As this study centered on the Kansas City Metropolitan Area's Kansas side, it was determined appropriate to align the study to the framework most likely utilized for the workforce's education. Multiple

systems for measuring SEL with students exist within the Kansas framework for SEL. One system is a survey that teachers and students complete, and tasks participants with rating, using a Likert scale, the effectiveness of SEL at their respective schools (KSDE, 2022). This survey was adapted to fit the design of this study.

The third framework that was used as a guideline for this dissertation was the work of Mahajan et al. (2022). This framework was developed for companies to utilize to train and increase the knowledge of employability skills of employees. Founded first through research, Mahajan et al. recognized a positive relationship between employability skills and job satisfaction. From the research, a framework was then developed to support companies and employers with increasing employability skills with the desired outcome of increasing the satisfaction of employees. This framework was vital to this study. First, it provided evidence that a link exists between employability skills and job satisfaction, and more importantly, increased job satisfaction can decrease burnout and turnover. The benefit of this finding will be discussed further in Chapter II.

The final vital aspect of this framework was the development of a job satisfaction survey by Spector (2022). Recognizing the gap in the availability of a reliable job satisfaction survey, Spector developed a survey that measures tangible aspects of job satisfaction. The initial survey was developed in 1985, and has since been used in numerous studies centered on job satisfaction (Astrauskaite et al., 2011; Ogunkaude & Ojii, 2018; Spector, 2022). For this present study, the Spector Job Satisfaction Survey (JSS) was adapted to support the measurement of overall job satisfaction of participants. By utilizing an established and tested instrument for measuring job satisfaction, the potential for error in data collection is minimized.

## Research Question and Hypotheses

The desired outcome of this dissertation was to explore the relationship between Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) skills taught from pre-kindergarten through 12th grade and post-secondary career satisfaction. Specifically, participants in the study responded to a two-part survey, with the participants first rating how well they were taught specific SEL skills in school, and the second part rating their post-secondary career satisfaction. Responses to the survey were utilized to explore the following research questions and hypotheses.

RQ1. Is there a statistically significant difference in adult career satisfaction between adults taught SEL skills in school and adults not taught SEL skills in school?

H<sub>0</sub> There is no statistically significant difference in adult career satisfaction between adults taught SEL skills in school and adults not taught SEL skills in school.

H<sub>1</sub> There is a statistically significant difference in adult career satisfaction between adults taught SEL skills in school and adults not taught SEL skills in school.

RQ2. Is there a statistically significant relationship between SEL skills taught in school and adult career satisfaction?

H<sub>0</sub> There is no statistically significant relationship between SEL skills taught in school and adult career satisfaction.

H<sub>1</sub> There is a statistically significant relationship between SEL skills taught in school and adult career satisfaction.



To examine these two research questions, participants responded to a two-part survey on SEL and job satisfaction. This first part of the survey was based on the Kansas SEL survey. Participants were asked to rate how well they were taught specific SEL skills in public school. The measurement for each school will be captured using the following four-point Likert scale:

1. Poor
2. Average
3. Good
4. Excellent

Participants' SEL scores were recorded as an average response to all questions from the first portion of the survey.

Similarly, the second part of the study utilized the same four-point Likert scale on questions referencing job satisfaction. These questions will be based on the framework provided by Spector (2022). Again, the average of all part-two questions will be calculated for each participant and recorded as their job satisfaction score.

To determine the first research question, an additional series of questions was included at the start of the survey to determine the potential that the participants had some exposure to SEL in schools. These questions included a demographic question where participants identified their graduation year, and a short four-question SEL screener to determine the participants' understanding of SEL concepts. Following the CASEL (2022) timeline, it was understood that participants graduating high school before the year 1996 would not have had direct SEL instruction during the public-school education. Participants who reported graduating 1995 or earlier, were labeled as having no SEL lessons taught to them in high school for RQ<sub>1</sub> and were

removed from data analysis for RQ<sub>2</sub>, as there was less confidence that their responses to the SEL portion of the study reflected their public-school education.

Likewise, participants who graduated between the years of 1996-2010 did not have a mandatory SEL requirement in their education (KSDE, 2022). To better determine the potential that these participants had some exposure to SEL instruction, four screener questions were utilized. Participants who answered at least half of these questions correctly, were determined to have had some SEL instruction in school, while those scoring less than half were determined to have none. Like the 1995 and earlier graduates, the latter participants were removed from data analysis when responding to RQ<sub>2</sub>.

Based on the timeline from KSDE (2022), it was assumed that participants who graduated from 2011-2022 would have had some level of SEL instruction in school. These participants, along with those who scored two or higher on the screener and graduated between 1996-2010 were utilized for the data analysis of both RQ<sub>1</sub> and RQ<sub>2</sub>.

For RQ<sub>1</sub> the job satisfaction scores were compared between the two groups, those that had SEL instruction and those that did not. To compare the two sets of data the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software was utilized to run a two-sample t-test between the two groups of participants. For RQ<sub>1</sub>, only the participants job satisfaction scores were compared to determine if there was statistically significant difference in adult career satisfaction between adults taught SEL skills in school and adults not taught SEL skills in school.

The second group, those that did receive SEL instruction in public schools, data was utilized to examine RQ<sub>2</sub> and to determine if there a statistically significant relationship between SEL skills taught in school and adult career satisfaction. For this data analysis the SPSS software

was once again used to run the Pearson Correlation Coefficient test. For RQ<sub>2</sub> it was determined that a Pearson Correlation Coefficient ( $r$ ) of zero would equate to no relationship between SEL scores and job satisfaction scores, ( $r$ ) of Zero to one would equate to a positive relationship, and a ( $r$ ) of zero to negative one would equate to a negative relationship. More information on the design of this study can be found in Chapter III.

### **Definitions, Terms, and Abbreviations**

- **Employability Skills:** Defined as eight, workplace-necessary skills for job success including: communication, teamwork, problem solving, initiative and enterprise, planning and organizing, self-management, learning skills, and motivation.
- **Job Satisfaction:** The measurement of overall happiness and satisfaction employees feel about their work and company. For this study, job satisfaction will include the positive or negative measurement of the following skills: communication, collaboration, compensation, motivation, loyalty, and relationship with peers.
- **Social-Emotional Learning:** The development of personal, social, and character development skills in the public-school setting. Using the CASEL (2022) definition, Social-Emotional Learning for this study will include the development of the skills: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, interpersonal skills, and responsible decision-making.

### **Significance of the Study**

In addition to the purpose of the study and problem statement, this dissertation has further significance and potential value. As identified previously, Kansas has continually increased the importance of SEL within public schools (KSDE, 2022). From the inclusion of SEL as a core

component of Kansas curriculum standards in 2012 to the shift in 2018 to utilize SEL as a measurement for accreditation, SEL is central to Kansas education. While this study will be focused on the relationship between SEL and job satisfaction, the SEL portion of the survey will also provide an opportunity to examine how well Kansas schools address SEL skills through the perspective of graduates. Regardless of the survey's outcomes, this provides a significant opportunity to assess Kansas's current approach to SEL.

From an individual standpoint, the P20 framework aims to develop an educational system that extends beyond public schools and provides an educational experience for students that will prepare them for life post-education. Suppose a relationship is found between SEL and job satisfaction. In that case, schools will be able to shift and adjust the approach to SEL to better align with employees' needs after education. This shift would support not only the improvement of education for student futures but also could support the present crisis in the Kansas City job market (Fortuno, 2022).

If a relationship was not found, the results of this study could still support school leaders in determining how to best structure their resources. If SEL did not have a relationship with future career satisfaction, school leaders could begin looking for other opportunities to support the future of their students outside of SEL. This is not to suggest that this study should be utilized to determine if SEL should be addressed at all in schools, as multiple studies identify the positive educational impact of SEL (Brackett & Rivers, 2014; Caparas, 2021; Gueldner et al., 2020; Jones & Doolittle, 2017), but rather that schools can continue to search for more opportunities to support the future of students.

Regardless of this study's outcomes, as identified in the introduction and expanded upon in Chapter II, there currently exists a gap in research around the relationship SEL has with post-

graduation. This study was designed to address this gap and provide new research on how SEL is addressed in public schools and the relationship it has on students' post-graduation success.

### **Summary of Chapter I**

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between SEL taught in pre-kindergarten through 12th grade and the job satisfaction of adults. This study was used to respond to two different problems. First is an identified gap in the research on SEL. Present research on SEL centers primarily on the impact of SEL within the school setting. Studies exist that align SEL with academic success and decrease unwanted behaviors. Beyond high school, some studies explore how SEL impacts students at the collegiate level. However, missing research centers on SEL's role in adults after they leave the school setting. This proposed dissertation will provide new research directly aimed at this gap.

The second area this study aligned with is the current job market crisis in Kansas City. As described earlier, a current concern exists for job satisfaction, turnover rates, and burnout of employees in Kansas City. As schools prepare students for the workforce, finding ways to prevent these areas of concern will support students in their future careers and actively respond to the growing crisis. This study was used to determine a potential relationship SEL has on these areas of concern and provide new research for school leaders to utilize in their development of school programs, including SEL.

The second chapter of this study includes a review of current literature that relates to this study. This chapter was utilized to establish merit for continued research in SEL and job satisfaction, as well as give evidence to the current gap in the research on SEL and post-graduation. Chapter III introduces the research design that was utilized to conduct this study,

including a description of participants, data collection and analysis, and other elements needed to conduct this study. Chapters IV and V include the data collected and an analysis of the data, respectively. Finally, the dissertation concludes with implications for future studies and the P20 framework for education.

## CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of the literature review is to synthesize current research that is relevant to this dissertation proposal. This literature review is divided into two key sections. The first section includes a comprehensive review of current SEL literature. This first section will define SEL and how it is taught in pre-kindergarten through twelfth-grade education. Further, literature on the impact of SEL in schools will be reviewed. Present research demonstrating the value of SEL in schools adds merit to this dissertation proposal by demonstrating a need for continued research on the topic. Finally, the first section will conclude with literature that connects SEL and employability skills, establishing evidence that a relationship between SEL and careers does exist.

The second section of the literature review will center on post-secondary career satisfaction. The priority of this section will be to define what career satisfaction is and how current literature has examined post-secondary career satisfaction. This section will also include literature on the relationship between employability skills and career satisfaction. Given the literature in the first section that relates SEL to employability skills, literature demonstrating a relationship between employability skills and career satisfaction would provide further justification for this dissertation proposal. By demonstrating a potential connection between SEL and career satisfaction through employability skills, there is more value in understanding the potential relationship between SEL education and career satisfaction.

### **What is Social-Emotional Learning?**

The literature by Beaty (2018) provides a historical overview of SEL in schools. Beaty defines the beginnings of SEL as a development from the social competencies taught to students

in the 1960s. These social competencies were centered on the soft-skills students needed to function and participate effectively with others. Beaty's research narrows these competencies to seven specific skills: sharing, listening, following directions, cooperating, patience, empathy, and respect. Beaty defines these competencies as skills designed to help establish appropriate behavior in school and were primarily taught in the fundamental years of education.

Beaty's historical research establishes a timeline of how these social competencies shifted towards SEL. This shift included broadening skills to include self-control and peer relationships in the 1970s and focusing on bullying during the late 1980s and early 1990s. Beaty concludes the historical review of the development of SEL by pointing to the collaboration between educators, superintendents, and researchers who developed the New Haven Social Development Program, now recognized as the first school based SEL program.

Kress and Elias (2006) continue the timeline established by Beaty by exploring the formation of the Collaborative for Academic Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL). Kress and Elias point to the same 1987-1992 collaboration and beginnings of the New Haven Social Development Program as a pivotal point in the development of SEL but go further to say that the actual term and use of SEL would not happen until 1994 with the founding of CASEL. The founding of CASEL included an expansion of the New Haven Program but would not officially define SEL until 1997. While the definition of SEL did not occur until 1997, Kress and Elias point out that many school systems were already incorporating programs like New Haven and using the terminology of SEL before the official definition was adopted.

The research of Kress and Elias continues to expand on the importance of CASEL. While recognizing multiple other researchers and programs around SEL, Kress and Elias highlight that few have produced the same volume of research and program development as CASEL.



Bridgeland et al. (2013) further label CASEL as the national standard and expert on SEL. This research points to not only the high volume of SEL research produced by CASEL but also that a high percentage of curriculum programs and academic research on SEL reference the work of CASEL. Beyond curriculum and research, the study by Bridgeland et al. provides evidence that the SEL work of CASEL is also highly trusted by school districts and teachers. The results of their national teacher survey on SEL found that more than 70% of teachers who utilize SEL in the classroom get their resources directly from CASEL or programs and curricula backed by CASEL. For this dissertation proposal, the research of Kress and Elias and Bridgeland et al. provides confidence in utilizing the CASEL framework in the development of the SEL portion of the survey and the definition of what SEL meant for this study.

Understanding the history of SEL was also valuable to this present study. Knowing that the actual term of SEL was not present in schools until the mid to late 1990s, the design of the data analysis for RQ<sub>2</sub> was limited to participants who graduated post 1995. Narrowing the participants supported the accuracy of the survey by increasing the likelihood that participants had the opportunity to have some level of access to SEL while in school. With the understanding of this historical background on SEL and its implications for this study, it is also essential to examine research that defines SEL.

