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Character Education in Prekindergarten

Lori Clark
clarkl4@csp.edu

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Lori L. Clark

Concordia University, St. Paul

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Course Instructor: Dr. Sadlovsky

Second Reader: Professor Elisabeth Amirahmadi

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Abstract

The outcomes of teaching character education in pre-kindergarten (PK) classrooms were researched for this paper. Challenging behaviors have become commonplace in PK classrooms; Edge, Rose, Honeycutt, McKelvey, Swindle, Courson, and Forsman (2018) reported more than 40% of early educators surveyed had suspended at least one child during the previous year. With changes in family structure, the rise in violent acts, and other ethical issues in society it has become necessary for schools to teach values that will help lead children to academic success and keep children in classrooms (Heidari, Nowrozi, & Ahmadpoor, 2016). Research was analyzed to report the effectiveness of including character education in a PK classroom. Evidence showed teaching character education and/or social and emotional skills helped children be successful in kindergarten and beyond. Furthermore, research showed positive outcomes had lasting effects in decreasing aggression, increasing pro-social behaviors, and reducing criminal activities (Heckman, Pinto, and Savelyev, 2013).

Keywords: character education, social and emotional learning (SEL), pre-kindergarten (PK), values education

Chapter One: Introduction

Early childhood is a stage in life that is full of learning; learning to identify colors, letters, and numbers, as well as learning to share space and materials with peers, are all skills that help children prepare for success in kindergarten and beyond (Arnold, Kupersmidt, Voegler-Lee, & Marshall, 2010). Research showed the importance of children learning self-regulation skills that help determine success in school and life (i.e., see Schultz, Richardson, Barber, & Wilcox, 2011; Williams, Bywater, Lane, Williams, & Hutchings, 2019). Character is defined as the values and virtues that lead to making socially accepted choices (Arthur, Powell, & Lin, 2014). The authors went on to state that there are virtues that help determine what kind of people we become; learning responsibility, being honest and self-sufficient, reliable, generous, and having self-discipline help promote success in life.

Character education is defined as supporting the development of social skills and cooperation through the intentional teaching of prosocial behaviors and attitudes (White & Warfa, 2011). Social and emotional learning results in children being able to understand and regulate emotions, identify emotions, make good choices, engage in healthy friendships, respond to challenges in a healthy manner, and gain empathy (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning [CASEL], 2003, as cited in Gunter, Caldarella, Korth, & Young, 2012). Character education, values-based education, and social and emotional intervention have the same primary goals: "…to increase student understanding, caring about, and acting upon core ethical values" (Berkowitz & Bustamante, 2013, p. 8).

Schultz et al. (2011) put the importance of teaching social and emotional skills above that of academics and showed how the skills taught helped alleviate unwanted behaviors in children from three to five years of age. Williams et al. (2019) contended when children do not gain skills

that help regulate emotions, unnecessary problems arise throughout the school years; there may be an increase in mental health issues, unwanted behaviors, and later experiences with substance abuse. Furthermore, Ho and Funk (2018) wrote when children do not gain self-regulation skills, challenges arise when children are expected to follow directions and participate in classroom activities. In 2010, expulsion rates for children in prekindergarten (PK) were three times that of students in kindergarten through the twelfth grade (Gilliam, 2010). Early educators work hard to give students the skills to be successful, happy citizens; removing children from the classroom does not afford the learning experiences that evolve when interacting with peers. Research showed positive outcomes in children's behavior when implementing a character education program (i.e., see Lee, 2016; Turan & Ulutas, 2016). The research reviewed showed the importance of teaching young children character traits that help manage emotions as children learn to navigate social situations. In addition, the research reviewed answered the question, "How can teaching character education reduce challenging behaviors in prekindergarten classrooms?"

The History of Character Education

The subject of character education is not a new one; Plato and Aristotle believed character education was a productive way to help children develop moral virtues (Heidari, Nowrozi, & Ahmadpoor, 2016). Additional history was presented in a research article reporting on the High/Scope Perry Preschool Program (Belfield, Nores, Barnett, & Schweinhart, 2006). According to the article, the program included 123 African American children from families with low income and little parental education. The children were three and four years of age at the time of the study and lived in Michigan (Belfield et al., 2006). The Perry Project took place between 1962 and 1967 and showed the effects of including character education as researchers

continued to collect data on participants after more than 35 years (Heckman, Pinto, & Savelyev, 2013). According to the authors, the character traits taught in the Perry Preschool program had longer lasting effects than any of the academics (Heckman, et al., 2013). The topic gained new life in the 1980s. Due to changes in family structure, a rise in violent acts, and ethical issues seen throughout the world, the United States (US) and parts of Europe felt like there was a lack of virtues in society (Heidari et al., 2016).

A Global Issue

The issue of children lacking self-regulation skills is not limited to the educational system in the US; therefore, studies have been conducted in Taiwan (Lee, 2016) and Croatia (Mihic, Novak, Basic, & Nix, 2016), among other countries, that measured the outcomes of implementing programs that helped children develop such skills. Author Lee (2016) wrote about character education being mandated in early childhood programs in Korea. According to the article, character education had a long history in early childhood education until there was a swing to focus more on academics; the Korean government made the change back after seeing a disparity between moral reasoning and knowledge (Lee, 2016). Furthermore, as Croatia began to look at what made early childhood programs high quality, it became evident that it was important for children to learn skills that encouraged positive relationships with peers and educators (Mihic, et al., 2016).

Vygotsky and Learning

Lev Vygotsky played an important role in understanding how children learn. Vygotsky's sociocultural theory stated that social interactions influence cognitive development (McLeod, 2018); therefore, character education that encourages positive social interactions provides a stage for children to learn important concepts in the classroom. Furthermore, as Vygotsky believed

children learn through the environment and interactions with others (Aras, 2016), early educators can teach character traits while scaffolding social interactions among children.

Conclusion

While some early educators may feel there is not enough time in the day to add more instruction, studies have shown how character education can be integrated through story time (Ruan & Ulutas, 2016) and music (Lee, 2016). Providing a character education program in PK aligns with developmentally appropriate practices (DAP), as suggested by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), as early educators help all children reach learning goals (NAEYC, 2009). In addition, as included in DAP, early educators can teach to all areas of development when including a character education program. Providing character education in PK is possible when applying Vygotskian theory of play as early educators model character traits and scaffold for students' learning (Bodrova, 2008).

The guiding question for the analyzed research in this paper was, "How can teaching character education reduce challenging behaviors in pre-kindergarten classrooms?" The research showed the success that was found when implementing a character education, values education, or social-emotional learning (SEL) program. The research concluded that it was possible to reduce challenging behaviors in a PK classroom through SEL that resulted from including a character education program. Studies from around the world were analyzed and synthesized to show the success children enjoyed after participating in programs that promoted the development of character traits through character education, values education, or SEL.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

The research analyzed for this literature review supported the following question, "How can teaching character education reduce challenging behaviors in a prekindergarten (PK) classroom?" According to authors White and Warfa (2011), character education is defined as supporting the development of social skills and cooperation through the intentionally teaching of prosocial behaviors and attitudes. The United States (US) Department of Health & Human Services & US Department of Education (2014) reported that far too many children are suspended and/or expelled from PK classrooms each year. Walter S. Gilliam issued a report in 2010 that showed expulsion rates for children in PK were three times that of students in K-12, adding that teachers with behavioral support reported the fewest expulsions and suspensions. The research showed benefits, short term and long term, in providing a character education program to help alleviate behaviors that can result in expulsion and/or suspension. These benefits included teaching social and emotional skills that can affect rates of future substance abuse, school dropout, and behaviors that qualify as violent (Schultz et al., 2011).

Research

Character education, values-based education, and social and emotional intervention have the same primary goals: to help children learn how to manage behavior and be successful. Studies were conducted in different parts of the US, as well as foreign countries. Qualitative and quantitative data was used to reveal the benefits of interventions used. Researchers noted an increase in behavior management (Morris, Millenky, Raver, & Jones, 2013), problem-solving skills (Bayrak & Akman, 2018) and cooperation (Kemple et al., 2019) among the prosocial skills gained.

US studies. Freeman (2013) used qualitative and quantitative research to show how a character education program, using picture books, could help children four to six years of age learn about appropriate behaviors in the classroom. In Freeman's study, character education was used to teach preschool-age children about bullying, a problem that was present as early as two years old (2013).

According to authors Schultz et al. (2011), children learned to exhibit appropriate behaviors, resulting in more chance of experiencing success in school and life. In addition, the authors told why it is important to help young children learn to manage behavior; there is more chance for children to drop out of school, abuse drugs, and be involved in violent offenses later in life when behaviors are not managed. The quantitative study included implementing a social and emotional program in a preschool in Nebraska and was successful in decreasing unwanted behaviors among students as the hypothesis was proven (Schultz et al., 2011). Furthermore, researchers found that teachers were able to spend more time on instruction as children learned to manage behaviors through a social and emotional learning intervention. Researchers saw a decrease in unwanted behaviors and an increase in student engagement in the qualitative and quantitative study in New Jersey (Morris et al., 2013).

