A Study of the Theoretical Framework, Influencing Factors and Interventions for Social and Emotional Learning in Preschool Children

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Abstract: Social and emotional learning is one of the crucial areas of preschool children's subsequent learning and lifelong development. In this paper, we used the literature review method to study the SEL of preschool children from three aspects: theoretical basis, influencing factors and interventions. Specifically, the theoretical framework of SEL mainly divided into three types, namely the five-dimensional, the six-dimensional and the seven-dimensional theoretical framework, which provide theory for the concept and dimensions of SEL. Based on ecosystem theory, it is found that three main factors of individual (gender, age, personality traits), family (family background, parenting behavior, the quality of parent-child interaction) and school (teachers, peers) have impact on SEL. Combined with the influencing factors, this paper proposes the individual and group interventions as the main interventions on improving SEL. This paper provides theoretical foundation for the future research on SEL of preschool children.

Keywords: Social and Emotional Learning; Preschool Children; CASEL Framework.

1. Introduction

Many researchers have found that children's social and emotional problems are the common and should be paid attention to in their preschool stage. Preschool children's competency for social and emotional learning is a good indicator of their cognitive adaptive development, which directly determines the happiness of preschool children's future family, academic and life [1]. On March 10, 2015, the OECD released a report titled "Skills for Social Progress: The Power of Social and Emotional Skills" that regarded "social and emotional learning skills" as consistent patterns of thinking, emotion, and behavior, as well as a major factor in the relation between preschool children's social and emotional outcomes throughout their lifetime.

Social and emotional learning, or SEL for short. SEL was first presented at the 1994 Fitz Institute's Conference on Child Mental Health, which also established the CASEL (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning). CASEL defines SEL as "the process by which preschool children learn and use cognition, emotion, and behavior to understand and manage emotions, to set and achieve positive goals, to feel and express empathy for others, to establish and maintain positive interpersonal relationships, and to make responsible decisions [2]." At present, the

majority of preschool children emphasize knowledge over competency, which hindered their SEL. After entering kindergarten, children show not only the separation anxiety, but also the defects in peer communication competency. Therefore, in the period of preschool children development, paying more attention and carrying out relevant SEL interventions will help children gradually form a good SEL competency.

Based on the literature reviews of SEL in preschool children, the research focus on the theoretical framework, the influencing factors and the interventions of SEL development for preschool children. Specifically, the theoretical framework of SEL, CASEL defines SEL as a combination of five abilities: self-awareness, self-management, social cognition, interpersonal skills and responsible decision-making. As for the influencing factors, researchers have conducted analysis on the factors affecting the development of SEL in preschool children only from a certain aspect of family, school and peer relationships, and most of the research literature is empirical research. Such as, the parental emotional-support and the quality of parent-child attachment [3], the teacher-student relationship and the influence of teaching style in classrooms [4], as well as the quality friendships established among peers [5]. Referring to the interventions, scholars have only discussed from the role of play-game curriculum in kindergartens, lacking of interventions from preschool children's self-evaluation and family perspectives. Zins [6] explained that preschool is the main environment to develop preschool children's SEL, and analyzed the impact of role play on preschool children's SEL. However, research perspectives on the theoretical framework, influencing factors and interventions for SEL in preschool children are scattered among the different literature, and there are fewer research to review above three core components comprehensively.

Therefore, this study will focus on three core issues of "what is the theoretical framework of SEL in preschool children, what are the factors influencing SEL, and how to implement interventions for SEL". By the systematic review of the theoretical frameworks, influencing factors, and interventions of the SEL in preschool children, with a view to help educators deepen the understanding of the theoretical system of SEL of preschool children, and create classroom and family environments for preschool children to develop their SEL competencies.

2. The Theoretical Framework of Social and Emotional Learning

Based on the analysis of the core literature, the current researches on preschool children's SEL mainly presents three theoretical frameworks, including, the five-dimensional, six-dimensional and seven-dimensional theoretical framework. These frameworks focus on what is SEL and what constitutes SEL, which provides a theoretical basis for answering "What is SEL in preschool children" in this study.