Graczyk et al. (2000) define SEL as teaching social skills and emotional regulation. Pointing again to CASEL, Graczyk et al. narrow down the definition of SEL to five central competencies: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. Graczyk et al. go on to discuss how in SEL, the desired outcome is to develop SEL skills with students that will support their ability to take care of themselves, maintain healthy peer relationships, and make decisions that align with the morals and beliefs of

their school community. Of note in the Grazyk et al. study is that the study is entirely centered on SEL as a school function. The study defines the purpose of SEL as the process used to develop skills to support students in maintaining good academic and behavioral progress. This study limits SEL skills to the needs of students in the classroom setting.

In contrast, Brackett and Rivers (2014) examine the definition of SEL beyond just the classroom. While their study uses the exact CASEL-based definition for SEL, Brackett and Rivers examine how SEL lessons and programs support students' mental health, ability to maintain relationships, and how strong SEL development can support life-long learning success. While this study centers on how SEL is addressed in schools, like the Graczyk et al. study, the data collected is on the behavior of children in general, and not just their behavior concerning the school's expectations. The findings of the Brackett and River (year) study suggest that strong SEL skills taught in pre-high school youth can impact long-term student success. This study shows evidence that students with strong SEL skills are less likely to be involved with dangerous or illicit behaviors post-high school. This provides further evidence that a relationship does exist between the SEL skills taught in school and post-secondary success, giving merit to further studies on the subject.

### ***SEL as Defined by CASEL***

Going directly to CASEL (2022), SEL is defined as the support of children and young adults in acquiring the skills and knowledge needed to develop healthy identities, manage emotions, achieve personal and collective goals, manage strong relationships, and make responsible decisions. CASEL identifies SEL as an integral aspect of student success. The research of CASEL establishes that students with high SEL skill development are more likely to

have high academic performance, and schools with integrated SEL have lower patterns of unwanted behaviors.

CASEL (2022) continues to narrow down the definition of SEL as five competencies divided into three areas of development. The first area of development is personal or self-development, structured into two competencies, self-management and self-awareness (source?). Students are working to gain the skills to manage and understand personal emotions in this developmental area. Research by CASEL defines this development area as integral to a student's ability to remain safe and in control of themselves regardless of their emotional state. Self-development is vital to the other two areas of SEL development.

CASEL (2022) defines the second developmental area as expanding personal development to social development. In this area, students are working to build skills related to the competencies of social awareness and interpersonal skills. Like personal development, CASEL expands on the idea that students are working to understand and manage emotions, but now regarding others. As students develop socially, they should be able to recognize the emotions of others and adjust their behavior in response. This includes the ability to show empathy towards others and to recognize and respond to social cues.

The final developmental area defined by CASEL (2022) includes only one competency, responsible decision-making. CASEL defines this competency as making decisions based on morals and community beliefs. As students develop this competency, CASEL states that they should be able to make responsible decisions that help support healthy living, achieving goals, and maintaining safe interactions with others. Further, CASEL identifies that students with high responsible decision-making skills development are more likely to make a responsible decision even if it is unpopular or unsupported, referencing situations like peer influence.

Numerous researchers identify CASEL as the national leader and standard in SEL (Kress & Elias, 2006; Bridgeland et al., 2013; Brackett & Rivers, 2014). Understanding the current trust and confidence in the CASEL framework was considered in developing the SEL survey. Further, the questions of the SEL survey centered on the developmental areas and SEL competencies defined by CASEL (2022). Understanding the purpose of these competencies, especially decision-making and social development, it can be understood how a potential connection between SEL, and careers could exist. CASEL provides foreshadowing to this link when discussing interpersonal relationships skills by discussing the value of students working successfully with others to achieve a common goal. This could be applied to the workforce by examining how employees' partner and work together.

### **Value of SEL in Schools**

Beyond understanding the definition of SEL, it is also essential to understand the value of SEL in the school setting. Without establishing a value for SEL, it limits the purpose of continued studying of SEL. Payton et al. (2008) examined the impact of SEL lessons on student behavioral achievement in kindergarten through eighth grade. In this study, Payton et al. analyzed behavioral infraction data pre- and post-implementation of the CASEL framework. The research question for the study examined if integrating SEL into students' curriculum would have a significant relationship with student behavior.

The Payton et al. study's results determined that students who effectively received SEL lessons had a lower rate of behavioral incidents than those who did not. The researchers pointed out that the decrease in behavioral infractions also led to fewer classroom disruptions, increased time for instruction, and a lower rate of students being removed from the classroom. While the

study did not examine academic progress, the researchers indicated that further research could be done to explore academic impact, and their general hypothesis was that the decrease in disruptions and increase in instructional time would potentially benefit academics.

Panayiotou et al. (2019) address the academic question directly. In this study, just over 200 middle school students completed a standardized academic assessment. Following the assessment, half the classes were randomly selected to receive SEL lessons in addition to the general education courses for an entire school year. The school readministered the exam in the middle of the year and measured no significant differences between the control group and those receiving the SEL lessons. At the end of the year, the test was administered again, and at this point, the students receiving SEL lessons witnessed more growth than those that did not.

Panayiotou et al. (2019) added to the assessment data by also interviewing teachers following the year of implementation. Like the Payton et al. study, teachers identified having fewer disruptions to instructional time with the students receiving SEL support. While no behavioral data were collected, Panayiotou et al. suggested that nearly every teacher involved in the SEL group mentioned an increased instructional time or improved student behavior. The final findings from Panayiotou et al. were that the study would benefit from a more extensive sampling size and potentially tracking behavioral data alongside the assessment data. Further, it was recognized that while there was more growth from the SEL group, growth was witnessed across the board, suggesting that not receiving the SEL support did not cause any harm to the control group, but there was evidence of benefit for SEL support.

Brackett and Rivers (2014) go further to align SEL skills to college readiness standards. For example, Brackett and Rivers found that students who have strong self-management will be more likely to be able to manage the studying and workload of their future education. This study

included teacher-generated assessments where students were rated on various self-management skills using a Likert scale. This data was then compared to the students' self-reported responses to a study time survey and their academic performance. The study's results demonstrated a significant relationship between students with high self-management scores and higher grades and study times. This dissertation proposal is essential because Brackett and Rivers provide evidence that SEL skills directly correlate with college readiness scores. The final discussion of the Brackett and Rivers study was that the relationship between self-management skills and academic success should continue to impact student success post-high school. This proposed study would expand on these findings by exploring if there could be a relationship beyond the school setting and to future career success.

The findings by Jones-Schenk (2019) continue to provide merit to the need to study the impact of SEL on post-secondary success. Jones-Schenk examines if SEL skills indicate student success in nursing school in this study. To explore this idea, Jones-Schenk asked second-year nursing students to rate their social-emotional health. Using the student responses, the researchers developed a series of SEL lessons to support areas of concern that aligned with most nursing students. The lessons included stress management, self-care, and responsible decision-making. Following the lessons, the nurses completed the same assessment and reported lower stress levels, increased confidence in managing time and stress, and overall increased social-emotional health. Jones-Schenk proposed that further studies be conducted to determine if similar lessons and assessments could be applied to new and working nurses.

The Jones-Schenk (2019) study is vital to this proposed study as it demonstrates a potential connection between SEL and success beyond the public-school setting. While the Jones-Schenk study still does not extend beyond college, the researcher discusses that the

second-year participants spent most of their academic time in realistic learning settings, including working within medical practices such as hospitals. This discussion extends to their proposal for further studies, pointing to the similarities between second-year nursing students and first-year nurses. This study is significant in that the results provide some evidence of a potential relationship between SEL and post-secondary job satisfaction.

### **SEL in Kansas**

The setting for this proposed dissertation is the Kansas side of the Kansas City Metropolitan area. According to the Kansas Department of Education (2022), this area of focus includes six school districts within Johnson County, Kansas, which serves nearly 100,000 students. The department of education also outlines specific measures each district should take to establish SEL within the district educational practice and, since 2012, has included SEL as a component of high school accreditation. All six districts within Johnson County, Kansas, address SEL using the CASEL framework and CASEL-endorsed curriculum.

A 2018 qualitative study by Eklund et al. explored the Kansas approach to SEL learning. This study found that nearly all Kansas districts, including all districts within Johnson County, had a systematic approach to addressing SEL in the classroom. The results showed that students in Kansas have been receiving SEL lessons, at least in elementary school, on a routine basis. Most school districts included some form of measurement for determining if SEL was being effectively addressed.

The Eklund et al. (2018) study provides evidence that SEL skills are measurable and quantifiable. The assessments used in this study provided educators with accurate data that could be used to restructure SEL lessons to align to the social-emotional needs of students. Throughout

the discussion of the Eklund et al. study, it is mentioned that while most schools in the Johnson County, Kansas area are delivering SEL lessons, the lack of assessments around SEL prevents the schools from ensuring their delivered lessons are driving the desired outcome for student social-emotional growth. Of further interest, the assessment utilized in this study was developed and available without cost for all schools through the Kansas Department of Education.

Jones and Doolittle (2015) provide historical context to SEL in Kansas. In this historical review of SEL in Kansas, Jones and Doolittle point to legislation developed in the mid-1990s that required all Kansas schools to teach lessons on bully prevention and anti-violent behavior. While these lessons do not align directly with an SEL curriculum or framework, Jones and Doolittle argue that the basis of the lessons was rooted in social-emotional skills, specifically responsible decision-making and self/social awareness. Further, Jones and Doolittle (2015) point out that these initial legislative steps were referenced in the 2012 development of statewide SEL standards.

Jones and Doolittle (2015) highlight three pivotal years going further into the historical elements of the Kansas SEL standards. First, in 2012, the Department of Education in Kansas established the Social, Emotional, and Character Development standards for public schools. These standards, designed for all public-school ages, were based on the CASEL framework with the addition of eleven-character traits that all schools could utilize to address SEL. While these standards were developed initially as a suggested addition to the curriculum, Jones and Doolittle share that a majority of Kansas schools began including the standards in some manner that same year.

Following the 2012 movement, Kansas shifted in 2015 by partnering with the state's college and career readiness design to align SEL to the required college and career readiness



standards. Jones and Doolittle (2015) suggest that this is the first movement in Kansas to require SEL within schools, although it is still housed within another program design. Not until 2018 did the Kansas Department of Education finally establish a requirement for the education and assessment of SEL in all public schools. Jones and Doolittle (2015) point out that not only are the standards now a required element of instruction, but starting in 2018, the state included the measurement of SEL as a function of school accreditation.

Of additional importance is the study conducted by Weissberg et al. (2015); over 100 business owners, managers, and executives were surveyed to determine what skills were the best indicator of successful employment. Respondents to the survey were able to respond openly, ranging from employability skills, social-emotional skills, and job-related skills. The results of Weissberg et al. overwhelmingly demonstrated that the critical indicators for job success were social-emotional and employability skills. Further, Weissberg et al. demonstrated clear connections between the skills. For example, two responses with high levels of recidivism were the social-emotional skills of interpersonal skills and the employability skill of collaboration. Weissberg et al. suggested that these two sets of skills complement each other and suggest that in the work force, the two skills are dependent on one another. Employees who lack interpersonal skills will also be challenged with collaborating effectively with others.

The design of the Weissberg et al. (2015) study provides evidence of a relationship between SEL and employability skills. The result of the study establishes a relationship between these skills and the satisfaction of employers with their employees. The critical difference between the Weissberg study, and this study, is that this study focused on job satisfaction from the employee's viewpoint and looks directly at the relationship between how SEL skills are taught. While the Weissberg et al. study and this proposed study differ, having evidence of a

known relationship between job satisfaction and SEL helps to establish confidence in this proposal.

This section was designed to define SEL. Merit for this study was found by establishing a definition for SEL through peer-reviewed research and then using this research to establish the SEL definition for this study. As discussed in Chapter I and supported through this literature, SEL was based on the CASEL framework. Further, this first section provided evidence that SEL is a crucial component of the public-school setting. Research demonstrating the value of SEL regarding academic and behavioral success created value for further SEL studies. Also witnessed in this section were the first hints to an alignment between SEL and employability. Specifically, the Weissberg et al. (2015) study foreshadowed the alignment between SEL and employability and how these two areas related in the focal area of this dissertation, Kansas and Kansas City. The next section of this review was used to define job satisfaction, continue to explore the importance of employability skills, and provide further rationale for continued research in job satisfaction and SEL.

### **Defining Job Satisfaction**

Ali and Anwar (2021) defined job satisfaction as the result of multiple elements of the workplace experience. In their definition, Ali and Anwar pointed to critical elements that must be in place for employees to feel satisfied with their job. To determine which elements significantly impact job satisfaction, Ali and Anwar developed a survey that allowed employees to rate which workspace elements had the most significant impact on job satisfaction. The survey results provided a clear outline of what drives job satisfaction. Companies could use them to ensure

their efforts with satisfaction are aligned to elements that will result in the highest yield of increased job satisfaction.

The element of compensation, for example, is key to employees feeling a sense of satisfaction of worth. In this study, compensation did not reference the actual dollar value of an employee's salary but rather that an employee feels their workload is equal to or less than other employees in higher-level positions. In other words, Ali and Anwar pointed out that it is not the size of the paycheck that creates satisfaction but rather the balance between workload expectations and equitable pay.

In addition to salary, Ali and Anwar (2021) pointed to other elements that impact job satisfaction. Employees who felt recognized or even rewarded for their efforts were more likely to be satisfied with their work than those who were not. In addition, employees receiving frequent feedback from management are more likely to be satisfied with their employment even if they are not receiving their desired pay level. Ali and Anwar argued that employees who receive frequent feedback from management have a higher sense of self-value and a greater sense of belonging to the company.