Three studies were conducted in Pennsylvania. The Head Start research-based, developmentally informed (REDI) program showed how teaching children social-emotional skills improved the ability to name emotions, problem solve in social situations, and be more engaged in learning (Bierman, Domitrovich, Nix, Gest, Welsh, Greenberg, Blair, Nelson, & Gill, 2008). This quantitative study was substantial because the following study showed lasting effects as children experienced kindergarten (Nix, Bierman, Domitrovich, & Gill, 2013). In "Promoting Children's Social-Emotional Skills in Preschool can Enhance Academic and Behavioral

Functioning in Kindergarten: Findings from Head Start REDI," the authors found children more successful in reading and more engaged in learning in kindergarten after developing important social skills in the Head Start REDI program (Nix et al., 2013). This was a quantitative study. Additionally, a later quantitative study showed positive effects after following the same children for five years (Nix, Bierman, Heinrichs, Gest, Welsh, & Domitrovich, 2016).

Three final studies conducted in the US included interventions to promote social and emotional learning. The Second Step Violence Prevention curriculum for PK and kindergarten was used to promote empathy, management of emotions, and problem-solving skills (Kemple, Lee, & Ellis, 2019). The program utilized 28 sessions and was delivered to 37 children between three and four years of age. Findings from the qualitative and quantitative study showed a significant difference in cooperation and social skills when comparing children in the intervention and control groups (Kemple et al., 2019).

The Strong Start Pre-K program was used in a study in Utah that included a total of 84 children among four classrooms (Gunter, Caldarella, Korth, & Young, 2012). Results of the quantitative study showed an increase in emotional regulation and a decrease in conflicts in the classroom and internalizing behaviors. Similarly, the quantitative study that included the Kindness Curriculum (KC) program, delivered over twelve weeks, showed an increase in social competence and social-emotional development, as well as higher grades in learning domains (Flook, Goldberg, Pinger, & Davidson, 2015). The study included 68 preschool-age children in a Midwestern city in the US. The KC program focused on improving executive function skills, self-regulation, and prosocial behaviors (Flook et al., 2015).

International studies. Lee (2016) reported findings of how students' behavior can improve when character education is incorporated into the curriculum. Lee included that the

educational authority in Taiwan insisted five and six-year-old children experience character education that focused on caring behaviors, showing respect, being courageous, being honest, taking responsibility, and cooperation, as these were considered core values. Lee (2016) included qualitative and quantitative data in the action research study.

Likewise, Mihic et al. (2016) used qualitative and quantitative data that revealed the benefits of a social-emotional learning program in Croatia. According to the study, preschool-age children participating in the Preschool Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies (PATHS) program showed an increase in positive behaviors and a decrease in unwanted behaviors. The Preschool PATHS program encouraged development of self-control, problem-solving skills, and self-esteem, among other social and emotional competencies (Mihic et al., 2016). Authors Hughes and Cline (2015) supported these findings when reporting significant improvements in behavior, social and emotional skills, and self-regulation using the PATHS program in the United Kingdom (UK). The authors also used a qualitative and quantitative study as the results of questionnaires and interviews were statistically analyzed (Hughes & Cline, 2015).

Author Dereli-Iman (2014) wrote that early childhood is an important time when children experience the most growth in many areas, including social skills, and begin to understand some cultural values. The author reported improved social skills in group situations and problem solving when comparing two groups of preschool children in a quasi-experimental design. Furthermore, positive effects of the intervention were still seen three months post intervention. The study was conducted in Eskisehir, Turkey (Dereli-Iman, 2014).

In addition, Social-emotional learning (SEL) was a strategy shown to improve outcomes for children living in poverty (Baker-Henningham, Scott, Jones, and Walker, 2012). Baker-Henningham et al. used a qualitative and quantitative study to show how implementing the

Incredible Years Teacher Training intervention program in Kingston, Jamaica improved social skills and conduct problems for children at home and school. The study was significant because low- and middle-income countries are home to almost 90% of children in the world. (Baker-Henningham et al., 2012). These findings were supported in the research conducted by Bayrak and Akman (2018). The quantitative study on the effects of the Incredible Years Child Training Program showed improvements in social and problem-solving skills and a decrease in challenging behaviors exhibited by children in Ankara, Turkey. The study included 32 children who were five and six years of age (Bayrak & Akman, 2018).

Further evidence of the effectiveness of the Incredible Years program was seen in the study conducted by Williams et al. (2019). This study included 221 children between four and eight years of age and attending Welsh schools. The children were chosen based on higher levels of behavioral problems exhibited, ages, and spoken language of Welsh and/or English. The quantitative study reported growth in knowledge of problems solving and children meeting teacher set goals pertaining to social skills (Williams et al., 2019).

Participants

Participants in the studies included children between three and six years of age, as well as teachers of early childhood education programs. Additionally, some studies included information provided by families or caregivers, pre- and post-intervention. Nine of the studies included fewer than 100 children and seven included more than 180. Diversity in groups varied between quite diverse and inclusion of children from one ethnic group and/or socioeconomic level. Children from different parts of the US, UK, Turkey, and Jamaica participated in intervention or control groups.

Fewer than 100. There were nine studies that included fewer than 100 participants. The studies were conducted in the US, UK, Jamaica, Turkey, and Taiwan. The number of participants ranged from 18 in the study by Schultz et al. (2011) to 84 in the study by Gunter et al. (2012). Children in the studies were between three and six years of age. Some studies were conducted in federally funded programs (Schultz et al., 2011), private preschools (Freeman, 2013; Dereli-Iman, 2014), and public preschools (Flook et al., 2015).

US studies. Participants in the study conducted by Schultz et al. (2011) included 18 children and one teacher; this study included the fewest students. The federally funded center was in Nebraska and included children from families with low socio-economic status (SES) and/or qualified as "at risk." Fifteen percent of the children had disabilities and all children were between three and five years of age. Thirty-eight percent of the children were Hispanic American, 45% were Caucasian, and 17% were African American. Fifty percent were girls and 50% boys (Schultz et al., 2011).

Thirty children participated in the study by Freeman (2013). The children attended three child development centers, full time. The centers were private establishments. The children were between four and six years of age; six were four, 21 were five, and three were six years of age. There were 18 girls and 12 boys in the study; 20% were African American, 10% Asian, 26.7% Hispanic, and 43.3% were Caucasian (Freeman, 2013).

The study conducted by Kemple et al. (2019) took place in the southeast part of the US. Thirty-seven children between three and four years of age were chosen for experimental and control groups, 17 in the experimental group and 20 in the control group. The average age of children in the experimental group was just under 3.5 years; the average age in the control group was 3.75. Of the experimental group, almost 53% were girls and of the control group, 40%.

Almost 71% of the children in the experimental group were Caucasian and 65% in the control group were Caucasian. There were no children with disabilities included in the study. Almost 60% of the children in the experimental group were identified as having high social-emotional competencies and just over 40% were identified as having low social-emotional competencies. Of children in the control group, 60% were identified as having high social-emotional competencies and 40% were identified as having low social-emotional competencies (Kemple et al., 2019).

The study by Flook et al. (2015) was conducted in a city in the Midwest section of the US. There were 67 children included in the study conducted in seven public classrooms. Thirty-four of the participating students were girls and 33 were boys; the average age was just over 4.5. Almost 40% of the children were from low-income families and 49 parents had graduated from college. Forty of the children were Caucasian, eight were Hispanic, four were African American, seven were Asian, and eight were mixed ethnicities. Demographics of educators were not included in the study (Flook et al., 2015).

Eighty-four children, in four classrooms in Utah, participated in the full study conducted by Gunter et al. (2012). The treatment group consisted of 52 children and there were 32 children in the control group after 19 moved before the end of the study. Of the participants, 42 were girls and 42 were boys. Almost 67% of the children were Hispanic, just over 26% were Caucasian, 2.4% were African American, 1.2% were Native American, and just over 3.5% were mixed ethnicities. In the study, there were two adults in each classroom, one Hispanic and one Caucasian (Gunter et al., 2012).

International studies. There were 32 children between the ages of four and five and a half years included in the study by Bayrak and Akman (2018). The children attended one of eight

classrooms in Ankara, Turkey. Just under 44% of the students were female and 26 were five years of age. Just under 45% of mothers and just over 65% of fathers had graduated from higher education institutions. Fifty percent of mothers were employed and almost 94% of the children lived with both parents. Fifty percent of all teachers had taught fewer than six years. Two-thirds of the teachers in the classrooms had been at current schools between two and five years. Ethnicity and socio-economic statistics were not included in the study (Bayrak & Akman, 2018).

There were 57 children, three and four years of age, included in the study by Hughes and Cline (2014). Twenty-eight boys and 29 girls attended one of three preschools in the UK. The children were divided into three groups for the study. Families were involved by filling out questionnaires before and at the conclusion of the study. Information concerning socio-economic status, ethnicities of children, and family backgrounds was not included in the study (Hughes & Cline, 2014).

Sixty-six children, divided evenly between an experimental and control group, were included in the study by Dereli-Iman (2014). The children, between five and a half and six years of age, attended one of two private preschools in Eskisehir, Turkey. Families were also included in the study when completing an evaluation of the program, post intervention. There were no additional demographics included in the study (Dereli-Iman, 2014).

The final study that included fewer than 100 people was conducted by Lee (2016). Lee's study took place in preschools located in Chungwa County, Taiwan. Ninety-two children and five teachers participated in Lee's study. The children were between five and six years of age and the teachers, between 25 and 40. The teachers had between eight and 20 years of experience teaching early childhood education, averaging 12 years. There was no additional demographic information included in the study (Lee, 2016).