2.1. Five-Dimensional Theoretical Framework

The most representative of the study of the theoretical framework of SEL in preschool children is the five-dimensional theory of the CASEL and the DFES (Department for Education and Skills). Based on the five-dimensional framework, CASEL explained that SEL uses a learning process in which preschool children recognize and control their emotions, develop care for others, make responsible decisions, establish and maintain good interpersonal relationships, and deal with a variety of issues [7]. The SEAL (social and emotional aspects of learning) project in DFES defined SEL as a supportive skill that helps preschool children effectively manage life and learning, and is a comprehensive approach to promoting the development of SEL in preschool children [8].

2.1.1. The Theoretical Framework CASEL

As can be seen from Table 1, CASEL summarized the five-dimensional core framework of SEL in preschool children.

Table 1: Five-Dimensional Theoretical Framework of SEL in CASEL.

Five-dimensional framework	Standard
Self-awareness	identify emotions recognize strengths
Self-management	manage emotions goal setting
Social awareness	perspective taking appreciate diversity
Relationship skills	build relationships negotiation and refused
Responsible decision-making	assume personal responsibility respect others problem solving

2.1.2. The Theoretical Framework DFES

DFES has promoted and implemented the SEAL project, to develop and improve the competency of preschool children by creating school environments and interpersonal relationships with an emotional culture. As shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Five-Dimensional Theoretical Framework of SEL in DFES.

Five-dimensional framework	Standard
Self-awareness	know and value oneself understand thoughts and feelings
Managing feelings	cope with negative emotions cultivate positive emotions
Motivation	move towards the goal
Empathy	understand the thoughts and feelings of others value and support others
Social skills	establish and maintain relationships solve problems

Although CASEL and the DFES have their own emphases on the theoretical frameworks of SEL in preschool children. CASEL focused more on the social skills and emotional management skills of preschool children, while the SEAL project emphasizes the use of a theoretical framework to support SEL of preschool children's daily life. Both of the two above frameworks show commonalities: focusing on the establishment of preschool children on positive self-awareness, manage emotions, understand others and society, establish interpersonal and communication skills, and make responsible decisions for themselves and society.

2.2. Six-dimensional Theoretical Framework

Chinese scholars expand the two dimensions of "individual and society" into three dimensions of "individual, others and society" [9]. Therefore, Chinese researchers improved the theoretical framework of SEL into six dimensions, and they proposed the concept of SEL: in order to help preschool children obtain the knowledge and skills of themselves and collective cognition and management in life, cultivate their self-confidence, enhance sense of responsibility. Make them learn to establish interpersonal relationships and correctly cope with challenges in the growing up. The specific dimensions are as follows in Table 3.

Table 3: Six-Dimensional Theoretical Framework of SEL.

Six-dimensional framework	Standard
Self-awareness	know emotional self-awareness emotional self-assessment
Self-management	adjust emotions pursue goals
Cognition of others	understand the feelings of others communicate and interact with others
Management by others	build and maintain relationship prevent and resolve conflicts
Collective cognition	understand the rules and values of the collective think from the collective's perspective
Collective management	build the sense of collective belonging deal with collective and individual contradictions

In short, Chinese six-dimensional theoretical framework focuses on explaining its theoretical basis from a theoretical perspective, and pays more attention to the adaptation of preschool children and the cultivation of SEL in the social and collective environment.

2.3. Seven-dimensional Theoretical Framework

Researchers in Australia use the SEWB framework (Social and Emotional Well-Being) for the theoretical framework of SEL in preschool children. Barblet [10] interpret the definition of SEL: the preschool children's conscious awareness of their emotions and behaviors. Table 4 shows that SEWB framework defines preschool children's SEL as seven dimensions.

Table 4. Seven-Dimensional Theoretical Framework of SEL in SEWB.

Seven-dimensional framework	Standard
Overall social-emotional well-being	feel positive emotions and behaviors regulate negative emotions and behaviors
Resilience	optimistic attitudes
Positive social orientation	establish and maintain friendship respect and understand the feelings of others resolve conflicts abide by social rules
Positive work orientation	cooperate with others
Positive school indicators	positive psychological school environment harmonious teacher-child relationship
Positive family indicators	equal and democratic family atmosphere

Positive community indicators	community available resources be aware of responsibilities to society

In the seven-dimensional theoretical framework, scholars pay more attention to linking SEL with schools and communities, and reclassifies the five dimensions defined by CASEL into seven dimensions, including positive school and community indicators.