Based on the survey, the most remarkable element impacting job satisfaction was the communication between employees and employers. Ali and Anwar (2021) described this element as essential to job satisfaction and provide results that demonstrate lack of communication also has the most significant impact on job satisfaction. Employees wanted to feel heard, respected, and valued by their employers regardless of their rank or level within the company. In the study's closing, Ali and Anwar suggested that human resource departments looking to increase job satisfaction receive the best return on investment by training and developing a culture of communication within the company.

Aziri (2011) found similar results when exploring job satisfaction in an earlier study. In this literature review style study, Aziri asked respondents to rate various impacts on job satisfaction from most impactful to least impactful. Like the Ali and Anwar study, communication was the company's most significant impact on job satisfaction. Employees desire clear, consistent, and equitable communication from managers and have a greater sense of satisfaction when they feel their voice is valued within the company. Second, employees felt more satisfaction in their work if the company fostered a collaborative and innovative work environment.

Aziri (2011) pointed to literature that suggests employees are more satisfied in their work if they are encouraged to partner with other employees to complete tasks and even more satisfied if collaboration with others is a crucial element of the company's function. Aziri shared that employees who report feeling alone at work or feeling that they were not team members were overwhelmingly more dissatisfied with their work. In the conclusion of the literature review, Aziri suggested that the two most impactful elements of job satisfaction are communication and collaboration and that employees working in more social settings are more likely to be satisfied with their work.

Judge et al. (2020) reviewed the research to get a more defined understanding of job satisfaction. Judge et al. narrowed down the definition of job satisfaction to ten elements. These elements include appreciation for work, relationships with colleagues, work-life balance, relationships with management, company stability, learning and career development, job security, salary, interesting job content, and company values. Of these 10 elements, Judge et al. found that when directly approached by management or human resources, improvement in

relationships with colleagues and management, learning and career development, work-life balance, and salary had the most significant impact on overall satisfaction.

Judge et al. (2020) also provided a series of survey-style questions that can measure a company's success in each of the ten elements of satisfaction. The questions were all centered on the ten elements and asked employees to respond using a four-point Likert scale. Judge et al. suggested that companies should administer the survey semi-regularly to ensure employees are continually satisfied with their work. Judge et al. provided evidence that is simply administering the survey aligns with the element of company values and increases the likelihood that employees feel that job satisfaction is a top priority for the company. Simply offering the option to complete the survey can increase satisfaction, even if there is no follow-through with the results.

### **Value of Job Satisfaction**

With a better understanding of job satisfaction, it is also essential to understand why it matters. In an earlier study, Shockley et al. (2000) explored the significance of job satisfaction. The results of this study highlighted that job satisfaction has a significant impact on company success. Shockley et al. explored the concept of organizational trust, and the impact trust has on both members of the organization and consumers. What was discovered was that when employees and companies have a high level of trust, workplace effort and efficiency increase and create the environment needed to produce high-level goods and services.

Looking first from the company viewpoint, Shockley et al. (2000) found that employee turnover is one of the greatest threats to a company. When a company experiences a high turnover level, it cannot maintain quality control, is forced to invest more of its budget in

recruitment and hiring and develop a company image of low trust that both employees and consumers experience. In contrast, when a company maintained a steady workforce, it could invest more in quality control, research, and design, thus producing better services and goods. In short, companies with lower turnover should experience success.

From the employee's viewpoint, Shockley et al. (2000) found that job satisfaction had the most significant impact on trust. Employees who feel satisfied with their work are more likely to remain with a company and invest in long-term employment plans. Included in this, Shockley outlined communication, recognition, relationships, and independence as essential to job satisfaction. Looking at these two viewpoints, it can be understood that turnover is less likely when employee satisfaction is reasonable. When turnover is less likely, companies increase trust in the company and with consumers. The results of the Shockley et al. study provided evidence that job satisfaction directly correlates with company success.

In a more recent study, De Clercq et al. (2019) explored the impact job satisfaction had on workplace productivity. The design of this study included a two-part survey administered at multiple workplaces in India. The first part of the study was provided to management and asked management to rate workplace productivity. The second part was provided to employees and tasked them with rating satisfaction. The purpose of the study was to explore if there exists a relationship between job satisfaction and productivity. The study's results provided statistically significant evidence of a positive relationship between job satisfaction and productivity.

In their findings, De Clercq et al. (2019) discussed that employees with a higher level of job satisfaction were more likely also to demonstrate helpful behaviors and were more likely to work as members of the team. Overall, satisfied employees demonstrated higher commitment and desire to do well at their jobs and support company success. Likewise, employers responded

that the critical elements of productivity were pride in work, commitment, and willingness to help others. De Clercq et al. point to this direct relationship and, like the Shockley et al. study, suggest that investment in job satisfaction should drive increased workplace productivity and success.

Looking at the current job market, Ibrahim et al. (2022) researched the impact job satisfaction has on the increased concern of employee retention. Ibrahim et al. identify a current struggle with securing an adequate workforce in many fields, including retail, restaurant, nursing, and education. The researchers proposed that decreased job satisfaction could be a potential problem with the current trend of increased staffing shortages. To explore this possibility, Ibrahim et al. surveyed companies with an adequate employment force to companies facing staffing shortages. Their purpose was to determine if there was a relationship between job satisfaction and employee retention.

The study's results showed that employees who felt more satisfied in their work were more likely to remain with the company and were even less likely to look for future employment actively. In addition to the elements of satisfaction outlined in the Judge et al. (2020) study, Ibrahim et al. (2022) included survey questions related to general happiness. This additional element ended up being the most significant impact on overall job satisfaction, followed by similar results to the Judge et al. study, with relationships, communication, and salary as the other most significant indicators of satisfaction. In their conclusion, Ibrahim et al. suggested that the best response to current employment shortages is to create an environment where happiness is fostered through positive relationships between colleagues, employees, and managers and strengthened by consistent communication.

All three of these studies demonstrated the value of continued studies on job satisfaction. Shockley et al. (2000), De Clercq et al. (2020), and Ibrahim et al. (2022) studies proved that job satisfaction significantly impacts employee retention, workplace productivity, and company trust. Each of these researchers provided the suggestion that increased investment in job satisfaction should result in a positive impact on the company's success. More relevant, the Ibrahim study outlined the current challenges with employment shortages and suggests that job satisfaction is crucial to responding to this challenge.

### **Job Satisfaction and Employability Skills**

As discussed earlier and in more detail in the next section of the literature review, employability skills have a known connection to SEL. Thus, research that provides evidence of a relationship between employability skills and job satisfaction would create more significant potential for a relationship between job satisfaction and SEL. Garton and Robinson (2006) explored the existence of this relationship with agricultural graduates in the state of Missouri. For this study, Garton and Robinson surveyed 112 recent agriculture graduates to determine two factors, their overall job satisfaction and which employability skills they learned in college. Participants in the study responded to a series of questions on employability skills. The results showed that an overwhelming number of students who received employability skills training in college had higher levels of job satisfaction. Specifically, participants identified the areas of peer relations, time and personal management, and decision-making as the most important skills learned in college.

As an extension to this study, Garton and Robinson (2006) surveyed employers in the agriculture sector who also identified the skills of getting along with people, planning,



completing projects, and analyzing information to make decisions as the critical skills needed for job success. The results of the Garton and Robinson study identified a direct correlation between employability skills and job satisfaction. In the discussion portion of their writing, they suggested that further studies should be completed to determine the best approach to teaching these skills.

Similarly, Peng et al. (2019) found a positive relationship between job satisfaction and employability skills. The purpose of this study was to explore the retention concerns of companies in Taiwan. Peng et al. wanted to look at early job satisfaction indicators to determine the best method for increasing retention. By collecting more than 1100 questionnaires, Peng et al. could determine possible antecedents to job satisfaction and success. The areas with the most significant positive impact on job satisfaction were developing necessary employability skills and continual job training.

In summary, Peng et al. (2019) determined that employees who entered the workforce with a high level of training, especially with the skills of communication and decision-making, were more likely to find early success and satisfaction in their work. Moreover, these employees who received frequent training and feedback were more likely to identify a desire to remain with the company. In response to the proposed retention problem, Peng et al. (2019) suggested that companies should shift hiring and recruiting practices to center on recent graduates with increased employability skills and develop a formal professional development plan for new employees.

Hsiao and Lin (2018) narrowed the examination of job satisfaction and employability skills by exploring the impact of employee competence on recent college graduates. In this study, Hsiao and Lin hypothesize that the general competence of employees would have a more

significant impact on job satisfaction than the workplace environment. For this study, employee competence was defined as a general understanding of workplace tasks, the self-driven actions of employees, and knowledge of work expectations. Workplace environment was defined as the culture and climate of the workplace, including safety, communication, and collegiality.

This study demonstrated that workplace environment had a more significant impact on job satisfaction than competence did. Employees who felt valued, welcomed, and supported by the company were more satisfied than employees who were good at their job. Further, the study showed that the soft skills of communication and peer relationships had a more significant impact on work production than employee competence. In a post-study interview, one employer shared that it is often easier to train an employee on how to complete a task than to train an employee to work well and collaborate with others.

Schwade (2021) supported this idea of collaboration driving job satisfaction through the development of the Social Collaborative Framework. In this framework, Schwade argued that work environments that foster a more social atmosphere and encourage collaboration will see not only an increase in job satisfaction but also an improved workplace production. The framework designed by Schwade hinges on the notion that humans are social creatures and limiting social interactions within the workspace can create more harm than good.

In contrast to a more traditional workspace where employees are task-oriented and focused on completing a required amount of work, Schwade (2020) suggested that companies should aim to create more opportunities for interaction and collaboration. The evidence presented in this framework shows that companies that remain in the traditional model see a decrease in time management and job satisfaction and an increase in workforce turnover. The argument made by Schwade was that each of these concerns can disrupt the work environment

more than creating breaks for socialization. Given the nature of people, Schwade pushed employees to find time to be social and interact with others. Therefore, by providing a set time for this to occur, employees became more committed to work completed throughout the day.

While Schwade (2020) did not directly reference employability skills, a connection is found through the elements of communication and collaboration. As highlighted in earlier studies, these two skills are aligned with employability skills and have a high impact on job satisfaction (Hsiao & Lin, 2018; Peng et al., 2019). The critical difference in Schwade's writing was that rather than simply identifying the relationship between employability skills and job satisfaction, Schwade created a framework to harness and establish these skills. The studies and this framework remain common: employability skills have a clear relationship to job satisfaction.

### **Defining Employability Skills**

The studies mentioned previously demonstrate a relationship between employability skills and job satisfaction. While this study did not specifically explore employability skills, there is a potential connection between SEL and employability skills. Before reviewing literature supporting this claim, it is important to review research that establishes a clearer understanding of employability skills and how they are measured.

Mahajan et al. (2022) utilized a comprehensive literature review to define employability skills. Through a thorough review of studies, academic papers, frameworks, and textbooks, Mahajan et al. narrowed employability skills to seven essential skills: communication, teamwork, problem-solving, initiative and enterprise, planning and organizing, learning skills, and technology. Through their research, Mahajan et al. pinpointed numerous studies that suggest

these eight skills are driving factors behind job success and satisfaction for both the employee and their employers.

After identifying these eight skills as critical employability skills, Mahajan et al. (2022) developed a professional development model to train and develop these skills in current employees. The research suggested that while it is beneficial to enter the workforce with these skills already developed, companies could increase job satisfaction and success by continuing to train and develop each skill. Mahajan et al. also suggested that the skills of problem-solving, teamwork, and communication were the most found in the present research. These three skills would yield the highest return on investment for employers.

In a quantitative study, Ng et al. (2021) observed the skill set of employees at a large corporation. For this study, Ng et al. had managerial staff label each employee by the manager's overall satisfaction with their work. The team of researchers then observed the groups to determine if the employees demonstrated specific skills that could help indicate why some employees were more successful than others. Like the Mahajan et al. study, Ng et al. discovered that the skills of communication, teamwork, collaboration, and self-motivation were more prevalent in the employees that management had more satisfaction with. The results of the Ng et al. study provided a continued definition of employability skills and evidence that these skills align with job satisfaction.

### **Employability Skills and SEL**

The final section of this review is used to establish the known relationship between employability skills and SEL. With evidence of the relationship between employability skills and job satisfaction, establishing a relationship between employability skills and SEL would create a

higher probability of a relationship between SEL and job satisfaction. Further, identifying each of these relationships in current research creates merit behind further research, including this proposed study, to explore the relationship between SEL and job satisfaction.

Yoder et al. (2020) provide a possible connection between SEL and employability skills in their qualitative research on the common language between the two concepts. The design of the Yoder et al. study aimed to support school district leaders by aligning educational practices and curriculum with the current workforce needs. Defining the primary purpose of schools as preparing students for life post-graduation, the researchers worked to develop an alignment between social-emotional skills taught in the classroom and employability skills needed to be successful in the workforce. The desired outcome of the study was to create a common language between education and careers that could be utilized to support the preparation of students.

Looking at the results of the Yoder et al. (2020) study, it was found that there were pre-existing connections between SEL and employability. For example, the skill of responsible decision-making was present within both fields and identified by educators and employers as a key indicator of success. Other less overtly related skills were connected through a change in language or minor shifts to the educational approach of teaching the skills. The district involved in the study utilized the CASEL framework for SEL. While collaboration is not directly referenced in this framework, Yoder et al. argue that the SEL skills of social awareness and interpersonal skills are essential foundations to the act of collaboration. Students must be able to recognize the needs and emotions of others and react accordingly to those needs and emotions to work with others in collaboration successfully.