More than 180. There were seven studies that included more than 180 participants. The studies were conducted in the US, Croatia, and Wales. The number of participants ranged from 356 in the studies by Bierman et al. (2008), Nix et al. (2013), and Nix et al. (2016) to 623 in the study conducted by Morris et al. (2013). Children included in the studies were between three and eight years of age. Some of the studies were conducted in federally funded programs (Bierman et al., 2008; Nix et al., 2013; Nix et al., 2016), public preschools (Baker-Henningham et al., 2012), and childcare centers (Morris et al., 2013).

US studies. The following three studies included 356 children in Head Start REDI programs in the state of Pennsylvania (Bierman et al., 2008; Nix et al., 2013; Nix et al., 2016). The studies started with 356 children in 44 Head Start classrooms in Pennsylvania; 46% were boys, 58% were Caucasian, 25% African American, and 17% Latino. Half of the children attended Head Start REDI classrooms located in more populated areas in a county in the southeastern part of Pennsylvania and half attended classrooms in smaller, rural areas in the central part of the state. In the study by Bierman et al. (2008), for 40% of the children, this was the first year in Head Start; 60% had attended the program at three years of age. Just under 90% of the children lived with mothers, 4% with fathers, and grandparents were primary caregivers for 4% of the children (Bierman et al., 2008).

The second study, conducted by Nix et al. (2013), included a follow-up as the children transitioned from Head Start REDI and experienced kindergarten. The study included the 356 children living in Pennsylvania; 46% were boys, 58% were Caucasian, 25% African American, and 17% Latino. All children came from families with low socioeconomic status. All families were invited to participate in the study; however, 14% declined. Three percent of the children

started the preschool program and did not finish. Furthermore, a total of 5% left the program before the end of kindergarten (Nix et al., 20113).

The third study of the Head Start REDI program, conducted by Bierman et al. (2016), included the same 356 children; 46% were boys, 58% were Caucasian, 25% African American, and 17% Latino. Seventy percent of the children were from families living in poverty. In addition, 69% of caregivers completed high school and 40% were single parents. The children had attended one of 44 classrooms among 25 Head Start centers and transitioned to 202 classrooms for kindergarten. The study followed the children through third grade, reported a 91% rate of retention, and included findings for the remaining 325 children. Each child had six teachers during the five years; different teachers rated behaviors each year. There was no parent involvement included in the study (Bierman et al., 2016).

Participants in the final and largest study in the US, conducted by Morris et al. (2013), included a total of 623 children from 51 public preschools, childcare centers, and Head Start programs; one four-year-old classroom was chosen from each location. Twenty-six classrooms, totaling 319 children, participated in the Foundations of Learning (FOL) program and 25 classrooms, totaling 304, were in the control group. Each classroom had two adults and 15 children, as mandated by the state of New Jersey. Children in the FOL group consisted of 48.6% girls, averaged in age of 4.4 years, 42.2% were Black, 9.5% white, and 35.8% Hispanic. The number of children in families receiving government benefits was 1.37%, 33.10% lived in families with three or more children, 7.10% had parents 22 years of age or younger, 47.8% lived in single-parent homes, and 18.2% lived in homes where Spanish was the primary language. The control group consisted of 48% girls and averaged 4.3 years of age. Children identified as Black constituted 43.7% of the participants in the control group, 9.1% identified as white, and 34.4%

Hispanic. The number of children living in homes where government benefits were received was 1.45%, 30.40% of the children had two or more siblings, 6.40% had parents under the age of 23, 50% lived in single-parent homes, and 17.5% lived in homes where Spanish was the primary language. There were 26 teachers in the FOL group and 25 in the control group. The average age of teachers in the FOL group was 36.96 years and the average in the control group was 38.23 years. The number of teachers in the FOL group with more than six years of teaching experience constituted 53.8% and in the control group, 56.5%. There were 52% Black, 24% white, and 23.1% Hispanic teachers in the FOL group. Just over sixty-six percent of teachers in the control group were Black, 14.3% white, and 17.4% Hispanic. The number of women teachers in the FOL group was 88.5% and 88% of the teachers in the control group were women; all teachers had obtained a bachelor's degree or higher, as mandated by the state (Morris et al., 2013).

International studies. The study conducted by Mihic et al. (2016), took place in six schools in Croatia; two classrooms were in Zagreb, two in Primorsho-goranka, and two in Istria. There were 182 participants in the study at the beginning of the school year and 171 at the end. All children were between three and six years of age and all were Caucasian. Girls made up 45% of the participants and 55% were boys. The percentage of children living with both parents was 92% (Mihic et al., 2016).

The study conducted by Williams et al. (2019) included 221 children between the ages of three and eight years: 85 between three and five years, 85 between five and six, 40 between six and seven, and 11 between seven and eight years of age. There were 112 children in the intervention group and 109 in the control group; the children attended one of 22 schools in Wales. Thirty-eight percent of the children were girls and 62%, boys. Almost 96% of the children were Caucasian and 21.5% qualified for free and reduced meals, above the national

average of 18.8%. There were 56 teachers included in the study, two of which were male. The average age of the teachers was just under 40 years and the average years of teaching was fifteen (Williams et al., 2019).

Another larger study included 225 children in Jamaica (Baker-Henningham et al., 2012). The children were between three and five years of age, attended one of 24 community preschools, and chosen because of being flagged as having higher levels of behavior problems. The intervention group included almost 60% boys and the control group was made up of over 63% boys. The average age of caregivers for the intervention group was just over 31 years and 30 years for the control group. Of the children in the intervention group, 90% lived with mothers; 96% of the control group lived with mothers. Fewer than 50% of each group lived with fathers. Fewer than 60% of the caregivers of the intervention group were employed, while 72% of caregivers of the control group were employed. There were 73 teachers involved in the study; however, the authors reported that most teachers qualified as paraprofessionals. The average age of teachers in the intervention was just over 38 years and the average age of teachers in the control group was just under 43. The teachers in the intervention group had an average of less than eight years of teaching in current schools and the teachers in the control group had taught in current schools for just over eleven years. Families of the students participated when completing questionnaires concerning children's behavior and parents' attitudes toward the schools, pre- and post-intervention. The average attendance for each group was close to 80% during the first part of the school year. Although the socioeconomic status for participants was not included in the study, the authors did include that the study was conducted in 24 inner-city schools in a country considered middle-income (Baker-Henningham et al., 2012).

Methodology

Methods across the studies included random or blind selection, convenience sampling, and a variety of instruments for assessing behaviors. For instance, the study on the effects of using the Incredible Years program included 32 children, chosen using a staged sampling method; convenience sampling was used first, followed by a criterion sampling (Bayrak & Akman, 2018). The children attended one of eight classrooms in Ankara, Turkey and were randomly divided between an experimental or control group. Children in the intervention group learned through seven units, delivered in a specific order to build on previous learning. The units included 18 sessions that were two hours long and given twice weekly. The program employed the use of videos to show children ways to problem solve in social situations; the videos lead to later discussions. In addition, dolls were used to help children talk about emotions provoked by certain social situations, along with ways to solve challenging situations. Teachers used the Child Behavior Assessment (CBA) to measure behaviors of children. Reliability of the CBA was .95. Teachers used the Social Competence and Behavior Evaluation Scale (SCBE) with a six-point scale to measure 80 items that fell into a category of positive or negative behaviors. Reliability for the SCBE was .81. Researchers included the use of the Wally Social Problem-Solving test (WSPS) to measure children's ability to problem solve in social situations. Eleven categories were covered as researchers asked children the appropriate response for different situations. The test-retest reliability was .79. Teachers completed the Child Behavior Assessment Scale (CBA) to measure 73 items using a five-point scale like the Likert scale. Teachers rated the 73 items that fell into one of three areas: rebellious behavior, anxiety in social situations, and harmony (Bayrak & Akman, 2018).

In addition, the study conducted by Gunter et al. (2012) took place in Utah as researchers looked at the effects of the Strong Start Prekindergarten Program. The program was designed to implement early intervention for emotional and health problems in young children. It included ten lessons, with two booster lessons, to help children gain vocabulary for expressing and dealing with emotions. The lessons were delivered by classroom teachers and reinforced with times of review. Teachers used Likert scales to score children in three areas: emotional regulation, internalizing behavior, and the relationship between teacher and each student. A subscale of the Preschool Behavioral and Emotional Regulation Scale (PreBers) was used to score 13 areas of emotional regulations. The consistency of the subscale was .96. The Preschool and Kindergarten Behavior Scale-Second Edition (PKBS-2) was used to score children's behaviors in 15 areas; teachers used a four-point Likert scale. The consistency of the scale was .90. The Student-Teacher Relationship Scale included 28 items and teachers used a five-point Likert scale to measure teachers' feelings about relationships with children. An analysis of variance was used to quantitatively analyze information from the subscales (Gunter et al., 2012).

Flook et al. (2015) used Kindness Curriculum to help 30 children develop social skills, comparing the outcomes to outcomes of 38 children in a control group. The intervention lasted 12 weeks and included two lessons per week, with a total of approximately ten hours of program training. Additionally, the intervention included observations pre- and post-intervention. Teachers used two subscales of the Teacher Social Competence Scale to measure prosocial behavior and regulation of emotions. In addition, teachers conducted observations to determine the children's ability to share, levels of cognitive flexibility, and to measure inhibitory control. Children's second semester grades were also used to determine growth in specific areas. To determine changes between pre- and post-intervention, a t-test was used to compare outcomes for

the intervention and control groups (Flook et al., 2015). The remaining studies included questionnaires, interviews, surveys, and parent involvement.