In summary, the division of the three main theoretical frameworks of SEL in preschool children has their own focuses. Specifically, the definition of SEL in CASEL emphasized the realization of its five-dimensional concept goals; the five-dimensional framework in DFES mainly focuses on the impact of SEL on the academic and life of preschool children; the six-dimensional framework of SEL expand the relationship between individuals, society and the collective; the seven-dimensional framework pay more attention to the preschool children's sensibility and understanding of their own emotions and behaviors. However, the above three main theoretical frameworks have a lot in common. Firstly, pay more attention to the establishment of preschool children's self-awareness and emotional management, which is the basis of SEL. Secondly, attach importance to the cognition of preschool children to others and society and the formation of interpersonal relationship, which is the core of SEL development. Thirdly, focus on the positive roles of the integration of school, family and community resources on preschool children's SEL.

3.   The influencing Factors for Social and Emotional Learning

Ecosystem theory is the famous American ecologist, anthropologist, Urie Bronfenbrenner put forward in 1979, and the theory core is that the environment will have impact on individual development. Moreover, the influence of the environment on individuals also has its own inherent hierarchy, including, micro-system, meso-system, exo-system and macro-system.

Micro system refers to the environment of direct contact with individuals, for the preschool children, the micro system includes three subsystems: individual, family and school. Therefore, this study mainly summarized the influencing factors affecting SEL of preschool children into three aspects of individuals, families, and schools.

3.1. Individual Factors

Based on ecosystem theory, the individual is the main factor affecting SEL. Such as gender differences, age differences and personality traits on the SEL of preschool children.

3.1.1. Gender

As for the gender differences, the girls' overall SEL scores were significantly higher than those of boys among preschool children. A questionnaire of children aged 1-3 found the level of self-awareness, self-management and interpersonal skills among girls is significantly higher than that of boys [11]. At the same time, there are significant differences in the behavioral problems of SEL between boys and girls, girls are more prone to anxiety tendencies, while boys are more likely to have problems, such as aggression, discipline violations and unpopularity. This difference may stem from physiological maturity. Because girls develop earlier than boys physiologically, so girls of the same age have higher empathy and show higher levels of SEL than boys. Girls pay more attention to their own emotions and understand the feelings of others; while boys tend to suppress their emotions and the development of their SEL being limited.

3.1.2. Age

There are extremely significant differences between all age classes, and SEL competencies increase as preschool children age. A learning ability assessment of preschool children showed that there were differences between the senior class and other-age classes. The preschool children in the senior class were significantly better than other-age classes in SEL, and the performance were better than that of other-age classes, while the SEL behavior of the middle class is significantly better than that of the junior class [12]. The reason is that the gradual maturity of preschool children's nervous system and language system has role in the preschool children's SEL. As preschool children age, they are able to use cognitive strategies to regulate their emotions.

3.1.3. Personality Traits

Among the individual factors of preschool children, the influence of personality traits on the development of SEL in preschool children is obvious. Thomas [13] defined the five dimensions of temperament, which include rhythm, approach of withdrawal, adaptability, intensity of reaction and quality of mood, in the NYLS and compiled the PTQ. Based on above five dimensions, Schipper [14] divided preschool children into the difficult type (slow adaption, negative emotions), the easy type (fast adaption, positive emotions) and the slow-to-warm-up type (withdrawal, slow adaptation), and examined the relationship between personality traits and SEL problems among children aged 2-5. In the score of SEL problems, the difficult type scored the highest, the slow-to-warm-up type followed, and the easy type was the lowest. Obviously, preschool children with the difficult type and slow-to-warm-up type have lower rhythm and adaptability, less intensity of reaction, withdrawal or more negative quality of mood, which affects the interaction between the individual and the environment, which hinders the development of SEL of preschool children.

3.2. Family Factors

According to the ecosystem theory, the family is the primary micro-environment of preschool children. Therefore, the influencing factors of family on preschool children's SEL include three aspects, namely, family background, parenting behavior and the parent-child interaction.