Yoder et al. (2020) completed this alignment process with nearly all CASEL-based SEL skills and gave strong reasoning behind the value of teaching the skills in school. The closing

discussion of the study included a suggestion that schools and local businesses continue to look for critical alignments and language connections to ensure students are prepared for the transition from school to the workforce. Yoder et al. provide evidence of a connection between SEL and employability skills.

Yoder et al. (2020) study provided a connection between SEL and employability skills through the alignment of language and, to an extent, gives evidence that the development of SEL skills in school impacts post-secondary job success. Wisniewski and Foster (2021) gave an alternative view of the relationship when they explored how SEL skills and training can impact job satisfaction with adults. In this study, Wisniewski and Foster worked with adult learners already actively involved in the workforce and paired SEL lessons with job-related employability skills training. The study aimed to understand how SEL skills impact job success and satisfaction.

Unlike the Yoder et al. (2020) study, Wisniewski and Foster (2021) did not look for connections between employability skills and SEL but rather if the inclusion of SEL would impact adult learners. Throughout the study, participants received lessons on emotional regulation, self-management, and interpersonal skills while also working on job-related education. The study's results showed that adults who received SEL voiced higher confidence in their ability to apply the new job-related learning to their career and an overall increase in satisfaction. Specifically related to SEL, participants felt more comfortable working with others and managing their time and emotions while at work.

The value of the Wisniewski and Foster (2021) study to this proposal is that it again demonstrates a correlation between SEL and employability skills. Wisniewski and Foster discovered that SEL has a continued impact on adults after they have left education. What is not

found by Wisniewski and Foster provides merit to this study as well. While the study identified a positive relationship between SEL and employability skills, it is not identified whether the SEL education that occurred during the kindergarten through twelfth-grade years had any relationship with their employability. In other words, would the participants see the same positive impact of SEL training on adults even if they did not receive SEL education as children?

## **Chapter II Summary**

The purpose of this literature review was to provide a comprehensive overview of current research that relates to this proposed dissertation. The earliest literature selected for this review was utilized to establish a standard definition of SEL that was utilized for this study. As identified by the studies of Bracket and Rivers (2014), Graczyk et al. (2000), and Bridgeland et al. (2013), CASEL is highly regarded and recognized as the national standard for SEL. In a review of the CASEL (2022) framework, the SEL skills of self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, interpersonal skills, and responsible decision-making were identified as the primary outcomes of SEL development in students. These skills were utilized in the definition of SEL for this study and will be present in the SEL portion of the survey.

The following two review sections were utilized to justify the need for further SEL studies. As witnessed in the Jones-Schenk study, SEL had a clear and positive relationship with student success. Students who receive a SEL education felt more prepared to handle stress, peer relationships, and self-management. This study provided value to continued research on the impact of SEL. Knowing that a positive relationship existed, it would be worth the investment to maximize this relationship through further research. Specific to this study, Jones-Schenk (year)

also argued that further research is needed on the relationship between SEL and post-graduation success.

Moving from education-based research to the job market, the next section of the literature review was used to define job satisfaction and employability skills and explore a relationship between employability skills. Research like Aziri (2011) and Judge et al. (2022) was used to establish an understanding of job satisfaction, while the research of Shockley et al. (2000) provided a connection between job satisfaction, employability skills, and job success. This study, and others referenced earlier, demonstrate a need for further studies on employability skills and job satisfaction by demonstrating the correlation between the two and defining the impact the two concepts can have on overall job success.

The final portion of the literature review is arguably the most valuable to this dissertation. The outcome of this section demonstrated a connection between employability skills and SEL. Yoder et al. (2020) developed a common language between the two sets of skills. Identifying this connection through language provided merit to this study by demonstrating that a known connection already exists between SEL and employability skills, increasing the confidence in the design of this proposal to expand the understanding of this connection. The Wisniewski and Foster (2021) study continue this bolstering of confidence by giving evidence that SEL and employability skills are related and that the development of SEL skills has a direct positive relationship with employability skills.

This dissertation explored the relationship between SEL taught in public schools and job satisfaction. The studies referenced in this literature review give some foreshadowing to this study. The research reviewed connects SEL with employability skills and research that highlights the relationship between employability skills and SEL. There is also research that supports SEL



training for adults. The gap in the current research is a direct examination of how SEL is developed in youth and job satisfaction as an adult. The desired outcome of this dissertation was to begin to address the current gap.

## **CHAPTER III: RESEARCH DESIGN**

The third chapter outlines the procedures and design that were utilized to conduct this quantitative study. To examine the relationship between SEL taught in schools from pre-kindergarten through 12<sup>th</sup> grade, participants of this study had the opportunity to respond to a two-part survey. The first part of the survey centered on SEL-based questions where participants scored how well they were taught various SEL skills in school. The second part of the survey featured a similar design, where participants scored their job satisfaction. At the conclusion of the two-part survey, each participant received a SEL score and a job satisfaction score that were used in the data analysis portion of this study.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The desired outcome of this dissertation was to explore the relationship between Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) skills taught from pre-kindergarten through 12th grade and post-secondary career satisfaction. This study was designed to respond to two problems. First, there exists a gap in SEL research that extends beyond the academic setting. This study was designed to expand the current literature on SEL to extend into the years following post-secondary graduation. The second problem is a recognition of the growing concerns in the job market in Kansas City, specifically the rise in employee turnovers and vacancies. As mentioned in Chapter I, if SEL has a positive relationship with employability skills, and employability skills have a positive relationship with job satisfaction, then SEL should, hypothetically, have a positive relationship with job satisfaction. The purpose of this study was to examine these potential relationships more closely.

### **Research Questions and Hypotheses**

The desired outcome of this dissertation was to explore the relationship between Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) skills taught from pre-kindergarten through 12th grade and post-secondary career satisfaction. Specifically, participants in the study responded to a two-part survey, with the participant first rating how well they were taught specific SEL skills in school, and the second part rating their post-secondary career satisfaction. Responses to the survey were utilized to explore the following research questions and hypotheses.

RQ1. Is there a statistically significant difference in adult career satisfaction between adults taught SEL skills in school and adults not taught SEL skills in school?

H<sub>0</sub> There is no statistically significant difference in adult career satisfaction between adults taught SEL skills in school and adults not taught SEL skills in school.

H<sub>1</sub> There is a statistically significant difference in adult career satisfaction between adults taught SEL skills in school and adults not taught SEL skills in school.

RQ2. Is there a statistically significant relationship between SEL skills taught in school and adult career satisfaction?

H<sub>0</sub> There is no statistically significant relationship between SEL skills taught in school and adult career satisfaction.

H<sub>1</sub> There is a statistically significant relationship between SEL skills taught in school and adult career satisfaction.

## **Description of Population**

The population of this study was comprised of volunteer participants who work in the Johnson County area of the Kansas City Metropolitan area. According to the 2021 United States Census Report, Johnson County is home to just over 600,000 people. In addition, 97% of Johnson County residents hold a high school diploma, and 60% have earned at least a bachelor's degree. The Johnson County Chamber of Commerce (2022) recognizes more than 25 companies with more than 25 employees. For this study, the five larger companies in the county were contacted as potential participants. These selected companies represented multiple sectors of the job market including education, engineering, health care services, telecommunications, and technology. By using these five larger companies as a potential sampling group, there was an increased likelihood of a large enough sample size to accurately represent the Johnson County population.

## ***Sampling Procedures***

For this study, a non-probability sampling method was utilized. Specifically, the voluntary response sampling method was used to increase the probability of a large sample size. The survey for this study was sent to the human resources department of the five larger companies in the Johnson County area. These companies, and their employees, had the opportunity to volunteer to complete the study. Based on the Johnson County Chamber of Commerce (2022), these companies represent roughly 1,500 employees. It was anticipated that not all companies contacted would be willing to participate in the study. To increase the reliability of the results, the total participant goal was to have at least 150 subjects complete the survey.

CASEL (2022) pinpoints the rise in SEL as occurring in the mid-1990s. To determine the exposure participants had to SEL while in school, a series of demographic and screener questions were utilized. The demographic questions included two prompts, one where candidates identified their graduation year, and the other gender. While the gender question was not used for this dissertation, it was captured for potential future studies. The graduation data was utilized to better determine the probability that a candidate had exposure to SEL in schools. For RQ<sub>1</sub>, it was assumed that participants who graduated pre-1995 would have had limited to no experience with SEL while in school. Likewise, participants who graduated post 2011 would be assumed to have had some experience. To understand the exposure to SEL for participants who graduated between 1996-2010, a four-question SEL screener was utilized. For this demographic it was determined that answering at least half of these questions correctly would signify some exposure to SEL in school.

For RQ<sub>2</sub>, participants who answered less than half the screener questions correctly or graduated pre-1995 were removed from data analysis. While this lowered the population size of the analysis, it provided the opportunity to examine the second research question from the perspective of participants with an increased likelihood of similar educational experiences. This decision lowered the chances of unknown variables and created a more narrowed focus for data analysis as generational differences in education were minimized, as well as secured a better understanding of the participants knowledge of SEL.

### ***Sample Size***

Each of the five larger companies utilized for this study had an employee size between 200-300 people. If all participants had volunteered to participate in the study, that would create the potential for 1000-1500 total participants. Understanding that getting 100% involvement was

unrealistic, a goal was set to have close to 10% of the total potential participants to respond, or somewhere between 100-150 total participants. For RQ<sub>1</sub>, this goal was met with a total participant of N=121 responding and being utilized in the data analysis.

For RQ<sub>2</sub>, after removing the participants who had no exposure to SEL in schools, the participant amount dropped to N=90. This resulted in a sampling size just below the targeted goal of the study at roughly 8% of the potential population. It is also noted that no data was gathered on the participants beyond gender and graduation year, therefore it was not possible to identify what percentage of each participating company responded. This decision was made to increase the security of the study and potential for participants to feel safe completing a survey about job satisfaction.

### ***Confidentiality and Anonymity***

For this study a Google Survey (see Appendix A) was sent to the human resources department of companies in Johnson County, K.S. Companies who agreed to participate in the study were provided a survey link to their employees to complete. Companies did not track which employees completed the survey, nor did they have access to the results of individual responses. Responses to surveys were recorded as average scores with no identifiable information gathered. This design increased confidence in confidentiality and anonymity.

### ***Description of Instruments***

The Google Survey utilized for this study was comprised of two main sections, each containing 10 questions, and a pre-test. Recognizing that the utilization of the term SEL might be out of the normal vernacular of the participants, the pretest included information to support the determination of a participant's exposure to SEL in school. First, participants identified their graduation year. Based on the Kansas Department of Education (2022), SEL was not commonly

used in Kansas schools prior to 2010, and CASEL (2022) identifies the introduction of SEL into schools as occurring post 1995. With this information in mind, the demographic data on graduation date was used to determine if a participant had any exposure to SEL in schools. Following demographic data, the participants answered a series of questions designed to measure their knowledge of SEL. Again, this data was used to determine if a participant had SEL as an element of their public-school education.

The first 10 questions of the survey were based on various SEL skills that are taught in Kansas schools. Eklund et al. (2018) provides an in-depth overview of how SEL is measured based on Kansas standards. The Kansas SEL Assessment includes a Likert scale-based assessment of SEL skills that each district, school, or individual classroom can utilize to assess SEL strengths and weaknesses. This survey is 25 questions long with five questions for each of the five SEL competencies. For this proposed study, 10 of the questions were modified representing two questions for each of five SEL competencies. Participants responded to each question rating how well they were taught each skill using the following four-point Likert scale:

1. Poor
2. Average
3. Good
4. Excellent

An average was calculated for these first 10 questions and recorded as the participant's SEL score.

The second portion of the survey included 12 questions on job satisfaction. This portion of the survey was based on the work of Spector (2022). Slightly adapted to include only a four

option Likert scale, participants responded to each of the job satisfaction questions using the options of:

1. Strongly Disagree
2. Disagree
3. Agree
4. Strongly Agree

Like the first portion of the survey, participants' responses were recorded as a number whereas the lowest score possible is 1 and the highest is four. The participants received a job satisfaction score based on the average of all 12 questions.

### ***Description of Risk***

For this study, subjects participated on a volunteer basis. No identifiable information was collected. Survey links were provided directly to the participants through a secure, limiting the ability for employers to track their employee's responses. Results from the survey were housed in a Google Sheet that was generated automatically from the participant's response and included only the numerical values of the participants response to questions. The design of the survey and method for collecting data limited the potential risks of breach of confidentiality and anonymity for the participants.

### ***Data Security***

The Google Survey platform is a free tool for designing and administering surveys and questionnaires. Included in the platform was the ability to house all responses in a spreadsheet program called Google Sheets. These results were housed in Google Drive provided to the researcher by Murray State University. Access to Google Drive is password protected, and only



the researcher had access to the original data collected. As mentioned, no identifiable information was collected for this study, and all responses were recorded as numerical values.

### ***Variables in the Study***

For RQ<sub>1</sub>, the independent variable was defined as whether the participant received SEL as part of their education from pre-kindergarten through 12<sup>th</sup> grade. The dependent variable was the participant's career satisfaction score. These two variables were examined for correlation using the independent-sample test. If a relationship is found, the null hypothesis would be rejected.

For RQ<sub>2</sub>, the independent variable was replaced with the participants SEL score. The dependent variable remained constant with the job satisfaction score. For RQ<sub>2</sub>, the Pearson *r*-test correlation coefficient test was utilized to test the null hypothesis, and to examine the potential relationships between SEL taught in pre-kindergarten and 12<sup>th</sup> grade and job satisfaction. If a relationship was found, then null hypothesis would be rejected.