SDQT questionnaires. The Strength and Difficulty Questionnaire (SDQT) was used in some studies. In the study conducted by Mihic et al. (2016), teachers used 37, 30-minute lessons to implement the social and emotional learning program. Teachers rated seven areas of behavior exhibited by children in September and April. The SDQT was used to measure the areas of emotional symptoms, conduct problems, and peer problems, using a three-point Likert scale with each. The Social Competence Scale was used to assess prosocial behavior and emotion regulation using a six-point Likert scale. The Children's Social Behavior Scale was used to measure the area of relational aggression using a six-point Likert scale. Finally, hyperactive impulsive behavior was measured with the ADHD Rating Scale using a four-point Likert scale (Mihic et al., 2016).

Hughes and Cline (2015) used the SDQT, pre- and post-intervention, to rate symptoms of emotions, behavior problems, relationship challenges with peers, prosocial behavior, and ability to pay attention as researchers evaluated the Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies (PATHS) program. The researchers included three groups of children, one group of seventeen and two groups of twenty children. The intervention was conducted for ten months and included 44 lessons; two lessons were provided each week. Lessons focused on self-control, problem solving, compliance, and feelings. To determine the children's level of vocabulary of emotions, a subtest from the Kuche Emotional Inventory, the revised Recognition of Emotion Concepts, was administered by Hughes. There was a .85 reliability of test-retest. To determine the children's ability to take a peer's perspective, the Deham Puppet Interview was conducted by Hughes. To describe behaviors exhibited by children, Hughes used the Early Years Behavior Checklist

(EYBC) while conducting observations. The checklist was used to rate the severity and occurrence of specific behaviors. Reliability for the EYBC was .88 for test-retest. Pre- and post-test results were compared using a paired samples t-test (Hughes & Cline, 2015).

Williams et al. (2019) also used the SDQT in the study when the Incredible Years Program was implemented in 22 schools in Wales. The program included 58 teachers and 221 children randomly placed in an intervention or control group. The program lasted 18 weeks and was delivered by two people, teachers and/or support staff. The intervention used videos, discussions, puppets, role-playing, and the children took home assignments to have discussions with families each week. The questionnaire was used to measure social and emotional skills of children to determine inclusion in the program, as well as outcomes post intervention. The SDQT included 25 items; the skills of problem solving, emotional competency, and pro-social behaviors were included in the questionnaire. The test-retest reliability was between .72 and .85. Academic goals were set by teachers at the beginning of the school year and assessed at the end of the same year. Targets were set for skills in mathematics, language, and social areas. Researchers used the Wally Problem-Solving Task (WPST) to measure children's prosocial behaviors. The same researcher scored and re-coded responses four months later and recorded a .87 reliability (Williams et al., 2019).

The Incredible Years Program was also implemented in Kingston, Jamaica; researchers utilized the SDQT in the study (Baker-Henningham et al., 2012). Control and intervention groups were randomly assigned to schools, and school identities were masked. Criteria for inclusion included classrooms of at least 20 children and schools that had three or four preschool classrooms; 24 schools met the criteria. Teachers, mostly classified as paraprofessionals, and administrators in the intervention schools attended training for eight days. The program was

adapted to suit Jamaican preschools. Alterations included Jamaican classrooms in training videos, the usual five- or six-day training was extended to eight, activities reflected experiences and challenges of teachers in Jamaica, teachers were trained on how to build relationships with students and manage difficult behaviors, and print materials were altered to reflect the culture. Baseline measurements were taken between October and November and post-intervention measurements were conducted between May and June of the same school year. The SDQT was used by teachers, along with the Sutter-Eyberg Student Behavior Inventory, Connor's Global Index, and Social Skills Scale, as teachers recorded difficulties with behavior, conduct problems, attention challenges, and prosocial skills, respectively. Five researchers conducted observations to record negative and positive behaviors exhibited by students, pre- and post-intervention. Behaviors were recorded through event recording for aggressive and prosocial behaviors, and instantaneous sampling was used for disruptive behaviors. Observations totaled 15 minutes at five-minute intervals over four days. The level of each behavior was rated using a seven-point scale. In addition, researchers used the Eyberg Child Behavior Inventory to measure prosocial skills and behavior problems reported by parents. A questionnaire that included ten items was completed by parents to measure feelings about children's teachers, the effectiveness of the teachers, and the relationship between child and teacher (Baker-Henningham, 2012).

Interviews. Freeman (2013) used interviews and questionnaires to collect data on the implementation of a character education program. Questions were developed by Freeman and approved by a parent of a child in the study, three teachers at the center, and two educators with doctorate degrees in early childhood education. Freeman and an assistant read questions to participants and recorded answers. A Likert scale was used, as well as questions that were open-ended and/or required short answers from participants. Interviews of at least two children were

conducted and included five questions after each book was read. A Likert scale was used to measure understanding of the message and whether the children liked the story. Agreement of the book was determined by the percentage of children liking it, with 80% agreement qualifying the book. Questionnaires were used again at the end of the study to measure new knowledge (Freeman, 2013).

Lee (2016) also used interviews in the study conducted in Taiwan, measuring the impact of teaching character education through music. Individual teacher interviews were conducted by Lee after each of 18 lessons; interviews were semi-structured to allow for broad discussions. Data from the interviews was analyzed through interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA). To ensure quality, collection and analysis of data was done by Lee. Lee used the method of identifying themes to analyze data (2016).

Interviews of children were also included in the study conducted by Kemple et al. (2019). The study included the Second Step Violence Prevention Curriculum for prekindergarten and kindergarten. Twenty-eight sessions that included learning about empathy, managing emotions, and solving of problems were delivered by previously trained classroom teachers to children in six classrooms designated as the intervention group. There were four classrooms identified as the control group. Classrooms were chosen based on recommendations and did not include classrooms thought to be of low quality. According to the researchers, the quality of classrooms was comparable between the two groups. Researchers interviewed children using the Second Step Knowledge Assessment interview to assess how much the children understood how to name and manage emotions, see situations from peers' perspectives, and problem solve in social situations. There were 20 questions included in the interviews and children earned points for appropriate answers. Children's behavior was rated by lead teachers in each classroom using the

Social Skills Rating System-Teacher form (SSRS-T). According to researchers, rating showed reliability at pre- and post-test. Six ten-minute observations were conducted by researchers while children played. Researchers then used the records to determine three categories to code for the children's behavior; the three categories included physical, verbal, and relational aggression. Interviews, ratings, and observations were conducted pre- and post-test and information was compared using t-tests (Kemple et al., 2019).

Surveys. In the study conducted by Schultz et al. (2011), a convenience sample was used. Thirty lessons were delivered, one or two per week, and each lesson lasted an hour. Instruction was delivered to whole and small groups and assessments were conducted to measure understanding of content. Two instruments were used to measure different aspects of the study. To measure both positive and negative behaviors of individual children, the Behaviors Assessment Systems for Children second edition (BASC-2) was used. Thirteen specific behaviors were the focus in social and behavioral areas. A 100-question survey was included pre- and post-intervention; teachers answered the questions by choosing "never," "sometimes," "often," or "always." Teachers used a 25-item rating scale to assess skills in five of the six areas presented in the program during pre-and post-intervention; the instrument used was known as the Connection with Others Rating Scale (CORS) and was used during whole class observations to check for use of the skills taught (Schultz et al., 2011).

Similarly, Morris et al. (2013) used surveys and observations to collect data. Morris et al. included 51 preschool sites that met New Jersey state standards and were chosen by convenience. The sites were then sectioned into 12 groups and intervention and control groups were assigned randomly within the groups. Ninety-six percent of teachers and 92% of parents filled out a survey at the onset of the study in the fall. Teacher surveys included information

about the children and children's behaviors; surveys were conducted in the fall and spring. Participating teachers were offered 30 hours of training on the program; 84% of the teachers attended between 24 and 30 hours. Clinical Classroom Consultants (CCC), consultants trained in mental health, having expertise in early childhood, and of master's level provided support to teachers and children with high risk. Classroom observations were conducted in the fall and spring by observers unaware of the status of each group. Observations took place for 20 minutes and were conducted four times. Observations took place when CCC were out of the room to keep group types anonymous. To have reliability with coders, double coding was included in 20% of observations. Individual child observations were conducted in the spring, post-program implementation. Observations were conducted on five pre-chosen children identified by teachers as having behavioral issues. Observations were conducted by people other than classroom observers and conducted on different days. Double coding of observations of individual students occurred 20% of the time. To ensure reliability, training was provided to coders by the University of Virginia's Center for Advanced Study of Teaching and Learning (Morris et al., 2013).