3.2.1. Family Background

In the family background, one factor is the family income, and the other is the maternal literacy level. Firstly, preschool children with high household incomes have lower SEL problems than whom with low household incomes. Barwick [15] found that family income affected the SEL of preschool children. Because in the process of SEL, preschool children's self-awareness and emotional regulation skills will be affected by the family economic level, and preschool children with low family income are more likely to have SEL problems. Secondly, the maternal literacy level has impact in promoting the SEL of preschool children. Studies have shown that the probability of SEL behavioral problems in preschool children will decrease with the increase of maternal literacy [16]. Because high maternal literacy in parent-child education, while ensuring the safe attachment of preschool children, appropriate intervention in their emotions.

3.2.2. Parenting Behavior

Among the family factors that affect the SEL of preschool children, parenting behavior has the most direct impact. The research on the impact of parenting behavior on preschool children's SEL mainly focused on the family emotional expression and parenting style.

(1) Family emotional expression

Family emotional expression affects the SEL of preschool children. In the study of SEL development, Deng [17] showed that preschool children's emotional cognition and interpersonal support was positively correlated with the paternal positive emotional expression, that is, the family emotional expression was significantly related to the SEL of preschool children. Because families with rich emotional expressions will promote children's emotional awareness and get emotional understanding and support. Parents are full of emotional expression, and their children have more opportunities to understand and respect others' emotions. In addition, the emotional expression of preschool children's parents in the family may also affect preschool children's SEL behavior through their SEL cognition, such as children's self-esteem, self-confidence and sense of well-being.

(2) Parenting style

Parenting style refers to the generalization of parenting behavior in the activities of raising and educating children, and the parenting style is a crucial factor affecting preschool children's SEL. Parenting style consists of four dimensions, including encouragement and induction, excessive interference and protection, rejection and punishment, and laissez-faire. Liu [16] explored the relationship between SEL of preschool children and parenting styles, and selected children aged 12-to-36-month as survey subjects. The survey result showed that the parenting styles, like parental excessive attention and protection, punishment, rejection and laissez-faire hindered SEL of preschool children, while the parenting styles such as, low-voltage induction, acceptance, encouraging independent exploration could promote SEL of preschool children. Because, in the process of SEL development of preschool children, the way of rejection will make children's self-acceptance low. Laissez-faire methods require less on preschool children, so that they have poor control. Too much punishment made preschool children rebel and anxious. Too much attention to protection will deprive preschool children of opportunities for self-development. However, the parenting styles of encourages independent exploration, acceptance and low-voltage induction not only respects preschool children, but also allows them to have their own choices, promoting SEL of preschool children.

3.2.3. The Parent-child Interaction

The parent-child interaction affects the SEL of preschool children. The parent-child interaction is mainly reflected in the intimacy and positive parental response. Studies have shown that the intimacy in parent-child interaction and the parental response are significantly negatively correlated with the preschool children's SEL explicit behavior problems. That is, the more intimacy and response in the parent-child interaction, the less likely the preschool children's SEL explicit behavior is [18]. Because in high-quality parent-child interaction, parents actively respond to their preschool children's negative emotions, help them learn self-control, and preschool children are increasingly able to use emotional regulation strategies independently. Meanwhile, in the process of parent-child interaction, preschool children learn to identify and manage their emotions and cognition, and understand others emotions, learn to communicate with others, which forms good SEL skills, help them build the foundation of SEL for preschool children.

3.3. School Factors

Ecosystem theory argued that, school is the micro-environment that has significant impact on preschool children after the family. Previous studies of influencing factors of SEL in preschool children have found that teachers and peers are the two main research areas of the school factors affecting SEL of preschool children.

3.3.1. Teachers

The teacher factors that significantly influence SEL in preschool children, include two aspects, the teacher-child relationship and the teacher social support.