### **Procedures for Data Analysis**

To prepare the data for analysis, the first step was to filter participant responses into two subcategories: those that experienced SEL in their school setting and those that did not. To determine this data, a couple of different methods were used. Using the timeline from KSDE (2022), which includes a mandatory introduction of SEL to all Kansas public schools starting in 2010, it is assumed that participants who graduated high school post 2011 would have had some level of SEL in their school education. Therefore, all participants who responded to the first question of the survey with a graduating class of 2011-2015 or 2016-2022 were automatically filtered into the first group.

Understanding the SEL timeline provided by CASEL (2022), the definition and common use of SEL began in the year 1996. With this timeline in mind, participants responded to four SEL screener questions to determine their understanding of SEL. Participants who correctly answered at least half of these questions, and graduated in the years 1996-2000, 2001-2005, or 2006-2010, were also filtered into the first group of participants who experienced SEL in their school setting.

All participants who reported graduating high school 1995 or earlier or graduated between the years of 1996-2010, and answering less than two screener questions correctly, were filtered into the second category, those who did not receive SEL in their school setting. This grouping was utilized to respond to the first research question. With the second research question centered on the impact of SEL, it was determined that the second group of participant's scores would be eliminated, as there would be less confidence that these participants SEL scores would be a result of their public-school education.

To complete the organization of data, participants responses were calculated into three numerical values. The first value reflected the participants SEL screener in a range from zero-four, whereas a score of zero represents zero correct responses to the screener, and a score of four represented all screener questions answered correctly. The second numerical value was the average score of the participants responses to the SEL questions, and the third numerical value the average score of the participants responses to the job satisfaction questions. The latter two numerical values were utilized as the primary sets of data for analysis in relation to Q<sub>2</sub>. All responses to the survey and the organization of the data can be found in Appendix A, Table 1, *Participants Responses to Survey*.

For RQ<sub>1</sub> the job satisfaction scores were compared between the two groups, those that had SEL instruction and those that did not. To compare the two sets of data the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software was utilized to run an independent-samples t-test between the two groups of participants. For RQ<sub>1</sub>, only the participants job satisfaction scores were compared to determine if there was statistically significant difference in adult career satisfaction between adults taught SEL skills in school and adults not taught SEL skills in school.

The second group, those that did receive SEL instruction in public schools, data was utilized to examine RQ<sub>2</sub> and to determine if there a statistically significant relationship between SEL scores and job satisfaction scores. For this data analysis the SPSS software was once again used to run the Pearson Correlation Coefficient test. For RQ<sub>2</sub> it was determined that a Pearson Correlation Coefficient ( $r$ ) of zero would equate to no relationship between SEL scores and job satisfaction scores, ( $r$ ) of Zero to one would equate to a positive relationship, and a ( $r$ ) of zero to negative one would equate to a negative relationship. The findings for RQ<sub>1</sub> and RQ<sub>2</sub> can be found in Chapter IV.

## CHAPTER IV: DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

### Introduction

Chapter IV centers on exploring the problem that there exists a lack of understanding of the relationship between job satisfaction and SEL education, which could further contribute to the current job crisis. As mentioned previously, if SEL has a positive relationship with employability skills, and employability skills have a positive relationship with job satisfaction, then SEL should, hypothetically, have a positive relationship with job satisfaction. The purpose of this chapter is to examine the data collected during this study to respond to two research questions that are a response to this lack of understanding.

Specifically, the data presented in this chapter was utilized to explore the relationship between Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) skills taught during pre-kindergarten through 12th grade and post-secondary career satisfaction. To gather this data, five large companies in the Kansas City Metropolitan area were asked to participate in a survey around job satisfaction and SEL with a potential response of 1000-1500 participants. A total of 121 participants responded to this survey; thus, between 8 to 12% of the potential participants volunteered. As described in Chapter III, these participants were separated into categories for data analysis: those who did receive SEL instruction in school in group one, and those who did not in group two. The following is an analysis of this data based on the two research questions and related hypotheses guiding this study.

### **Research Question One with Hypotheses**

RQ1. Is there a statistically significant difference in adult career satisfaction between adults taught SEL skills in school and adults not taught SEL skills in school?

H<sub>0</sub> There is no statistically significant difference in adult career satisfaction between adults taught SEL skills in school and adults not taught SEL skills in school.

H<sub>1</sub> There is a statistically significant difference in adult career satisfaction between adults taught SEL skills in school and adults not taught SEL skills in school.

### ***Data Analysis Research Question One***

For RQ<sub>1</sub>, participants were separated into two categories, those that received SEL instruction and those that did not. These groupings can be found in Appendix A under Table 1, *Participant Responses to Survey*. To test RQ<sub>1</sub>, only the job satisfaction scores were utilized to determine possible correlation. In Table 2, *Sample of Grouping Job Satisfaction Scores*, it can be seen how the data was organized to test RQ<sub>1</sub>. In this table, participants who did receive SEL instruction in school are identified in the group column with the numerical value of 1, and those that did not are identified with the number 2. Also found in Table 2, is a sampling of the job satisfaction scores of participants.

**Table 2***Sample of Grouping Job Satisfaction Scores*


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<b>Year of Graduation</b>	<b>Group</b>	<b>Job Score</b>
3	1	3.3
1	1	3.3
4	1	3.1
1	1	1.9
5	1	3.2
0	2	3.8
2	2	3.7
0	2	3.3
4	2	3.4
0	2	2.1
0	2	2.6
0	2	3.0

---

Note: The Year of Graduation column has been converted from year of graduation responses to numerical values utilized for data analysis. For this column, 0 represents 1995 or earlier, 1 represents 1996-2000, 2 represents 2001-2005, 3 represents 2006-2010, 4 represents 2011-2015, and 5 represents 2016-2022. The group column, a response of 1 represents a participant who did not receive SEL instruction in school, and a response of 2 represents a participant who did receive SEL instruction in school.

The first step to testing  $RQ_1$ , was to determine if the job satisfaction data followed a normal distribution. Using the SPSS software, a one-sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was used to determine if the data followed a normal distribution. The results of this test demonstrated that the data was normalized, and so it was determined appropriate to utilize an independent-sample t-test for  $RQ_1$ . In Table 3, *Group statistics  $RQ_1$* , the mean, standard deviation, and standard error mean can be seen between Group 1, those that received SEL instruction, and Group 2, those that did not receive SEL instruction.

**Table 3***Group Statistics RQ<sub>1</sub>*

Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
1	90	3.37	.542	.057
2	31	3.06	.578	.104

As captured in the above table, Group 1 consisted of 90 participants who identified as having some level of exposure to SEL in schools; and Group 2, 31 that identified as having no SEL exposure in school. Looking at the mean job satisfaction scores of the two groups, it was noted that participants in Group 1 had a higher job satisfaction score with a .31 increase over Group 2. In addition to group statistics calculated through the SPSS software, the independent-samples t-test also provided results for Levene's Test for Equality of Variances, t-test for Equality, and a t-test for Equality of Means.

For the Levene's Test for Equality of Variances, it was determined that if  $p \leq .05$ , the variances would be assumed to be not equal. For RQ<sub>1</sub>, it was determined that the  $p$ -value of .484 was greater than .05, and therefore it was determined that the variances were equal. Given these results, the remainder of data analysis for RQ<sub>1</sub> was done utilizing the data where equal variances were assumed. After completing the Levene's Test for Equality of Variances, the t-Test for Equality of Means was utilized to answer RQ<sub>1</sub>.

The t-Test for Equality of Means provided an answer to the question, is there a statistically significant difference in adult career satisfaction between adults taught SEL skills in school and adults not taught SEL skills in school? In this t-Test the null hypothesis was tested as

the difference between the mean job satisfaction scores of Groups 1 and 2, over the standard error of the differences between the two means. The value of  $t$  was found to be 2.68 for variances assumed equal, and 2.6 for variances not assumed equal. Along with the value of  $t$ , the one-sided  $p$ -value was found to be .004. With this  $p$ -value being less than the test  $p$ -value of .05, it was determined that the null hypothesis was rejected, and therefore the alternative hypothesis, that there is a statistically significant difference in adult career satisfaction between adults taught SEL skills in school and adults not taught SEL skills in school, was found to be true.

Going back to the original t-Test and group statistics, and with the added confidence provided by the independent-sampling test, Group 1, those that did have SEL in school, had a higher mean job satisfaction than those that did not receive SEL in school, Group 2. The final step in the analysis of RQ<sub>1</sub> was to determine the effect size. To determine effect size, the SPSS software utilizes the 1988 Cohen estimate values for  $d$  of .20, .50, and .80; whereas .20 equates to a small effect size, .50 a medium, and .80 a large effect size. For RQ<sub>1</sub>, the effect size was found to be medium.

With the conclusion of tests for RQ<sub>1</sub>, the results were found that those who received SEL in schools, with a mean of job satisfaction score of 3.37 and a standard deviation of .542, had a significantly higher job satisfaction score than those who did not receive SEL in schools, with a mean of 3.06 and standard deviation of .578. Discussion and implications of these results can be found in Chapter V.

### **Research Question Two with Hypotheses**

RQ2. Is there a statistically significant relationship between SEL skills taught in school and adult career satisfaction?



H<sub>0</sub> There is no statistically significant relationship between SEL skills taught in school and adult career satisfaction.

H<sub>1</sub> There is a statistically significant relationship between SEL skills taught in school and adult career satisfaction.

### ***Data Analysis Research Question Two***

For RQ<sub>2</sub>, the focus shifted from exploring the relationship between participants who received SEL scores in schools and those that did not, to examining the correlation between SEL scores and job satisfaction scores. As described previously, for RQ<sub>2</sub> the responses from Group 2 were removed from this portion of the study. While this lowered the participants from 121 to 90, and thus lowered the percentage of representation of potential participants from 8-12% to 6-9%, the purpose of the study still centers on the impact of SEL taught in schools and, therefore, it was determined valuable to ensure SEL scores were more likely impacted by the SEL taught within public schools. The data utilized for RQ<sub>2</sub> can be found in Table 6, *Participant Responses to Survey RQ<sub>2</sub>*, found in Appendix A.

The first step to testing RQ<sub>2</sub>, was to determine if the SEL data followed a normal distribution, as job satisfaction scores were already determined to be normal. Using the SPSS software, a one-sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was again used to determine if the data followed a normal distribution. The results of this test demonstrated that the data was normalized. As RQ<sub>2</sub> is designed to examine the linear correlation between two sets of variables, it was determined that the best test for answering RQ<sub>2</sub> was the Pearson  $r$  correlation coefficient. In this test, the correlation represented by the letter  $r$  can be described as positive, neutral, or negative. Results for this test can range from negative one, a perfect negative relationship; to positive one, a perfect positive relationship. A negative relationship is witnessed when higher

scores for one variable results in lower scores for the other. A positive relationship is then witnessed as the opposite, where high scores for one variable result in high scores for the other variable. Finally, a neutral relationship is when there is no relationship found between the two variables.

As in RQ<sub>1</sub>, the SPSS software was utilized as the main tool for answering RQ<sub>2</sub>. After setting up the data in SPSS, the Pearson  $r$  correlation coefficient test was run. For this test, a  $p$ -value of .05 was utilized, and the standard was adopted that if the  $p$ -value was less than .05 the null hypothesis, there is no statistically significant relationship between SEL skills taught in school and adult career satisfaction, would be false. The results of the Pearson  $r$  correlation coefficient test can be seen in Table 7, *Pearson  $r$  Correlation Coefficient Test*.

**Table 7**

*Pearson  $r$  Correlation Coefficient Test*

	SEL	Job Satisfaction
Pearson Correlation	1	0.523
Sig. (2-tailed)		.002
N	90	90

Based on the results of the Pearson  $r$  correlation coefficient, it was found that the intersection between SEL scores and job satisfaction scores was .523 with a  $p$ -value of .002. With the  $p$ -value being less than .05 for the 90 participants, it was determined that the null hypothesis would be rejected, and the alternative hypothesis, there is a statistically significant relationship between SEL skills taught in school and adult career satisfaction, was found to be true. Further, with a correlation score of greater than zero at .523, it was also determined that the correlation between SEL scores and job satisfaction scores was a positive relationship. Finally,

based on Cohen (1998), the correlation score provided by the Pearson  $r$  correlation coefficient can also be utilized to determine the effect size. Based on the results of this test, it was determined that the effect size is large, suggesting a stronger positive relationship exists between SEL and job satisfaction.

### **Additional Data Analysis for RQ<sub>2</sub>**

While the SEL screener questions did not have a direct relationship with RQ<sub>2</sub>, it was decided that comparing these scores to job satisfaction scores, using the same Pearson  $r$  correlation coefficient could be valuable in the discussion portion of Chapter V. Table 8, *Pearson  $r$  Correlation Coefficient Screener*, represents the results of this test. As will RQ<sub>2</sub>, a  $p$ -value of .05 was utilized, as was the same definition for effect size. The results of this test showed a correlation of .066 with a  $p$ -value of .536. With a  $p$ -value greater than .05, it was determined there was not a statistically significant correlation between SEL screener scores and job satisfaction. These results, and the results of RQ<sub>2</sub> will be further discussed in Chapter V.