Parent involvement. Researcher Dereli-Iman (2014) created and implemented the Values Education Program in a preschool in Turkey. Prior to the research, two classrooms were formed by school administrators. The study began when Dereli-Iman created and provided families with a form to rate the importance of twenty values with the ten top-rated values included in the program. Additionally, the form asked families for permission for children to participate in the intervention group and how likely they were to participate in activities designed for families. There were 11, 30-minute sessions delivered to the intervention group and pre- and post-tests were conducted, as well as a retention test three months after the post-test. Teachers

filled out the Social Skills Evaluation Scale to measure nine areas of social skills exhibited by children in the intervention group. The reliability for test-retest was .83. In addition, teachers filled out the Psycho-Social Behavioral Scale for Preschool Children to measure observed social psychology behaviors in eight areas. The researcher used the Wally child Social Problem-Solving Detective Game Test to measure the children's ability to problem solve with adults and peers. Reliability of the test-retest was .87. Data from all scales was evaluated and t-tests and descriptive statistics were used to analyze children's levels of social development. Post intervention, families of children participating in the intervention group were given an interview form to evaluate the program. Data from parent interviews was coded to find themes of information collected (Dereli-Iman, 2014).

Likewise, Bierman et al. (2008) included families in the study of the Head Start REDI program. Families were informed of the study and invited to participate as researchers provided brochures containing information about the program; 86% of invited families chose to participate. PATHS videos with tips and activities for families to use at home were provided to parents three times during the school year and parents were provided prompts for asking children about learning to encourage support in homes. In addition, parents were interviewed at the beginning and end of the school year; when necessary, interviews were conducted in Spanish and $20 was given to each family interviewed. Bierman et al. conducted the study to determine the effectiveness of the REDI program in Head Start as intervention teachers received training and were provided mentoring throughout the study. The REDI program was developed to provide teachers with support when using the social-emotional learning program, Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies (PATHS), and to support teachers' ability to encourage development of literacy skills. The PATHS program included 33 lessons to encourage growth in social-emotional

areas; lessons focused on prosocial skills, emotional development, self-control, and skills in problems solving. The study included 14 classrooms in the intervention group and 14 in the control group. Centers were randomly assigned to one group; classrooms within each center were assigned to the same group to avoid contamination between classrooms. Teachers and parents used the ADHD Rating Scale to measure children's ability to pay attention at school and home. Ratings were conducted to measure children's ability to control impulses, how easily children were distracted, and how long children could pay attention to tasks. Teachers, researchers, and parents used the Teacher's Observation of Child Adaptation-Revised and the Preschool Social Behavior Scale, with a six-point Likert, to assess aggressive behaviors displayed by children. Additionally, teachers, researchers, and parents used the Social Competence Scale with a six-point Likert to measure prosocial behaviors exhibited by children. The Assessment of children's Emotional Skills and Emotional Recognition Questionnaire were used to assess the children's understanding of emotions and social-cognitive skills. The Challenging Situations Task was used to assess the children's ability to solve problems in social situations. The results were coded by the lead and assistant teachers. Teachers and assistants used a six-point Likert scale to rate eight areas of children's learning engagement; the list of areas was created for the study. The Adapted Leiter-R Assessor Report was used by researchers to assess the children's ability to complete tasks at school. In addition, researchers rated the level of involvement and participation the children exhibited. Teachers and assistants used the Expressive One-Word Picture Vocabulary Test, the Grammatical Understanding, and the Sentence Imitations to measure a variety of language skills. The Blending, Elison, and Print Knowledge subtests were used to measure children's skills in emergent literacy (Bierman et al., 2008).

The study conducted by Nix et al. (2013) also included families and was a follow-up to the study by Bierman et al. (2008). The purpose of the study was to determine the effects of the REDI intervention as children experienced kindergarten. Data was collected and analyzed as children four years of age entered Head Start, at the end of the school year, and at the end of kindergarten the following year; families were interviewed at each of these times. The ADHD Rating Sale and the School Readiness Questionnaire were used to assess learning engagement of the children; researchers used a four- and six-point Likert scale, respectively. Observations by researchers, teachers, and parents were conducted using the Social Competence Scale and the Teacher Observation of Child Adaptation-Revised to measure positive and negative behaviors. Researchers, teachers, and parents used a six-point Likert scale for each. These measures were also used by teachers and parents at the end of kindergarten. The Assessment of Children's Emotional Recognition Questionnaire was used to assess children's understanding of emotions. To assess the children's ability to solve social problems, the Challenging Situation Task was used. A subscale of the TOPEL, Print Knowledge, and a subscale of the Test of Word Reading Efficiency, Phonemic Decoding, were used to assess letter and phonemic knowledge, as well as children's ability to sound out words. A subscale of the Woodcock-Johnson Test of Achievement III-R, Story Recall, was used to assess children's skills in listening and comprehension. Subscales of the Test of Preschool Early Literacy, Blending, including 21 items, and Ellison, containing 18 items, were used to assess children's skills in emergent literacy. The Expressive One-Word Picture Vocabulary Test was used to assess vocabulary knowledge using 170 items. T-tests were used to compare outcomes for the intervention and control groups (Nix et al., 2013).

The final study conducted in the Head Start REDI program was a follow-up to measure the effects of the program as children transitioned through grade three (Nix et al., 2016).

Although the study did not include parents, information from previous studies was included to measure progress. Ratings were recorded by classroom teachers in the spring of first, second, and third grades. A subscale of the ADHD Rating Scale, Inattentive-Impulse, was used to assess eight areas of attention problems exhibited by children in the intervention group; teachers used a four-point Likert scale. A subscale of the Teachers Observation of Classroom Adaptation-Revised was used to assess aggressive-oppositional behavior. Seven items were rated by teachers using a six-point Likert scale. A six-point Likert was also used to assess eight items under the category of learning engagement. The Social Competence Scale included 13 areas of social competence; teachers used a six-point Likert to rate behaviors of children. A subscale of the Child Behavior Scale was used to assess three areas of student-peer relationships. The Student-Teacher Relationship Scale included eighth areas to rate the relationship between students and teachers; teachers used a five-point Likert scale (Nix et al., 2016).

Purpose and Key Findings

The purpose of each study was to measure the effects of implementing a character education program, or a similar program, teaching young children about values, and included social-emotional development in an early childhood setting. Results of each study showed an improvement in positive behaviors and a decrease in challenging behaviors after implementing an intervention program, showing that including character education can reduce challenging behaviors in prekindergarten classrooms.

Connecting with Others. The purpose of the study conducted by Schultz et al. (2011) was to test the results of the program normally used for children in kindergarten through second grade as teachers encouraged social and emotional growth in preschool classrooms. The results reported by Schultz et al. included the greatest amount of change in two areas; the amount of

depression exhibited by children saw a decrease and there was significant increase in adaptability by the children. Furthermore, using the BASC-2 scale, six other areas showed enough change to suggest the reduction of unwanted behaviors. The Connecting with Others Rating Scale (CORS) also showed an improvement in social-emotional skills (Schultz et al., 2011).

Foundations of Learning. The purpose of the study conducted by Morris et al. (2013) was to test the implementation of a social-emotional learning program into preschool classrooms as teachers were trained on how to manage disruptive behaviors. Results recorded by independent observers showed a lower level of conflicts among students, as well as between students and teachers in the Foundations of Learning (FOL) group. FOL group scores were significantly higher in the areas of engagement, self-control, focus, and participation during activities, and lower in disruptive behaviors when compared to the control group. In addition, there was a decrease in observed conflict for children considered high risk in the FOL group. Other results included the improvement of teachers' classroom management skills, including providing a positive environment and behavior management with students, when compared to the teachers in the control group. Furthermore, teachers in the FOL program were able to spend 50 more minutes per week on instruction due to spending less time dealing with unwanted student behaviors (Morris et al., 2013).

Preschool PATHS. The purpose of the study conducted by Mihic et al. (2016) was to measure the effects of implementing the Preschool PATHS program for the first time in Croatia. Researchers hypothesized that the program would have a positive effect on behaviors while showing a decrease in challenging behaviors. The study showed there was a decrease in unwanted behaviors and an increase in positive behavior between the months of September and April. Specifically, there was negative change in emotional symptoms, aggression, conduct

problems, and behaviors associated with hyperactive impulse. There was positive change seen in prosocial behavior including emotion regulation (Mihic et al., 2016).

The study conducted by Hughes and Cline (2015) had a similar purpose. The purpose of the study was to determine if the PATHS program was affective in improving behavior, emotional knowledge, skills in self-regulation, and social-emotional development in children in preschool. Additionally, the researchers wanted to test how effective a partial program would be and measure perceptions of teachers and parents about the program. Results of the study showed a significant improvement in children's ability to name and appropriately respond to emotions for children in the full PATHS program. Additional improvements were seen in the areas of problem behaviors, hyperactivity, and prosocial skills when comparing the group with the participants in the partial program and control groups. Qualitative data from interviews was analyzed and showed 11 areas of the program that were identified as positive aspects; seven areas were identified as problematic (Hughes & Cline, 2015).

Author-created studies. Freeman (2013) conducted research on the implementation of character education to test the effects of including literature for children that included the theme of bullying to address the problem. In addition, Freeman intended to have a better understanding of how preschool-age children viewed bullying. The study showed an increase in positive behaviors. Freeman reported an increase in all 30 children's ability to identify bullies and behaviors. Specifically, the children were able to tell Freeman about how bullies behaved physically, verbally, and emotionally at the conclusion of the study. In addition, 26 of the 30 children were rated as having a good understanding of the characteristics of bullies. When asked how the children would deal with a bully on the pre-questionnaire, the answers were about

fighting back; however, when asked on the post-questionnaire the children had responses like asking an adult for help and being kind (Freeman, 2013).