(1) Teacher-child relationship

The teacher-child relationship has impact on the SEL of preschool children, and the positive teacher-student relationship has positive prediction on the SEL of preschool children. The teacher-child relationship is the interpersonal relationship between teachers and preschool children in the teaching activities. Pianta [19] divided the teacher-student relationship into three dimensions, such as intimacy, conflict, and dependence. Studies have confirmed that the impact of intimate teacher-student relationships on SEL is positive. The impact of conflict and dependence on SEL is negative [20]. Firstly, the preschool children in close teacher-child relationship regard teachers as SEL support. They are more effective in regulating SEL behaviors, and increase opportunities of social interaction. In addition, there is a significant link between conflict teacher-child relationships and children' SEL problems. The conflict relationships cause preschool children's negative attitudes toward school and low levels of cooperation. Thirdly, the dependent teacher-child relationship will reduce children's independent cognitive ability, the children are unwilling to explore independently and interact with peers.

(2) Teacher social support

Teachers' social support significantly affects preschool children's SEL. Teacher social support refers to the support given by teachers to preschool children, including teachers providing knowledge, emotional understanding, giving feedback on preschool children's achievements and problems. Studies had shown that teacher social support is positively correlated with the five dimensions of SEL in preschool children [21]. The reason for this is that teacher social support can improve preschool children's SEL behaviors, better adapt them to the school environment, promoting academic performance. Meanwhile, preschool children who perceive the support will also improve their skills to cooperate, self-control, empathy, understand the feelings of others, be willing to share, and help others.

3.3.2. Peers

Peer factors are related to preschool children's SEL. The peer acceptance and the friendship quality are the two most prominent research domains of the peer's factor.

(1) Peer acceptance

Preschool children with high peer acceptance have high SEL. Peer acceptance refers to the peer group's attitude toward the individual. According to the degree of peer acceptance, the preschool children are divided into five peer types, namely popular, neglected, rejected, contradictory and general. Studies have shown a significant positive correlation between peer acceptance and preschool children in the five dimensions of SEL, with rejected children scoring the least and contradictory children scoring the most [22]. Because the preschool children with high SEL be able to manage and regulate emotions, and better deal with interpersonal conflicts. Meanwhile, children who are accepted by peers have more opportunities to participate in peers' interactions to improve SEL skills.

(2) Friendship quality

Friendship quality can significantly predict SEL in preschool children. Friendship quality refers to the evaluation of the friendship relationship. The quality of preschool children's friendship is mainly include three different types: low quality, general quality and high quality. Asher [23] showed that the quality of friendship was significantly positively correlated with the SEL of preschool children, and the children in the high-quality group, the low-quality group and the general

group had significant differences in SEL dimensions. Because the high-quality friendship can provide emotional support to children, children have opportunity to express their emotions in interaction, care for the emotions of others, and find effective ways to deal with interpersonal relationships, promoting the development of SEL in preschool children.

4. The Interventions of Social and Emotional Learning

Based on an analysis of the influencing factors of SEL in preschool children, interventions for SEL are discussed. There are two main types of SEL interventions for preschool children, one is individual intervention and the other is group intervention.

4.1. Individual Intervention

Individual interventions with SEL in preschool children are through two main ways, the intervention of picture book reading and role-play game.

4.1.1. Picture Book Reading

Picture book reading is the teacher-child or parent-child reading. In the process of reading, preschool children are the main body, and parents or teachers play a role of guidance and assistance. Previous studies have found that picture book reading plays effective role in SEL in preschool children. For example, after a 8-week picture book reading intervention for preschool children, three children aged 4 were selected as the subjects in the middle class. According to the eight SEL theme activities, one-on-one picture book reading activity was carried out in the experimental group in the afternoon, while the children in the control group were not take any SEL theme education activities. It was found that preschool children in the experimental group had a significant improvement in the positive emotions regulation and cognition, and a significant decrease in behavioral problems with SEL [24]. The intervention mainly includes: asking preschool children to answer open-ended questions about story plots; expanding children's answers with techniques such as repetition and explanation, and encouraging children to explore stories in depth.