**Table 8**

*Pearson  $r$  Correlation Coefficient Screener*

	Screener	Job Satisfaction
Pearson Correlation	1	0.066
Sig. (2-tailed)		0.536
N	90	90

One final test using the Pearson  $r$  correlation coefficient was utilized. While this study focused on SEL exposure in schools, all participants responded to the SEL portion of the survey. To gain further understanding of the impact SEL education has on job satisfaction, this final test

was calculated using all participants scores, including those identified as having no SEL exposure in school. As seen in Table 9, *Full Data Pearson r Correlation Coefficient*, it was found that even with the inclusion of the participants who did not receive SEL in schools, a positive relationship between SEL scores and job satisfaction scores stills exists, and further yet, the effect size of .001 suggests an even stronger positive relationship than the test done with just the participants who received SEL in schools. The implications of these findings will be included in Chapter V.

**Table 9**

*Full Data Pearson r Correlation Coefficient*

	SEL	Job Satisfaction
Pearson Correlation	1	0.516
Sig. (2-tailed)		0.001
N	121	121

### Summary

The purpose of Chapter IV was to report the findings for two research questions for this study. For RQ<sub>1</sub>, an independent samplings test was utilized to test the question, is there a statistically significant difference in adult career satisfaction between adults taught SEL skills in school and adults not taught SEL skills in school? The *p*-value results of .484 and medium effect size of this test provided an answer to RQ<sub>1</sub> that there does exist a statistically significant difference in adult career satisfaction scores between adults who received SEL in schools and adults who did not, and that further, adults who received SEL in schools were more satisfied with their job.

The findings for RQ<sub>2</sub> were also outlined in this chapter. To test RQ<sub>2</sub>, is there a statistically significant relationship between SEL skills taught in school and adult career satisfaction, the Pearson *r* correlation coefficient test was utilized. The results of this test provided evidence that the null hypothesis was rejected, and thus there is a statistically significant relationship between SEL skills taught in school and adult career satisfaction. These findings were supported by a correlation score and effect size of .523 and the *p*-value of .002. The results defined that there exists a relatively strong positive correlation between SEL scores and job satisfaction scores for the 90 participants who received SEL in schools.

The final chapter will include a discussion of these results. This discussion will be organized into seven sections, including a restatement of the results of this study, discussion on RQ<sub>1</sub> and RQ<sub>2</sub>, connections to other research, practical implications, limitations, and recommendations for future studies. Chapter V will conclude with a section specific to P20 implications.

## CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

### Summary

There currently exists a gap in literature around the topic of SEL, specifically in understanding how SEL taught in schools impacts post-secondary success. Further, for the Kansas City Metropolitan Area, there are additional concerns with the job market and employee retention. As discussed in Chapter II, there are some known links between SEL and employability skills, employability skills and job satisfaction, and job satisfaction and employee retention. This study was designed to explore a potential direct connection between SEL and job satisfaction to provide additional research to the current gap around SEL, while also responding to the current job crisis.

In addition, schools are frequently reflecting on current practices to determine how they can best support post-secondary success for their students. As schools introduce new curriculum and programs to their students and teachers, they must be wise to ensure that they are gaining the desired outcomes of these new initiatives. By understanding the relationship between SEL and job satisfaction, schools can potentially adjust their approach to increase post-secondary success. The results and discussion of this study give some merit to the inclusion of SEL in schools, especially in relation to students' future satisfaction in their careers.

Chapter V consists of the conclusion of this dissertation. An interpretation of the results discussed in Chapter IV and how they relate to the research questions and overall purpose of this study. The Chapter also includes connections to other research, recommendations for future studies, and limitations of this study. Chapter V concludes with a connection to P20, which is the foundation of the doctoral program at Murray State University.

## Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to explore the relationship between SEL and job satisfaction. To understand this relationship, five large companies in the Kansas City Metropolitan area were invited to complete a survey comprised of three sections. The first section included a screener, utilized to determine the participants' exposure to SEL while in school, as well as their current understanding of SEL. The second section included a series of questions where participants used a Likert scale to rate how well they learned various SEL skills in school, and the final section used a similar format centered on job satisfaction. A total of 121 participants completed the survey, and an analysis of the results of the survey are found in Chapter IV.

After completing the analysis of the results, the broad takeaway is that there does exist a positive relationship between SEL and job satisfaction. This broad result, alone, can be used to begin to discuss the initial problem identified. If schools want to support future job satisfaction for their students, this initial finding provides the justification for continued focus on SEL in schools. While further discussion will occur later in this chapter, these results should give confidence to school systems who are currently investing in SEL education. Beyond that confidence, the results give merit to continuing to address SEL, even as schools feel stretched by the number of expectations placed on them by their communities and state education departments.

That said, one interesting detail found in the results was that the actual understanding of SEL had no relationship to job satisfaction. After completing the analysis for the two research questions, it was decided to run an extra analysis on the results of the SEL screener compared to

job satisfaction. The analysis found that there did not exist a statistically significant relationship. These results, paired with the results of the research questions, may provide an opportunity for educators to approach SEL in a less formal manner than a full SEL curriculum. This concept will be explored further in the practical significance portion of this chapter.

## **Discussion**

The first portion of this discussion will focus on the overall problem of this dissertation, understanding the relationship between SEL and job satisfaction. As outlined in Chapter IV, a total of 121 participants completed the study, with 90 participants identified as having some exposure to SEL in school, and 31 identified as having no exposure to SEL in school. A group statistic was found after completing an independent-samples test. These results provide the first point of discussion, the broad comparison of mean job satisfaction scores.

This initial test showed that the participants who had SEL exposure had a mean job satisfaction score of 3.37, and those that did not had a mean job satisfaction score of 3.06. These two mean scores provide two interesting discussion points. First, it was interesting to see both groups have a relatively high mean job satisfaction score. Given that the screener for job satisfaction was on a scale of one to four, a mean score above three would imply that both groups are relatively satisfied in their careers. In fact, when looking at the raw data, it is seen that only 26 participants had a job satisfaction score lower than three, and further, only 14 had a score lower than 2.5. This calculates to just over 10% of all participants having an unfavorable job satisfaction score.

This data brings to question how these results would relate to the entire Kansas City Metropolitan workforce. While it would be simple to infer that the workforce in this area is more



satisfied with their careers, it could also reflect these five companies. As five of the larger companies in the area, based on number of employees, these results could reflect companies that have invested in caring for their employees. Without further study, it would be difficult to decide which truth is reality, but both are interesting points that could be utilized in future studies.

This is an important detail to keep in mind, as it is a reminder that while this initial study does give some evidence to the notion that increased SEL will result in increased job satisfaction, it is still too wide of a study to come to that conclusive of a determination. That said, the results of the RQ<sub>1</sub> data analysis did provide an encouraging suggestion that focus on SEL in schools will support the increase of job satisfaction, and this should support employee retention. By conducting further assessments, perhaps focused on companies with a known low job satisfaction trend, it could be determined just how strong the impact of SEL has on job satisfaction. That idea will be further discussed later in this chapter.

The second discussion point relates directly to this study. These first initial results give evidence that there does exist a relationship between SEL and job satisfaction. While further analysis was completed to determine the strength and reliability of this relationship, the group statistics support that this relationship exists, and that the relationship is positive. This initial understanding already provides a new viewpoint on SEL that does not exist in other research and gives merit to focusing on SEL in the school setting. The remainder of the analysis around these results provides an answer to RQ<sub>1</sub>

### ***Research Question One***

Is there a statistically significant difference in adult career satisfaction between adults taught SEL skills in school and adults not taught SEL skills in school?

**Discussion Research Question One.** The intent behind RQ<sub>1</sub> was to develop an understanding of how exposure to SEL in schools relates to job satisfaction. For this question, the participants' SEL scores had no role in the analysis, and rather analysis only focused on if the participant did or did not have SEL exposure in their education and their respective job satisfaction scores. As discussed already, the initial finding was that those who had SEL in school did indeed have a higher job satisfaction score, giving some confidence that there exists a relationship between SEL and job satisfaction. The next step to determining the strength of this relationship was to use an independent-samples test to identify the reliability and effect size of this relationship.

Within this independent-samples test were two individual tests, Levene's Test for Equality of Variances, and t-Test for Equality of Means. The results of the first test produced a *p*-value of .484 which was higher than the needed *p*-value of .05 to determine that the variances were equal. The second test once again produced a *p*-value that when combined with the first test, allowed the ability to reject the null hypothesis and accept the alternative hypothesis that gives the answer to RQ<sub>1</sub>, there does exist a statistically significant relationship between SEL scores and job satisfaction scores. A medium effect size was found, and while this does not have the same confidence as a large effect size, it does support that the results of RQ<sub>1</sub> are not negligible, and a relationship between SEL exposure and job satisfaction does exist.

These results provide a starting point for also addressing the larger problem. Looking at the gap in SEL literature, these results supply a new understanding of how SEL affects students beyond the school setting that was not already known. For a school leader or district curriculum team, this new finding gives additional confidence in the continued focus of SEL in schools and provides merit that the use of SEL in schools has a greater impact than just on behavior and

academics. This concept of SEL impacting behavior and academics was already known, and discussed in Chapter II, but expanding beyond the school setting is an area where SEL research is limited. With the results to RQ<sub>1</sub>, the next step was to examine the relationship between SEL scores and job satisfaction scores.

### ***Research Question Two***

Is there a statistically significant relationship between SEL skills taught in school and adult career satisfaction?

**Discussion Research Question Two.** RQ<sub>2</sub> aimed to deepen the level of understanding around SEL and job satisfaction by exploring the direct relationship between the two. The responses to the SEL and job satisfaction scores of participants were calculated as mean SEL and job satisfaction scores. These scores ranged from a low of one to a high of four. To narrow the results of RQ<sub>2</sub> to a focus on SEL taught in schools, participants who were identified as not having SEL exposure in school were removed from this portion of the study. Once the data was filtered to only include those who had SEL in schools, the Pearson *r* correlation coefficient test was utilized to answer RQ<sub>2</sub>.

The results of this test were used to determine an intersect of .523 and a *p*-value of .002, which allowed the null hypothesis to be rejected, and the alternative hypothesis, there is a statistically significant relationship between SEL scores and job satisfaction scores, was found to be true. Of importance as well, the effect size of this test was large, meaning that the results of RQ<sub>2</sub> have a higher level of confidence than RQ<sub>1</sub>. The results of this test also provided evidence that SEL has a strong positive relationship with job satisfaction.

When looking at the other side of the problem statement, centered on the job crisis, these results give additional support to teaching and focusing on SEL skills. As discussed in Chapter II, and strengthened in the next portion of Chapter V, there exists research that suggests that job satisfaction is a key indicator to retention (Ibrahim et al., 2022), with this known information now paired with the findings for RQ<sub>2</sub>, there exists the potential that increased focus on SEL could result in increased retention for companies.

The overall take away from RQ<sub>1</sub> and RQ<sub>2</sub> is that there clearly exists a positive relationship between SEL and job satisfaction, and with an effect size of medium and large respectively, these relationships are strong. In summary, increased SEL exposure in school results in increased post-secondary job satisfaction. This finding responds directly to the central problem of this dissertation by adding a new finding to the gap in literature around SEL and post-secondary success and provides a potential answer to the job crisis in the Kansas City Metropolitan area.

### **Relationship to Other Research**

With the answer found to RQ<sub>1</sub> and RQ<sub>2</sub>, the next step is to begin to draw connections between these findings and previous research. Beginning with simply the SEL literature viewpoint, the first relationship to other research is found in the study by Payton et al. (2008). This study provided some early findings on the impact of SEL in the school setting. In their study, Payton et al., discovered that the inclusion of SEL in schools resulted in increased academic achievement and decreased behavioral distractions. The results of this study can be utilized to justify the inclusion of SEL in schools but does not provide any support for how SEL impacts students beyond school.

This is important to note because schools are continually urged to simplify and filter the amount of content they are teaching students. In a 2020 article by Sahlburg, it was discussed that because of the pandemic, schools were forced to begin to set priority standards, and filter out additional content that has little impact on the future success of students. Further, Sahlburg (2020) suggests that with the loss of instruction during the pandemic, schools may never be able to return to the content that was removed. One area that schools may have decided to cut back is on the education and inclusion of SEL in curriculum. The results of the Payton et al. (2008) study may give reason to include SEL in schools, but when looking at narrowing the scope of education to only include priorities, the results of Payton et al. may not be enough to raise SEL to a priority level.

This dissertation, however, may just provide the reasoning behind including SEL as a priority. As discussed by Sahlburg (2020), many priority standards were determined by how they impacted students beyond that school year and even beyond schools itself. Understanding, now, that SEL has a positive relationship regarding job satisfaction, it could be argued that this moves SEL to that priority level. Since SEL could potentially impact a student's future career success, it would then be reasonable for schools to hold SEL in higher regard, since it is no longer a benefit to students only while in school.

Moving to the job satisfaction focus of this study, the first relationship to other research to examine is the study by Ibrahim et al. (2022). The Ibrahim study links job satisfaction and employee retention. In this study, it was found that companies with higher employee retention have a workforce that was more satisfied with their careers. Looking that the job crisis in the Kansas City Area, these findings have become important in responding to this crisis. While one solution to the job crisis is simply recruiting and incentivizing applicants, another key solution is

retaining the employees currently on staff. Ibrahim et al. point out that a major aspect of retention is job satisfaction. Where the Ibrahim et al. (2022) study stops is in providing concrete steps or data that employers can use to increase job satisfaction.

The results of this dissertation provide one potential avenue for increasing job satisfaction, which would be to recruit applicants who had some level of SEL exposure in school. While there are multiple steps employers can take to support job satisfaction, if hiring practices include this additional element, employers could begin to witness increased job satisfaction without further investment once the employee is on staff. This is not to suggest that SEL will resolve the job crisis alone, but this could potentially be a low-cost step for employers to take. Further, as seen in the results of this study, 74% of the participants identified as having exposure to SEL. This result gives hope that locating applicants who had exposure to SEL in schools would not be overly complicated to do.