Angela Lee (2016) also conducted a study of integrating character education into the curriculum, this time using music. The purpose of the study was to record the results of using music to teach character education. Results of interviews with the five teachers participating in the study showed six areas that had increased in positive behavior. Teachers saw increases in the areas of caring for others, cooperation, respect, responsibility, honesty, and the value of courage. Academic achievement was also seen to improve throughout the study (Lee, 2016).

Second Step. Kemple et al. (2019) conducted research to measure the effects of the Second Step program on improving social-emotional skills and reducing aggressive behavior. Results showed children in the intervention group scored significantly higher in cooperation, social-emotional competence, self-control, and assertion. Specifically, the number of aggressive incidences decreased from 21 to nine for the intervention group and 37 to 36 for the control group when measured post-intervention (Kemple et al., 2019).

Values Education. Similarly, the study conducted by Dereli-Iman (2014) showed children participating in the Values Education Program had a significant improvement in development of social skills, development of psycho-social skills, and problem solving in social situations; improvements were still present three month later. Furthermore, family interviews, post-intervention, showed improvements in behaviors at home. The control group did not have the same outcomes. Dereli-Iman (2014) conducted the study to measure the effects of a values-based education program when implemented in preschool classrooms where children were allowed opportunities to learn and practice prosocial skills.

Strong Start. The purposes of the study conducted by Gunter et al. (2012) were to determine how curriculum effected teachers' beliefs of social-emotional competence in preschool, to record how the booster lessons affected outcomes of learning and development, and to measure the effects of student-teacher relationships when using a particular curriculum. Results showed the treatment group that included lesson boosters had the largest improvement in internalizing behavior; the treatment group that did not use the boosters showed significant improvement. Both groups showed a decrease in conflict while the control group showed an increase. In addition, the treatment groups showed improvement in dependent behaviors. All groups showed an increase in emotional regulation (Gunter et al., 2012).

Incredible Years. The studies conducted using the Incredible Years (IY) program had similar purpose. Bayrak and Akman (2018) conducted a study to determine how implementing the IY Child Training Program would affect children's outcomes in behavior, social problem-solving, and social competence. Results showed a significant difference between social problem-solving skills and behavior problems at home and school in children participating in the intervention and control groups. Furthermore, growth was still present four weeks after the study was conducted. Results also showed a significant difference between the two groups in the areas of problem-solving in social situations. Additionally, the experimental group scored higher in social competence skills post-intervention (Bayrak & Akman, 2018).

The purpose of the study conducted by Williams et al. (2019) was to see how using the IY program would affect social-emotional and behavioral skills in children known to have challenges in the areas. Results showed positive effects in the areas of knowledge in problem solving and reaching social goals set by teachers. There was a significant difference in knowledge of problem-solving skills in the intervention group; children were better at naming

and understanding feelings and could give appropriate solutions of how to solve problems post-intervention when compared to the control group. Reductions in behavior problems were recorded for both groups (Williams et al., 2019).

Baker-Henningham et al. (2012) also intended to measure the effects of using the IY program to teach children pro-social behaviors but added specialized training and support for teachers. Findings showed a significant reduction in teacher reported challenging behaviors and improvements in social skills. Parents also reported significant improvements in behavior of children in homes. Additional improvements were seen in school attendance (Baker-Henningham et al., 2012).

Kindness Curriculum. The study by Flook et al. (2015) was conducted to determine how the Kindness Curriculum program would affect self-regulation and prosocial behavior in preschool-age children. Results showed children in the intervention group exhibited more sharing skills, improvement in cognitive flexibility, and delay in gratification when compared to the control group. Furthermore, an improvement in social competence was reported by teachers. End-of-year report cards reflected improvements in learning, development of social-emotional skills, and positive health three months after the intervention concluded (Flook et al., 2015).

Head Start REDI. The purposes of the studies conducted in Head Start REDI programs were connected. The purpose of the study conducted by Bierman et al. (2008) was to see if the Head Start REDI intervention would provide higher skills acquisition in language and literacy and social-emotional areas as teachers were trained and supported throughout the study. As data was compared between the intervention and control groups, pre- and post-intervention, nine of the 11 target areas showed improvements for language and literacy and social-emotional skills of

children in the intervention group. Significant improvements were seen in seven areas and measurable improvements were seen in two others (Bierman et al., 2008).

The purpose of the study by Nix et al. (2013) was to see if the language and literacy skills and social-emotional skills gained in the Head Start REDI program would help children achieve higher academics and adjust well to school environments throughout kindergarten. Results showed children participating in the REDI intervention in Head Start experienced growth in emergent literacy skills, understanding of emotions, and prosocial behaviors, leading to higher engagement in learning and reading achievement in kindergarten. Furthermore, prosocial skills developed in the Head Start REDI program led to prosocial behaviors in kindergarten (Nix et al., 2013).

The purpose of the study conducted by Nix et al. (2016) was to determine if the children from the Head Start REDI program would continue the same trajectory through the third grade. Data was analyzed and trajectories of outcomes were categorized into levels: high-increasing, moderate-stable, and low-stable. Results showed participants in the REDI program had a significantly higher chance of being in the high-increasing level of trajectory in the areas of social competence, learning, and student-teacher closeness. Furthermore, the same students were more likely to be in the low-stable trajectory level in the areas of aggressive-oppositional behavior, attention problems, and peer rejection (Nix et al., 2016).

Limitations

Each of the studies included limitations. Common limitations referred to sample sizes; small studies included between 18 and 84 participants. Aspects of family involvement included none or some during the implementation of a study. Further limitations were present when researchers did not include follow-ups, post-interventions, to determine lasting effects. There

was possible bias in reporting that may have changed outcomes in some studies. Lack of education provided for families who participated in studies was another limitation reported by researchers. Many limitations were noted within the studies; additional limitations were included in this section.

Small sample size. The study by Schultz et al. (2011) included several limitations. First were the small sample size of 18 children and teachers with limited teaching time. Furthermore, the study did not include a control group for comparison, there was not measurement for long term effects, and no information was included from families as to whether the improved social and emotional skills were observed outside of school. Finally, it is unknown if the teacher taught highlighting items on the CORS rating scale or using the program's usual curriculum (Schultz et al., 2011).

Although Freeman (2013) did not include limitations, limitations were present in the study. As with the study by Schultz et al. (2011), the sample size was small and there was not a control group included. Additionally, there was no follow up with the study to determine if results were long lasting. Finally, the researcher and assistant were responsible for each aspect of the study; an outsider for pre- and post-interviews may have provided more reliable results (Freeman, 2013).

The study by Kemple et al. (2019) also included a small sample, 17 children in the experimental group and 20 in the control group. Further limitation was seen with the lack of diversity; all students were from middle-income families and no children with disabilities were included. In addition, researchers did not survey families to determine if families used intervention materials at home. Finally, researchers did not include a follow-up to determine long term effectiveness of the intervention (Kemple et al., 2019). The sample size of 66, in the study

conducted by Dereli-Iman (2014), was also considered small. In addition, like the study by Kemple et al. (2019), Dereli-Iman noted a lack of diversity in socio-economic status and ethnicity; however, specifics were not included. Further limitations were seen when teachers were not provided training on the implantation of the program and when families were not educated on how to model behaviors that exhibit values at home (Dereli-Iman, 2014).

The study conducted by Gunter et al. (2012) also used a small sample size; there were 84 students involved. An additional limitation was that group selections were not randomized. Teachers taught lessons and determined the amount of change seen, allowing for bias in reporting. Additionally, teachers were not provided feedback during the study; feedback may have improved outcomes as teachers adjusted for effectiveness. Finally, not all components were used by teachers due to lack of time, indicating some lessons may have been too long (Gunter et al., 2012). Similarly, the teachers in the study by Hughes and Cline (2015) did not use all lessons provided or read all books to children in the intervention group. Additionally, the number of children participating was 57 and considered a small sample size. Teachers felt the program was difficult for children with learning disabilities; lessons could have been taught over shorter times to alleviate this. Additional limitation was some staff felt the program did not reflect UK culture; this may have impacted how staff felt about the validity of the program. Finally, the groups were rated by an agency that monitored quality; group three had the highest rating and showed the most improvements post-intervention. This may have been due to a higher quality program (Hughes & Cline, 2015).

The final study where there was a small sample size was conducted by Flook et al. (2015); the study included 68 children. Family involvement was not included in the study and there was not follow-up to determine lasting effects of the program. Further limitation was

presented as teachers conducted observations and reported improvements, leaving room for bias when reporting findings (Flook et al., 2015).

No follow-up. Like the study by Flook et al. (2015), Kemple et al. (2019), Schultz at al. (2011), and Freeman (2013), the study conducted by Bayrak and Akman (2018) did not include a follow-up; additional time may have revealed more information on the impact of the program. Additional limitations were that the Incredible Years Child Training Program was intended for children in the United States; cultural differences may have had an impact on outcomes. Researchers also noted a need to provide education to families to increase the effectiveness of the IY program. Two-hour lessons were not listed as a limitation to the study; however, the length of the lessons may have impacted outcomes (Bayrak & Akman, 2018).

The study conducted by Lee (2016) also lacked follow-up to account for lasting results. In addition, samples were convenient when a character education program was implemented. There was little information concerning demographics of participants; therefore, demographics may or may not have provided limitations. Further limitation was teachers were highly qualified, not a reflection of all early childhood classrooms. Additionally, the teachers were cooperative with the program and knew its contents ahead of time. Finally, families were not included in the study; thus, the improved social and emotional skills could not be determined to extend outside of the school setting (Lee, 2016).

