4-14-2019

Evaluation of the Socio Emotional Learning (SEL) Activities on Self-Regulation Skills Among Primary School Children

Kerem Coskun
Artvin Coruh University, keremcoskun@artvin.edu.tr

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Abstract

I seek the experience of the primary school children who participated in the SEL Activities instructing self-regulation skill. I designed the SEL Activities and conducted them with the participant students' classroom teacher. I used phenomenological methods (Moustakas, 1994) to collect data through semi-structured interviews with primary school children who are 10-years-old and analysed the data by identifying significant statements and then clustering the significant statements into themes, writing textural and structural descriptions, before finally arriving at a composite description. Findings demonstrate that through the SEL Activities, the participant children became more competent in realizing the influence of emotions on their behaviours and in using practical and strategic knowledge on self-regulation skills.

Keywords

Self-Regulation, Socio-Emotional Learning, Primary School Children, Phenomenology

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Artvin Coruh University, Education Faculty, Turkey

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Human beings have always tried to adapt to physical and social environments by using their cognitive, affective, and motor skills. Acquisition of skills is possible through learning. Learning in the cognitive domain requires developing logical and rational thinking skills, learning in the motor domain involves muscle and brain coordination, and learning in the affective domain focuses on socio-emotional skills. Primary school is one of the places in which students are taught basic skills which function as the basis for later learning in cognitive and affective domains. Therefore, the primary school is the cornerstone of one's education process.

Learning in the affective domain is addressed in primary school. Affective learning helps students establish positive relationships with others, adjust to a social environment, and have improved well-being. Affective learning involves three processes consisting of (a) stress responses, (b) moods, and (c) emotions. Stress responses are described as negative affective states which are the result of the inability to manage environmental demands (Lazarus, 1993). Moods refer to an emotional state usually with longer lasting impacts. Emotions may have either a positive or negative nature, be triggered by a specific stimulus, and bring about behavioural reaction to the stimulus (Gendolla, 2000; Lang, 1995; Parkinson, Totterdell, Briner, & Reynolds, 1996).

Because emotions are influential in how an individual thinks, feels, and behaves, it is crucial to manage and regulate them; a lack of emotional regulation leads to excessive, inappropriate, and insufficient responses to environmental and situational demands. Emotions are extremely important because emotions influence individuals in two ways, either facilitating or impeding. Furthermore, emotions influence the learning performance of the students. Emotions are influential in students' motivation, academic achievement, and establishing healthy relationships with others. Therefore, schools have begun to include learning outcomes in affective domains in instructional curricula from kindergarten to secondary schools (Elias, et al., 1997). Inclusion of affective learning outcomes has also resulted in the expansion of schools' responsibilities (Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki,

Schellinger, & Taylor, 2011). In other words, schools have to help students become more competent in the affective domain as much as they are expected to improve students' cognitive skills (Greenberg et al., 2003). Policy makers and educators have realized that inclusion of socio-emotional skills into instructional curricula is necessary. Schools develop students' affective characteristics through Socio Emotional Learning (SEL) programs. SEL is the new concept which has been included into school programs from primary school to secondary school in the UK and the USA (Hromek & Roffey, 2009; Matthews, 2006).

SEL is constructed upon the notion of competence by Waters and Sroufe (1983). Waters and Sroufe defined competent people as those who can generate and coordinate flexible, adaptive responses against external demands and create opportunities in their social environment. Socio-emotional competence is described as the ability to understand, manage, and express one's affective experience and process which allow individuals to learn better, establish better relations with others, solve daily problems, and adapt to the social environment. SEL is a process of learning core competencies to recognize and regulate emotions, set and achieve goals, take other's perspectives into consideration, establish and maintain positive relationships with others, make better and suitable decisions, and tackle interpersonal situations constructively (Elias et al., 1997). These competencies then involve behavioural change which is observable, quantifiable, and assessed through wide range of instrumentations. Because behavioural change is a result of internal processes it is very crucial to understand how children perceive and conceptualize their experiences during such an instructional process. Understanding their perceptions and conceptualizations of their experiences after SEL activities will make primary school teachers aware of how to design SEL activities that are suitable for children's development.

SEL programs aim to develop five specific competencies: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relational skills, and responsible decision-making. Those skills are interrelated and have cognitive, affective, and behavioural aspects (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning, 2005). When students are made more competent in self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relational skills, and responsible decision- making, those competencies function as basis for better adjustment, better academic performances, and a fewer number of behavioural problems (Greenberg et al., 2003). Becoming competent in all SEL fields plays a crucial role in decreasing the impact of external factors and increasing impact of internal factors such as care, motivation, goal-setting and self-values (Bear & Watkins, 2006). Systematic and planned instruction of SEL activities may help students develop appropriate behaviour models for diverse settings (Ladd & Mize, 1983; Weissberg, Caplan, & Sivo, 1989).