The final research connection that will be made is with that of Peng et al. (2019) and Yoder et al. (2020). Peng et al. conducted a study to explore the relationship between employability skills and job satisfaction. The results of this study found that employability skills have a positive relationship with job satisfaction. Likewise, Yoder et al. conducted a study to connect SEL and employability skills. The findings of this study were that SEL, and employability skills have a direct relationship both in the use of common language and purpose, and the impact that SEL has on employability skills for students.

Earlier in this dissertation, these studies were utilized to justify this study through the transitive property. It was hypothesized that if SEL has a positive relationship with employability skills, and employability skills has a positive relationship with job satisfaction, then SEL should have a positive relationship with job satisfaction. This transitive viewpoint was the basis of the

design of the research questions for this study, especially RQ<sub>2</sub>. With the conclusion of this research, this hypothesis can now move forward as a confirmed relationship, that SEL exposure in schools does have a positive relationship with job satisfaction.

### **Practical Significance**

There is a current trend in education of shifting curriculum and pacing guides towards priority standards. In response to the pandemic, schools were forced to streamline education and pull back on additional lessons and standards that perhaps did not have as big of an impact on future success for students (Sahlburg, 2020). While the pandemic is over, this impact of shifting to priority standards is still a common practice in schools, especially as schools continue to try and regain some of the education lost during the pandemic. With this shift, there may be some schools and districts who will contemplate cutting programs centered on SEL to increase focus on academic achievement.

The results of this study provide rationale for not cutting back focus on SEL. Knowing that SEL does impact post-secondary success, schools and districts should work to continue to include SEL. In the state of Kansas, this is currently a requirement from the state school board, and therefore it would seem logical that this argument is unnecessary. Yet, in 2022 a new law was introduced in Kansas to limit how SEL can be addressed in the school setting, and lowered the flexibility schools have for teaching and assessing SEL (KSDE, 2022). Kansas is not alone in this movement either. In Montana a new law has been introduced to ban SEL in schools all together, and several other states have similar laws and policies being created (Standford & Meisner, 2023).

A recent Hechinger Report (2023) discusses many movements from politicians and parents pushing for the removal of SEL from schools. Citing connections to critical race theory, liberal agenda, and decreased focus on true academia, there are many calls to ban SEL. While the Heckinger Report provides evidence that these connections are not true, the movement to limit or even ban SEL for from schools does appear to be a growing trend, and is being witnessed, as mentioned, in new policies and laws. With this movement, research that supports SEL becomes increasingly important. What this dissertation provides is an opportunity to uplift SEL to the same standard as reading and math, in that it too has a direct connection to future success for students. While further research will be needed to strengthen this argument, the findings of this dissertation could be beneficial to schools or districts trying to justify the continued use of SEL.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

In reflection of the design of this study, there are a few items that could be altered to create higher levels of confidence in the findings. If this exact study were to be replicated, it would be beneficial to understand current job satisfaction trends in the companies selected to participate. For this study, the size of the company was the only determining factor in deciding which companies would be contacted. The thinking behind this decision was to increase the number of potential participants. Including known data around job satisfaction, there could exist the potential of getting an increased number of participants who are not satisfied with work. As seen in the data analysis, roughly 90% of the participants had high job satisfaction scores. This creates a less rich data analysis and has the potential of skewing the results of the study.

Beyond replicating this study with a more diverse participant field, new studies could also be designed to continue the exploration of SEL and job satisfaction. A simple new study



would be to shift the design of this study away from school, and simply to understand the relationship of SEL skills to job satisfaction. A similar study could be conducted where the SEL screener and graduation years are removed, and the school based SEL questions are shifted towards simple SEL questions, such as how well do you manage your emotions?

This shift would allow the researcher to look for connections between various SEL skills and job satisfaction and might give some additional evidence for how SEL is measured and utilized beyond the school setting. The additional data analysis that was conducted beyond the research questions would support this type of study, as it was found that a positive relationship between SEL scores and job satisfaction scores existed even when a participant did not have SEL exposure in school. These results suggest that it is not the school-based exposure to SEL that drives this relationship, but rather just SEL in general. A new study could be developed to back this finding more concretely.

A more complex future study would be to focus on one company and explore how SEL could be implemented as a new company practice. This study could be designed as a full experimental study where employees take an initial job satisfaction screener. Employees could then be randomly split into two groups, where one group receives SEL training for a given period. At the end of the study, a second job satisfaction screener could be given, to measure any potential changes or differences between the two groups of employees. This type of study would continue to add to the current gap in literature by providing new SEL findings that are completely removed from education. Further, results of this potential study could continue to provide support to the current job crisis, as it would potentially create a new response to increasing job satisfaction, if the results suggested that inclusion of SEL had such an impact.

## Limitations of the Study

With the conclusion of this study, it is important to also reflect on the limitations of this study. One limitation has already been mentioned, the lack of diversity in the job satisfaction levels of the participants. While the participants responses to this study did support the findings that there does exist a positive relationship between SEL and job satisfaction, it was also found that 90% of the participants were satisfied with their careers regardless of SEL exposure. By doing more research into the targeted companies, beyond just their workforce size, more confidence in the results would exist if the results still held true with a more diverse group of participants, including a higher number of participants with low job satisfaction scores.

Another limitation discovered in the data analysis is around the SEL screener. The four SEL screener questions were one of the tools utilized to determine if a participant had SEL exposure in school. Looking at the first additional data analysis conducted, it was found that these scores had zero relationship to job satisfaction. Further, when analysis was done for RQ<sub>2</sub> without filtering out the non-SEL group, the results were not only found to be the same, but the results showed a stronger positive relationship than the results with the group filtered. The results of these two additional tests could suggest that the screener utilized was not accurate enough to successfully filter Group 1 and Group 2, or that even participants who had SEL in school could simply not recall specific SEL facts from school. This finding could be seen as a potential reason to have less confidence in the results of this study and justify the need for continued research on the topic.

Further limitations were found within the screener that align to the recognition of mostly positive results. While data was gathered to determine a participant's understanding of SEL and

potential exposure while in school, little data was collected to further develop a demographic understanding of the participants. Future studies should include questions around length of time at a company, their field of work, state where they received public school education, and generalized questions about their satisfaction at work. Each of these demographic questions would support gaining a deeper understanding of who the participants were, and how their experience may impact the results of the study. For example, a participant who just began at a company may not have had time to develop a true rating of satisfaction in their workplace. This would also limit assumptions made, such as if the participant was educated in a state where SEL standards are present in education.

Part of the assumption of this study is that because the companies utilized are based in Kansas, the applicants likely went to a Kansas high school. The data analysis portion was also based on the idea that Kansas mandated SEL incorporation in 2010, thus all applicants graduating 2011 or later were assumed to have had SEL education. One limitation is that the demographic data collected did not include a question to determine if the participants truly did graduate from Kansas or not. Knowing that not all states mandate SEL, this could have led to some incorrectly filtered participants who were assumed to have had SEL in school, and, did not.

The final limitation for this study was around getting participants in general. Around 1500 employees were asked to participate in this study, and less than 10% opted to do so. Multiple contact attempts were needed to increase participation to a level where data analysis could occur. While 121 participants did provide a large enough sample to conduct an accurate data analysis, it does mean that the participants likely do not represent a fair reflection of the Kansas City Metropolitan workforce. For future studies, it will be important to consider how to increase interest in the study.

## **Validity**

In addition to limitations, there exist a few challenges to the validity of the data. In terms of internal validity, there were assumptions made about a participant's exposure to SEL in schools. While a screener was utilized to support this assumption, without further demographic data, it is not a completely accurate manner for determining if a participant did or did not have exposure to SEL in schools. This threat to validity is witnessed in the additional analysis that showed no relationship between the screener and job satisfaction scores, which goes against all other data collected, suggesting that the screener was not an accurate enough measure, and should be adjusted for future studies. The screener itself introduces a threat of validity when considering the instrumentation.

As mentioned in the limitations, another potential threat can be found in the maturation of the study. Without knowing the length of time an employee has been at a company, it is difficult to determine if their satisfaction was impacted. As mentioned previously, a new employee may be more satisfied than a veteran employee. This is also impacted by the threat of history. Since the study was presented to a single person at each company, and the company had the freedom to disseminate the study to whom they pleased, there is potential that only highly satisfied employees were offered the opportunity to complete the study. Again, further demographic data and control over participants would limit both of these threats in future studies.

## **P20 Implications**

The Murray State University Doctor of Education centers on the idea of P20 education. P20 education is the idea that education extends beyond the high school years, and that the school system must design education that prepares students for life and success post-graduation,

and into the beginnings of their adult lives and careers. The design of this study aligns to the P20 design in that it explores this post-secondary connection exploring how a school practice, SEL, impacts adults, job satisfaction. Beyond this overarching focus of P20 on education beyond high school, the Doctor of Education in P20 and Community Leadership at Murray State also included four learning outcomes in the areas of innovation, implementation, diversity, and leadership. The final section of this dissertation will include implications between this study and these four learning outcomes of the doctoral program at Murray State University.

In terms of innovation, this dissertation aimed to find a new way to view SEL. A current school-based practice, the intent of this study was to determine if SEL impacted students beyond high school, and to respond to the issues around the job market and the increased trend of banning SEL in schools. The discovery of a positive relationship between SEL and job satisfaction supports the use of SEL in schools, and could be used to push back against the trend of moving away from SEL. Further studies around this topic could even provide justification for the opposite, an increased focus on SEL in schools.

Regarding implementation, within the conclusion of this study is the recommendation that this study could be utilized for further research around SEL in the job setting. The future study would include providing SEL to employees and measuring the impact of SEL on job satisfaction. There already exists the obvious implementation of SEL in schools, as this practice has been occurring since the mid-1990s, and this study does give a P20 viewpoint on the rationale of continuing this practice, but this idea of creating a job-based SEL initiative would be an innovation in SEL. If this were to occur, either as a continuation of research, or as an initiative for a company, this practice would move SEL from the P-12 world, truly into the P20 framework.

Murray State University tasks doctoral candidates with embodying inclusiveness, diversity, and applying this inclusiveness into their decision-making. Based on the research from CASEL (2022), SEL is a direct response to a schools' need to address equity, diversity, and inclusion (DEI). By recognizing the need to strengthen social-emotional skills, schools can create a whole-child education system that closes achievement gaps and creates a strong foundation for all students to successfully work with other and build effective relationships. As the trend of moving away from SEL occurs, one concern is how this movement could impact DEI. This dissertation gives merit to continuing the use of SEL in schools and gives decision makers potential support in continuing the practice if their community is working against it. SEL is a DEI practice and maintaining these practices is essential for any school leader.

The final outcome of the doctoral program at Murray State University is leadership. As schools adapt and shift in the post pandemic world, respond to increased action of community leaders, and work to create school experiences for students that will have a lifelong impact on their success, it is important that their decisions be based on research and data. This dissertation was designed to do this. To discover a data-based relationship between SEL and post-secondary success. If that relationship was not found, a school leader may have to decide to side with the new trend of move away from SEL, but since a positive relationship was discovered, a leader could use this dissertation as a potential starting point for their rationale behind continuing to incorporate SEL into the classroom.

While further research will be needed to strengthen the findings of this study, and to give increased confidence in the use of SEL in the school setting, this dissertation responds to the P20 outcomes of the Murray State University Doctorate of Education by responding to a current problem in an innovative manner, implementing a study to explore a critical problem, centering

on a practice that supports diversity, and creating new research that can support future leadership decisions. Finally, by shifting the focus of SEL out of the school setting and into the workforce, this dissertation embodies the P20 framework and challenge to view education beyond high school graduation.