The study by Baker-Henningham et al. (2012) also lacked a follow-up to determine lasting effects of the intervention. Additionally, differences in outcomes between groups may have been affected by the lack of training for control group teachers; according to researchers, most teachers qualified as paraprofessionals. Measured outcomes were only included for children predetermined to have a high number of behavior problems; the program may have benefited

children with fewer challenges. Finally, only schools with class sizes of more than 20 children were included; this may have eliminated some students in need of benefited intervention (Baker-Henningham et al., 2012).

Family involvement. The study conducted by Bierman et al. (2008) was similar to those by Bayrak and Akman (2018), Dereli-Iman (2014), Flook et al. (2015), and Lee (2016) in that the study did not provide training to families; training may have produced more positive changes in children. Another limitation was that fidelity of High/Scope and Creative Curriculum being used in classrooms was not measured; lack of fidelity may have affected outcomes. Additionally, due to time limitations, evaluations of change were determined after 25 weeks of implementation; the Head Start REDI program was 35 weeks long. Finally, because of the ages of the children, short assessments were conducted; longer assessments may have provided more in-depth understanding of growth in literacy skills (Bierman et al., 2008).

In the study by Nix et al. (2016), no parent involvement was noted in the follow-up study. Additionally, the level of need was not predetermined for children. Further limitation was seen in the fact that overlap of learning in different domains was not determined. Social-emotional growth was the only focus of this study; the study provided an opportunity to determine continued growth in language and literacy skills recorded in previous studies. Finally, results of growth were recorded by different teachers each year; higher validity may have been achieved if the researchers rated changes over all years (Nix et al., 2016).

Possible bias in reporting. As previously mentioned, there may have been some biases in reporting in the studies by Freeman (2013) and Gunter et al. (2012). In addition, the study conducted by Mihic et al. (2016) consisted of teachers implementing the program, rating children's social and emotional competencies, and reporting student outcomes. Reports provided

by teachers were the basis of all findings; there may have been some bias in reporting due to perceptions of students by teachers. In addition, the study by Mihic et al. (2016) did not include a control group and 96% of the intervention group was Caucasian.

In the study by Morris et al. (2013), a limitation appeared in the results of reports by teachers; according to teachers, there was no significant difference between students in the FOL and control groups. Most differences between groups were recorded by observers; this may show bias in teacher reporting. Additional limitations were classrooms were smaller than many places, having a 2:15 ratio, adults to students, and requirements were higher for teachers at the schools than in many areas. Lastly, because the FOL program included training and extra support for teachers and students, the researchers could not determine which area provided the most growth in positive behaviors or the largest decrease in unwanted behaviors of students (Morris et al., 2013).

Design flaw. According to Nix et al. (2013), experimental design did not allow researchers to measure how functioning skills gained in the Head Start REDI program affected outcomes in kindergarten; lack of measurement of the connection created a limitation in the study. Furthermore, the research showed more small changes than the researchers were hoping to find. Researchers noted little difference of change in achievements in reading skills and engagement of learning between the intervention and control groups in kindergarten (Nix et al., 2013).

A possible flaw in design was also seen in the study by Williams et al. (2019). Children from both groups were together in classrooms; overflow of intervention may have affected outcomes for children in the control group. Additionally, there was a lack of information about peer interactions included in teacher observation reports. Finally, it was not determined how well

the IY curriculum was being delivered; fidelity of the program may have affected outcomes (Williams et al., 2019).

Conclusion

Studies showed how including character education can help alleviate unwanted behaviors in prekindergarten. Each of the studies reviewed showed improvements in desirable behaviors and a decrease in unwanted behaviors in classrooms. Furthermore, data showed a decrease in some behaviors that can lead to expulsion and/or suspension of students. According to Arnold, Kupersmidt, Voeger-Lee, and Marshall (2011), it is crucial that young children gain social skills that help alleviate aggression and anti-social behavior and increase ability to pay attention during learning times to be ready to succeed in school. The study conducted by Morris et al. (2013) included the largest number of children, 623, while the study conducted by Schultz et al. (2011) included 18, the fewest. The studies included a variety of methods; there were interviews, questionnaires, observations, and surveys used among groups of randomly selected and samples chosen by convenience. Results were collected using a variety of methods and included an increase in cooperation, respect, responsibility, honesty, self-control, engagement, academics, and other character traits that can help alleviate unwanted behaviors. Although each study experienced limitations, it would be possible to resolve limitations by including larger groups of children and communicating with families to determine if positive behaviors were extended outside of the school setting. Furthermore, having two or more observers record behaviors in each study would provide more reliability, and including control groups in each would provide more validity. The studies provided an opportunity to further research the benefits of teaching character education in Pre-K classrooms. The following chapter discussed the insights gained from the research and how the information can be used to improve instructional practice in

prekindergarten classrooms. In addition, chapter three provided suggestions for possible future studies.

Chapter Three: Application

This chapter tells why the topic of character education is important to the field of early childhood education (ECE). In addition, it provides insight to how the findings from previous research can guide early educators to intentionally teach character traits that lead to success. The information gained will help early educators apply the new knowledge to a prekindergarten (PK) classroom and alleviate challenging behaviors. Finally, suggestions are made for ways to resolve limitations in previous studies as researchers conduct new studies.

Importance in ECE

Character education provides children with the opportunity to learn and practice social skills and emotional regulation that lead to success in learning. Children need social skills and the ability to pay attention, follow instructions, and regulate emotions to be successful in school and life (McClelland, Tominey, Schmitt, & Duncan, 2017). The participants in the Perry Preschool program experienced benefits of social-emotional learning (SEL) that influenced participants into adulthood. The cost of the program was outweighed by the return; one dollar spent returned $12.90 to society through higher wages earned and fewer crimes committed (McClelland et al., 2017). This information showed the benefits of allocating funds to promote success through a character education program.

Research showed a direct link between teaching character education, promoting social and emotional development, to alleviate behavior problems known to disrupt learning. When children learn about cooperation, empathy, and being responsible, academic success is more achievable as children are more likely to regulate behaviors (Arnold et al., 2010). The authors included that, when children have healthy relationships with peers and teachers, there is higher chance of academic success. Furthermore, positive interactions that result

from social and emotional development encourage children to have a positive attitude toward school. Arnold et al. (2010) shared the connection between a positive attitude toward school and social interactions, engagement, and achievement. In addition, Arnold et al. (2010) reported the connection between prosocial behaviors, learning engagement, and self-esteem.

Furthermore, for children from families with low SES, language and literacy development are connected to the ability to pay attention to instruction. As seen in the studies conducted in Head Start Research-based Developmentally Informed (REDI) programs, teaching social and emotional skills improved attention and alleviated behavior problems (Bierman et al., 2008; Nix et al., 2013; Nix et al., 2016). McClelland, Acock, Piccinin, Rhea, and Stallings (2013) supported this information, adding that the attention skills gained in early education have a direct link to success in future school years, specifically in reading and mathematics. The study conducted by McClelland et al. (2013) showed a greater chance for children to complete college by 25 years of age when attention skills are gained by age four. Character education encourages the ability for children to pay attention through the development of self-control.

Arnold et al. (2010) reported findings from a study investigating the connection between social skills and emergent academic skills. Findings showed the importance of early intervention to teach children how to manage emotions, avoid aggression, pay attention, and participate in prosocial behaviors as the relationship between social skills and academics begins at an early age (Arnold et al., 2010). Including a character education program in PK classrooms, provides young children a chance to develop prosocial behaviors before entering a more formal educational setting.

Implementation

As seen in the research reviewed, there are ways for early educators to implement character education into the learning environment. Freeman (2013) used picture books to teach children about character traits and saw an increase in positive behaviors. Other strategies for implantation were reported by authors Heidari, Nowrozi, and Ahmadpoor (2016). The authors listed the caring approach, the cognitive-development approach, and the traditional approach, first identified by Aristotle, as ways to implement character education. Heidari et al. (2016) believed the three approaches were important to teaching character education. The caring, cognitive-development, and traditional approaches are effective; however, each comes with limitations, so the authors suggested using more than one approach to experience greater outcomes. In addition, the authors recognized the importance of including families and the community in character education, adding that schools, families, and communities must work together. When children witness adults modelling good character, it is more likely children will behave the same way (Heidari et al., 2016).

Caring approach. The caring approach focuses on the character traits of nurturing, kindness, and compassion as children are taught to care for peers and adults. Noddings believed teachers should teach children that teachers care for children, as well as teaching children to care for peers and adults (as cited in Heidari et al., 2016). Heidari et al. (2016) included social-emotional learning as a method to using the caring approach. The social-emotional learning method focuses on student's learning as a social process that includes naming and regulating emotions. This is done as early educators scaffold social and emotional development while children engage in dramatic play and when children's literature, containing themes of feelings, is included in the curriculum. In addition, Lee

(2013) believed using experiential activities to be a good way for children to experience hands-on learning when teaching children to care for peers and adults. Lee (2013) suggested teaching and allowing children to practice using words that show empathy for peers. Heidari et al. (2016) made a connection between social-emotional learning and children's growth in many areas: physical and mental health, morals, academics, and success through motivation. When children learn about character education, there is more respect, responsibility, and caring behaviors seen in classrooms and homes (Heidari et al., 2016).