4.1.2. Role-play Game

As for the role-play game, which means that each character in the game requires children to take turns to experience, and the SEL of preschool children is intervened through the role play project, and the behavior of preschool children in SEL before and after the experimental intervention is compared. The study showed that role play interventions can improve the initiative of peer interaction in preschool children, while alleviating emotional anxiety, tension and other SEL problems, thereby developing emotional regulation and interpersonal skills. Specifically, the researchers selected three children from the junior class, the middle class, and the senior class respectively as subjects in a kindergarten. Role play interventions were conducted in three individual cases to explore the effects of role play on SEL in preschool children. During the intervention, the teacher enables three children to understand the game plots and the emotional state of the main roles through explanations and discussions, and guides them to carry out role play training, conduct individual conversations and observe and record the words and deeds of three children [25].

4.2. Group Intervention

Group interventions can effectively improve the SEL development in preschool children. Group interventions are mainly include group counseling and SEL courses.

4.2.1. Group Counseling

Group counseling interferes with the SEL of preschool children. Group counseling is an important way to provide psychological help and guidance in group situations. It is through interpersonal interaction within the group, to promote individuals in the interaction adjustment and improvement of relationships, attitudes and behaviors with others, in order to develop SEL of the process. In a study of SEL interventions in children aged 3-6 years, four units of counseling activities were designed: recognizing one's own and others' emotions, managing emotions, maintaining positive emotions and self-motivation, as well as setting up group unit feedback self-assessment forms and final feedback evaluation forms. After the intervention of group counseling, the SEL level of the children in the experimental group was significantly improved, and the SEL behavior of the children was also significantly changed compared with the control group without intervention [26].

4.2.2. SEL Courses

Numerous studies have shown that interventions based on SEL courses in schools are effective in promoting preschool children's SEL development. The Strong Start Curriculum in the US is a series of SEL courses for children developed based on its SEL program---the Oregon Resiliency Project. The course consists of 10 units, which is implemented based on the theoretical model of "action-feeling-idea". The main elements of the teaching intervention include: teachers create harmonious teaching atmosphere; teachers organize learning activities; teachers guide children to share the feelings during the activity; and at the end of each theme activity, teachers and children will hold an assembly to summarize the learning achievements [27]. Meanwhile, the researchers in the Strong Start Curriculum developed the "Social-Emotional Assets and Resilience Scales" (SEARS) that can be used to evaluate preschool children's SEL. Assessment information is provided to the educators through child self-assessments, teacher evaluations, and parent evaluations. Numerous evaluation reports of course interventions have shown that the Strong Start Curriculum has impact on preschool children's SEL. Their SEL cognition was significantly improved, while SEL behavioral problems were significantly reduced.

5. Conclusion

This study reviews three main types of theoretical framework of SEL in preschool children, explores influencing factors based on ecosystem theory, and further explores individual and group interventions to promote SEL development. This not only lays a theoretical foundation for in-depth research, provides research methods and references in the future, but also indicates three new breakthrough space.

Firstly, the current research on SEL in preschool children is mainly based on the five-dimensional theoretical framework of CASEL, which provides a theoretical basis for understanding the essence of SEL in preschool children. However, the six-dimensional theoretical framework proposed in China is mainly derived from CASEL, so in the context of Chinese education, how adaptable is this theoretical framework? Therefore, through localization empirical research, future researchers can develop theoretical frameworks that are consistent with the SEL of preschool children in China based on the investigation of the understanding of SEL in different

regions and different educational backgrounds in China and the application of theoretical framework. Secondly, based on ecosystem theory, current research reveals the influencing factors of individuals, families and schools on the SEL of preschool children. However, because this study only explores the micro-environment of ecosystem theory, some factors such as communities, national policies, etc., which is limited to theoretical discussion, lacking of empirical research. So in the future research, more influencing factors and associated empirical studies should be included which can enrich the research on the influencing factors and provide information support for the development of SEL in preschool children. Finally, future studies should enrich the research subjects and methods of SEL intervention in preschool children. The current intervention studies are mainly based on preschool children, and the intervention method is basically the empirical research, such as the experimental data analysis and the quantitative research. Furthermore, in terms of the research subjects, the research should be more based on the implementation of interventions for parents, teachers and peers. Because, based on the influencing factors, the parents, teachers and peers play important roles in the development of preschool children's SEL. As for the research method, the future research can expand the intervention methods. For example, the combination of quantitative and qualitative research or the mixture intervention of individual and group, which should be further explored.

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