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## Appendix A

**Table 1***Participant Responses to Survey*

<b>Year of Graduation</b>	<b>Group</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b> Screener Score</b>	<b>SEL Score</b>	<b>Job Score</b>
3	1	1	3	3.2	3.3
1	1	1	2	2.3	3.3
4	1	1	3	2.2	3.1
1	1	1	2	2.3	1.9
5	1	2	3	3.6	3.2
3	1	2	4	3.9	3.5
4	1	1	3	3.7	3.9
3	1	1	3	3.8	3.7
2	1	1	3	3.4	3.8
2	1	2	4	4.0	3.9
3	1	2	3	3.6	3.2
2	1	2	2	2.6	2.9
3	1	2	3	3.7	3.7
5	1	1	2	3.4	3.1
5	1	1	1	3.0	3.9
5	1	2	3	3.7	3.8
3	1	1	3	3.2	3.3
3	1	1	3	3.9	3.1
3	1	1	4	2.2	3.1
4	1	2	4	3.8	3.4
4	1	2	2	3.6	3.4
5	1	1	1	3.4	3.9
5	1	1	3	3.2	3.0
2	1	2	3	3.9	3.8
1	1	2	2	3.4	3.2
4	1	1	3	3.9	3.7
5	1	2	4	3.6	3.4
5	1	2	2	3.4	3.4
2	1	1	3	3.2	3.4
2	1	1	3	3.6	2.9

<b>Year of Graduation</b>	<b>Group</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b> Screener Score</b>	<b>SEL Score</b>	<b>Job Score</b>
3	1	2	3	3.6	3.8
5	1	1	4	3.8	3.8
5	1	2	3	3.6	3.2
2	1	2	2	3.8	2.9
2	1	1	3	3.4	2.0
3	1	1	2	3.0	3.0
5	1	1	3	3.4	2.6
2	1	2	3	3.4	3.6
3	1	1	3	3.8	3.9
3	1	1	3	3.4	3.8
4	1	2	3	3.3	3.9
4	1	2	2	3.4	3.6
5	1	2	3	3.4	3.9
5	1	2	3	3.6	3.0
2	1	1	2	3.2	3.6
3	1	2	2	3.2	3.4
3	1	1	3	2.8	3.2
5	1	2	1	3.2	3.2
4	1	2	0	3.4	3.9
5	1	1	3	3.8	3.9
4	1	1	3	4.0	3.6
2	1	2	2	2.8	3.4
2	1	2	3	3.4	3.8
4	1	1	3	3.6	4.0
4	1	1	2	3.0	3.4
1	1	2	3	3.4	3.9
4	1	1	3	3.2	3.8
5	1	1	2	3.8	3.2
1	1	1	3	3.2	3.4
1	1	2	2	3.4	4.0
3	1	2	3	3.6	3.9
2	1	1	2	1.8	2.4
2	1	2	3	1.6	2.0
3	1	2	2	2.2	2.9
3	1	1	2	2.8	3.2
5	1	1	1	3.4	3.9
5	1	1	2	3.8	3.9

<b>Year of Graduation</b>	<b>Group</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b> Screener Score</b>	<b>SEL Score</b>	<b>Job Score</b>
4	1	2	3	3.4	2.8
4	1	1	2	3.2	3.4
1	1	2	2	1.6	2.4
1	1	1	3	3.0	3.4
2	1	1	2	3.8	4.0
5	1	1	2	3.8	3.9
4	1	2	3	3.0	3.2
4	1	1	2	2.8	1.8
3	1	2	2	3.4	3.8
3	1	1	3	3.8	1.8
2	1	1	2	3.2	3.2
5	1	2	2	2.1	2.1
2	1	1	3	2.3	3.0
5	1	2	4	4.0	4.0
5	1	1	3	3.2	3.6
1	1	2	2	2.1	3.0
1	1	1	3	1.9	3.4
2	1	2	2	3.2	3.6
3	1	1	2	3.4	3.8
4	1	2	3	3.0	3.9
4	1	1	2	3.4	3.4
5	1	2	3	3.2	3.8
2	1	1	3	3.4	3.8
0	2	1	1	3.9	3.8
2	2	1	1	2.1	3.7
0	2	1	0	2.0	3.3
4	2	1	1	3.0	3.4
0	2	2	0	2.0	2.1
0	2	2	1	2.5	2.6
0	2	1	1	2.1	3.0
1	2	1	1	2.1	2.0
0	2	2	2	2.7	2.1
2	2	2	1	2.2	2.0
3	2	1	1	3.4	3.4
1	2	1	1	2.2	2.9
0	2	1	0	3.6	3.4
2	2	2	1	3.4	3.2



<b>Year of Graduation</b>	<b>Group</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Screenener Score</b>	<b>SEL Score</b>	<b>Job Score</b>
0	2	1	1	2.8	3.6
3	2	2	1	3.2	3.0
0	2	1	1	1.4	2.9
0	2	1	2	2.0	3.6
1	2	2	1	2.2	3.8
3	2	2	1	2.8	3.0
0	2	2	2	2.6	3.9
2	2	2	1	3.0	2.8
0	2	1	1	2.0	3.0
0	2	1	2	2.4	3.6
2	2	2	1	3.0	3.4
0	2	1	1	2.8	2.6
0	2	1	1	2.4	2.0
1	2	2	1	2.8	3.2
2	2	2	1	3.0	3.0
2	2	2	1	3.4	3.8
0	2	2	1	2.0	2.8

Note: The Year of Graduation column has been converted from year of graduation responses to numerical values utilized for data analysis. For this column, 0 represents 1995 or earlier, 1 represents 1996-2000, 2 represents 2001-2005, 3 represents 2006-2010, 4 represents 2011-2015, and 5 represents 2016-2022. The group column, a response of 1 represents a participant who did not receive SEL instruction in school, and a response of 2 represents a participant who did receive SEL instruction in school. In the gender column, 1 represents a female response and 2 represents a male response.

**Table 6***Participant Responses to Survey RQ<sub>2</sub>*

<b>Year of Graduation</b>	<b>Group</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Screenener Score</b>	<b>SEL Score</b>	<b>Job Score</b>
3	1	1	3	3.2	3.3
1	1	1	2	2.3	3.3
4	1	1	3	2.2	3.1
1	1	1	2	2.3	1.9
5	1	2	3	3.6	3.2
3	1	2	4	3.9	3.5
4	1	1	3	3.7	3.9
3	1	1	3	3.8	3.7
2	1	1	3	3.4	3.8
2	1	2	4	4.0	3.9
3	1	2	3	3.6	3.2
2	1	2	2	2.6	2.9
3	1	2	3	3.7	3.7
5	1	1	2	3.4	3.1
5	1	1	1	3.0	3.9
5	1	2	3	3.7	3.8
3	1	1	3	3.2	3.3
3	1	1	3	3.9	3.1
3	1	1	4	2.2	3.1
4	1	2	4	3.8	3.4
4	1	2	2	3.6	3.4
5	1	1	1	3.4	3.9
5	1	1	3	3.2	3.0
2	1	2	3	3.9	3.8
1	1	2	2	3.4	3.2
4	1	1	3	3.9	3.7
5	1	2	4	3.6	3.4
5	1	2	2	3.4	3.4
2	1	1	3	3.2	3.4
2	1	1	3	3.6	2.9
3	1	2	3	3.6	3.8
5	1	1	4	3.8	3.8
5	1	2	3	3.6	3.2

<b>Year of Graduation</b>	<b>Group</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Screener Score</b>	<b>SEL Score</b>	<b>Job Score</b>
2	1	2	2	3.8	2.9
2	1	1	3	3.4	2.0
3	1	1	2	3.0	3.0
5	1	1	3	3.4	2.6
2	1	2	3	3.4	3.6
3	1	1	3	3.8	3.9
3	1	1	3	3.4	3.8
4	1	2	3	3.3	3.9
4	1	2	2	3.4	3.6
5	1	2	3	3.4	3.9
5	1	2	3	3.6	3.0
2	1	1	2	3.2	3.6
3	1	2	2	3.2	3.4
3	1	1	3	2.8	3.2
5	1	2	1	3.2	3.2
4	1	2	0	3.4	3.9
5	1	1	3	3.8	3.9
4	1	1	3	4.0	3.6
2	1	2	2	2.8	3.4
2	1	2	3	3.4	3.8
4	1	1	3	3.6	4.0
4	1	1	2	3.0	3.4
1	1	2	3	3.4	3.9
4	1	1	3	3.2	3.8
5	1	1	2	3.8	3.2
1	1	1	3	3.2	3.4
1	1	2	2	3.4	4.0
3	1	2	3	3.6	3.9
2	1	1	2	1.8	2.4
2	1	2	3	1.6	2.0
3	1	2	2	2.2	2.9
3	1	1	2	2.8	3.2
5	1	1	1	3.4	3.9
5	1	1	2	3.8	3.9
4	1	2	3	3.4	2.8
4	1	1	2	3.2	3.4
1	1	2	2	1.6	2.4

<b>Year of Graduation</b>	<b>Group</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b> Screener Score</b>	<b>SEL Score</b>	<b>Job Score</b>
1	1	1	3	3.0	3.4
2	1	1	2	3.8	4.0
5	1	1	2	3.8	3.9
4	1	2	3	3.0	3.2
4	1	1	2	2.8	1.8
3	1	2	2	3.4	3.8
3	1	1	3	3.8	1.8
2	1	1	2	3.2	3.2
5	1	2	2	2.1	2.1
2	1	1	3	2.3	3.0
5	1	2	4	4.0	4.0
5	1	1	3	3.2	3.6
1	1	2	2	2.1	3.0
1	1	1	3	1.9	3.4
2	1	2	2	3.2	3.6
3	1	1	2	3.4	3.8
4	1	2	3	3.0	3.9
4	1	1	2	3.4	3.4
5	1	2	3	3.2	3.8
2	1	1	3	3.4	3.8

Note: The Year of Graduation column has been converted from year of graduation responses to numerical values utilized for data analysis. For this column, 1 represents 1996-2000, 2 represents 2001-2005, 3 represents 2006-2010, 4 represents 2011-2015, and 5 represents 2016-2022. The group column, a response of 1 represents a participant who did not receive SEL instruction in school, and a response of 2 represents a participant who did receive SEL instruction in school. In the gender column, 1 represents a female response and 2 represents a male response.

### **SEL and Job Satisfaction Survey Questions**

The desired outcome of this dissertation will be to explore the relationship between Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) skills taught from pre-kindergarten through 12th grade and post-secondary career satisfaction. Specifically, participants in the study will respond to a two-part survey, with the participant first rating their development of SEL skills in school, and the second part rating their post-secondary career satisfaction.

---

What year did you graduation high school?

- 1995 or earlier
- 1996-2000
- 2001-2005
- 2006-2010
- 2011-2015
- 2016-2022
- Currently in School

What is your identified gender?

- Male
  - Female
  - Other
  - Prefer not to say
-

## Social Emotional Screener

The following four questions will be utilized to determine a participants understanding of various social-emotional skills.

---

What is emotional development?

- The ability to identify multiple types of emotions
- The ability to maintain and manage emotions
- The ability to communication with others and express feelings

What is social development?

- The ability to understand social ques and body language
- The ability to relate to others through communication
- The ability to maintain relationships with others

Which behavior is an application of self-awareness?

- Recognizing your emotions
- Remaining calm or regulated when facing conflict
- Developing healthy living habits

Engaging in and modeling caring relationships with family, school, and community is an example of...

- Core Principles
- Personal Development
- Social Development

## Social Emotional Learning

The first section of this survey asks the participant to rate the development of their social-emotional skills while in school from grades pre-kindergarten through 12<sup>th</sup> grade. For all questions, participants will use the scale:

1. Poor
2. Average
3. Good
4. Excellent

- 
1. How well did you learn to recognize, select, and ascribe to a set of core ethical and performance principles as a foundation of good character?
  2. How well did you learn to promote and model core ethical and performance principles, including caring for others?
  3. How well did you learn to understand and analyze thoughts and emotions?
  4. How well did you learn to understand and practice strategies for managing thoughts and behaviors?
  5. How well did you learn to set, monitor, adapt, and evaluate goals to achieve success in school and life?
  6. How well did you learn to be aware of thoughts, feelings, and perspectives of others?
  7. How well did you learn to demonstrate awareness of cultural issues and a respect for human dignity and differences?
  8. How well did you learn to demonstrate communication and social skills to interact effectively?

9. How well did you learn to demonstrate an ability to prevent, manage, and resolve interpersonal conflict?

### **Job Satisfaction**

The next section of this survey asks the participant to respond to 12 job satisfaction questions. The questions were developed by Paul Spector (1997). Each question should be responded to using the following scale:

1. Strongly Disagree
2. Disagree
3. Agree
4. Strongly Agree

- 
1. I feel I am being paid a fair amount for what I do.
  2. I feel satisfied with my change for salary increase.
  3. Those that do well on the job stand a fair chance of being promoted.
  4. I am satisfied with my chances for promotion.
  5. I like my supervisor.
  6. I enjoy collaborating with my colleagues.
  7. When I do a good job, I receive the recognition for it that I should receive.
  8. I feel that my efforts are rewarded appropriately.
  9. I feel that my workload is manageable.
  10. I like the people I work with.
  11. I often feel my job is meaningful.
  12. I fell a sense of pride in doing my job.




## Institutional Review Board Approval



### Institutional Review Board

328 Wells Hall  
Murray, KY 42071-3318  
270-809-2916 • msu.irb@murraystate.edu

**TO:** Teresa Clark, Educational Studies Leadership and Counseling

**FROM:** Jonathan Baskin, IRB Coordinator 

**DATE:** 4/10/2023

**RE:** Human Subjects Protocol I.D. – IRB # 23-151

The IRB has completed its review of your student's Level 1 protocol entitled *Relationship Between Social-Emotional Learning and Post-Secondary Job Satisfaction*. After review and consideration, the IRB has determined that the research, as described in the protocol form, will be conducted in compliance with Murray State University guidelines for the protection of human participants.

**The forms and materials that have been approved for use in this research study are attached to the email containing this letter. These are the forms and materials that must be presented to the subjects. Use of any process or forms other than those approved by the IRB will be considered misconduct in research as stated in the MSU IRB Procedures and Guidelines section 20.3.**

**Your stated data collection period is from 4/10/2023 to 4/9/2024.**

If data collection extends beyond this period, please submit an Amendment to an Approved Protocol form detailing the new data collection period and the reason for the change.

**This Level 1 approval is valid until 4/9/2024.**

If data collection and analysis extends beyond this date, the research project must be reviewed as a continuation project by the IRB prior to the end of the approval period, 4/9/2024. You must reapply for IRB approval by submitting a Project Update and Closure form (available at [murraystate.edu/irb](http://murraystate.edu/irb)). You must allow ample time for IRB processing and decision prior to your expiration date, or your research must stop until such time that IRB approval is received. If the research project is completed by the end of the approval period, then a Project Update and Closure form must be submitted for IRB review so that your protocol may be closed. It is your responsibility to submit the appropriate paperwork in a timely manner.

The protocol is approved. You may begin data collection now.

**Opportunity  
afforded**

[murraystate.edu](http://murraystate.edu)