Cognitive-development approach. The cognitive-development approach to teaching character includes encouraging children to actively think about and problem-solve social issues as there is a focus on the process of solving the issues (Heidari et al., 2016). According to Heidari et al., this is related to Piaget's belief that children's problem-solving development is part of the focus of character education. In addition, Vygotsky believed it was more effective to encourage moral reasoning than to use direct instruction when teaching character. One way of using the cognitive-development approach is through the Socratic Method that involves discussions to further understanding of a specific topic (Heidari et al. 2016). The Socratic Method encourages skills in reasoning and deep thinking. This method was seen when Freeman (2013) used picture books to teach children about bullying, while determining the children's understanding of the topic. Freeman carefully chose books that included specific character traits, read to students, asked questions to determine the level of understanding, and held discussions to encourage further understanding. Lee (2013) supported the use of discussions to encourage moral reasoning as children learned about the needs of peers. The author shared how discussions allowed for children to see the perspective of peers as children discussed conflicts common in daily life.

In addition, discussions encouraged the development of language and literacy skills (Lee, 2013).

Traditional approach. The traditional approach includes helping children form good habits through instruction and repetition (Heidari et al, 2016). Looking more closely at the approach, the authors included learning through service, civic education, and listing virtues in a statement as ways to teach character education. Service learning provides children with the opportunity to engage in moral activities through planned projects that help connect children to communities. Volunteering to spend time with elderly people is an example of service learning and provides children with a chance to learn about character traits like empathy and caring. Civic education teaches children about character traits through activities that encourage an understanding of democracy. An example of civic education is a curriculum that teaches children about groups working together to improve a community, promoting cooperation and fairness. Additionally, Lee (2013) included collaborative activities, like games and cleaning together, as ways to encourage respect and prosocial behaviors. Listing virtues in a statement encourages children to understand morals that society finds important. The list can be read and displayed to remind children of the importance of virtues in a school or classroom (Heidari, et al. 2016).

Future Studies

Each study reviewed experienced limitations. It is possible to eliminate many of the limitations in future studies by learning from studies reviewed. The limitations found were associated with children, families, teachers, time, and curriculum. Limiting the participants of a study can affect the validity as a population may not be represented in the study. Additionally, families and teachers are active participants in children's lives and important

when showing the validity of a study. Ample time provided in a study is crucial for the validity as it takes time to measure important outcomes. Finally, curriculum, already implemented and/or being used in a study, are tools that affect measurements of outcomes.

Children. Small sample sizes were seen in some studies (Dereli-Iman, 2014; Flook et al., 2015; Freeman, 2013; Gunter et al., 2012; Kemple et al., 2019; Morris et al., 2013; Schultz et al., 2011). To eliminate this problem, inclusion of more participants from a variety of early childhood classrooms should be considered. Some studies lacked diversity in SES and ethnicity (Dereli-Iman, 2014; Kemple et al., 2019). The diversity in participants should reflect the diversity of a community. This can be done by including children from different SES and children of ethnicities within the community. Furthermore, inclusion of children with disabilities should be included in studies in early childhood classrooms.

The measurable outcomes reported in the study by Baker-Henningham et al. (2012) included children predetermined to have more behavior problems. Children of all abilities should be included in outcomes. Bierman et al. (2008) included the ages of the children as a limitation, noting the children were too young for longer assessments that would have provided more information concerning growth in literacy skills. Assessments of literacy skills can be done through observations; this would alleviate the issue of attention spans of young children.

The limitation of only including classrooms with more than 20 students was seen in the study by Baker-Henningham et al. (2012). By including classrooms with different numbers of students, researchers may learn more about the effects of teacher to child ratios in respect to the intervention. Finally, children from the control and intervention groups shared classrooms in the study by Williams et al. (2019), allowing for over-flow of

intervention in the study. The way to resolve this issue is to separate the control group and intervention group into different classrooms; this would provide a better understanding of the effects of an intervention.

Families. There were limitations associated with family involvement in some studies. For instance, Kemple et al. (2019) did not survey families to determine if materials were used at home. Providing families with a post-intervention survey and/or interview would resolve this issue. Families were not included in the studies conducted by Flook et al. (2015), Lee (2016), and Schultz et al. (2011). Families provide valuable information about children's behavior outside of school. Including families pre- and post-intervention provides more information about the success of the intervention. Finally, Dereli-Iman (2014) and Bayrak and Akman (2018) noted the lack of educating families on the implemented programs as a limitation. Providing families with information about programs and educating families on how to model behaviors adds benefits to children's learning experience. Park (2008) supported this by referring to the results of the Perry Preschool Project; families experienced education on the program as staff conducted home visits weekly. More importantly, McClelland et al. (2017) reported a higher possibility of breaking the cycle of poverty when both children and families are provided support through educational programs.

Teachers. Teachers were included in some limitations. Baker-Henningham et al. (2012) and Dereli-Iman (2014) described how the lack of training of teachers affected outcomes of studies. Hughes and Cline (2015) noted teachers did not instruct students on specific skills. These limitations can be resolved by providing teachers with training during summer months and scheduled professional development days. Williams et al. (2019) felt the lack of teacher-reported information about peer interactions was a limitation to the study.

This can be corrected when an outsider provides findings of observations as children interact. Additional misunderstandings can be eliminated through interviews and open communication throughout a study.

Gunter et al. (2012) reported the lack of feedback to teachers during the study and lack of teacher interviews, post-intervention, as additional limitations. Providing teachers with feedback is a good way to promote growth; researchers must include teachers in the study process. Additionally, receiving information from teachers, through interviews, provides more insight to an intervention. In the study conducted by Nix et al. (2016), growth was recorded by different teachers each year, allowing for less validity. There would be less room for bias and misinformation if the researchers conducted assessments throughout a study.

Time. Hughes and Cline (2015) reported teachers did not include all lessons of the program. Similarly, Gunter el al. (2012) reported, due to lack of time, teachers did not use all materials. Time allotment is an important aspect to conducting a study; to ensure validity of a study, there must be sufficient time for the process. Time must be allocated for proper implementation as a program is evaluated for effectiveness, participants are chosen, proper training is included, and measurements are conducted during and after interventions.

There was lack of follow-up to studies conducted by Baker-Kenningham et al. (2012), Bayrak et al. (2018), (2012), Flook et al. (2015), Freeman (2013), Kemple et al. (2019), Lee (2016), and Schultz et al. (2011). Time must be provided to include lasting effects of an intervention; this adds to the validity of the outcomes from an intervention program. Due to time constraints, Bierman et al. (2008) listed having 25 weeks to conduct the study as a limitation. This can be eliminated by starting the process of selecting

participants and educators during the summer months, allowing more time for an intervention during the school year.

Curriculum. The effectiveness of curriculum was not determined in the studies by Bierman et al. (2008) and Williams et al. (2019), and fidelity of the curriculum was questioned by teachers in the study by Hughes and Cline (2015). These can be eliminated by conducting a review of a program that has been implemented into a classroom. Providing educators with the findings will help answer questions about the validity of the program. In the study conducted by Hughes and Cline (2015), the program was difficult for children with learning disabilities, specifically children struggled in the areas of language and behavior. As included in developmentally appropriate practice (DAP) (NAEYC, 2009), curriculum must be adapted to meet the needs of all students.

Curriculum that did not account for cultural differences provided additional limitations. The Incredible Years Child Training Program was intended for children in the US; outcomes may have been affected by differences between American and Turkish cultures. In addition, Turkish teachers focused more on negative behaviors than positive (Bayrak & Akman, 2018). Likewise, some staff in the study by Hughes and Cline (2015) felt the program did not reflect the culture of the United Kingdom. Differences between cultures can have a significant impact on the validity of a study. These can be addressed by altering programs used in an intervention before implementation occurs. Activities, and all aspects of a program, should reflect the culture of the participants (NAEYC, 2009).

Conclusion

Including character education in PK classrooms helps alleviate challenging behaviors. Challenging behaviors are common in prekindergarten classrooms; Edge et al.

(2018) believed it was due to the lack of social and emotional skills. Behavior problems were reported by more than 85% of directors surveyed; most reported three or more children exhibiting such behaviors in centers. Furthermore, Edge et al. reported, although early educators did not believe in removing children from the classroom, more than 40% said there was at least one child suspended in the previous year. Additional stress was delivered to families as almost 60% of the directors contacted parents concerning challenging behaviors during the previous month. The authors share a national study that stated privately owned prekindergarten classrooms may have a higher rate of expulsion, adding that early suspension and expulsion often lead to children being removed from classrooms in later school years (Edge et al., 2018). Prekindergarten (PK) children must be in a classroom to learn social skills, as well as academics, that will help them be successful in school and life. When children are removed from the classroom due to behavior problems, children, families, early educators, and society suffer.

Including a character education program in a PK classroom helps alleviate unwanted behaviors and encourages success in life. Just as important, society needs people to possess a moral compass to aid in societal improvements. When children experience character education, learn to manage emotions and behaviors, and have positive interactions with peers and adults, a moral compass begins to develop (Berkowitz & Bustamante, 2013, p. 8). The research findings analyzed and synthesized for this Capstone paper concluded that providing a character education program in PK classrooms encourages the development of prosocial behaviors and a moral compass.

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