Emotion regulation is one of the social emotional competences that can be developed through SEL. Emotion regulation is described as the process by which individuals have impacts on which emotions they have, when they have them, and how they experience them (Gross, 1998). In this description, the fact that an individual has an impact on which emotions to have emphasizes the ability to change emotional dynamics in terms of latency, rise time, magnitude, duration, and balance of responses. Personal goals have impact on emotions. Emotions, in turn, influence actions. Emotion regulation refers to using emotions to act. (Gross, Sheppes, & Urry, 2011). This means that emotions and their influence are regulated for a previously determined goal.

Social-emotional skills involve a wide range of skills such as self-awareness, empathy, motivation, cooperation, tolerance, courage, self-discipline, caring, fairness, respect, self-regulation, self-respect, and altruism (Kuhrasch, 2007). Self-regulation is the skill that is the outcome of affective learning. Self-regulation can be viewed as one of the manifestations of social-emotional competencies in long-term memory. This manifestation can be improved with appropriate experiences provided by SEL activities. Self-regulation can

be instilled, consolidated, and stabilized by experiences thanks to SEL activities in the primary school period. Providing positive experiences on self-regulation for primary school children can be seen as the first step of instilling, consolidating, and stabilizing self-regulation skill. Understanding primary school children's experiences related to self-regulation will reveal how they become competent in self-regulation skill. Children's evaluations through self-report will help them ruminate on their experiences during SEL activities and make them more adept at monitoring, revising, and labelling their experiences. Therefore, the present study focuses on an evaluation of the impact of SEL Activities on primary school children's self-regulation skill through their self-evaluations. Self-evaluations of their experiences during SEL Activities disclose internal processes concerning how they perceive the relationship between emotions and behaviours, construct knowledge about self-regulation, and evaluate their own competence.

In the Turkish Primary School Curriculum, there are several learning outcomes of social-emotional skills. Learning outcomes are taught and expected from students on a strict schedule and they have very few opportunities to monitor and evaluate what they experience during instruction about social-emotional skills. Therefore, the present study is important to offer an opportunity for the participant children to evaluate what they have undergone, and reinforce what they have learnt and as a result of the study; practical implications will be developed for primary school teachers about how primary school children conceptualize their experiences during the activities that teach self-regulation skills.

Goal of the Present Study

I aim to disclose what the participant students experience during the SEL activities in which they were instructed. In the present study, self-regulation is the concept, which is the locus for the participant children to make their experience sensible and evaluate themselves. Consequently, the goal of the present study is to learn how participant children perceive the relationship between their emotions and behaviours and conceptualize the benefits of SEL activities.

Literature Review

In the relevant literature, a large body of research showed that SEL Activities improved student's social-emotional skills. Caprara et al. (2014) found that school-based intervention SEL Programs fostered pro-social behaviours among early adolescents. Cramer and Castro-Olivo (2016) addressed the impact of SEL activities through experimental research and reported that SEL activities increased resiliency and reduced internalizing social-emotional problems with 9th and 10th graders. Espelage, Low, Polanin, and Brown (2013) designed an SEL program called Second Step: Student Success Through Preventions (SS-SSTP), investigated its impact through experimental research, and reached the conclusion that SS-SSTP reduced bullying and aggression among middle school students. Evans, Murphy, and Scourfield (2015) developed SEL activities based on the Diffusions of Innovations Theory, investigated its impact in a case study and concluded that SEL is effective in reducing behavioural problems and increasing well-being among children and adolescents. However, Evans et al. (2015) conducted the research with school managers and education authorities so their findings are confined to school managers and education authorities. Garner, Mahatmya, Brown, and Vesely (2014) pointed out that SEL programs are influenced by social-cultural variables. McCormick, Cappella, O'Connor, Hill, and McClowry (2016) found that low income families are less likely to volunteer in SEL activities of their children. Morris, Milenky, Raver, and Jones (2013) reported that SEL

activities improve the learning environment in preschool classrooms. Wilson and Ripley (2007) found that psychosocial intervention programs are effective in reducing disruptive and aggressive behaviours among students.

However, these research results are based on the quantification of social-emotional skill and conducted through quantitative research traditions. There is no research which aims to understand primary school children's' experience during SEL Activities and how they see their development, construct knowledge of self-regulation, or how competent they find themselves in terms of self-regulation. This kind of knowledge cannot be developed through quantification. In other words, in the relevant literature it has not been disclosed how participants make sense of their experiences with self-regulation or social-emotional skills or how they define progress which they undergo, so my stance is to design, conduct the SEL Activities, understand and interpret the participant children's development and experience during the study. I spent 24 course hours with the participants, so candidness and frankness occurred between us. This candidness and frankness helped the children to state their thoughts in a forthright manner. Therefore, my role was designer, executive, and interpreter of the study.

My Role in the Present Study

Social reality is dependent on the minds of the knower as people construct social reality and are not passive agents against external events (Blumer, 1986). Therefore, I adopted an interpretative paradigm as this requires one to focus on actions because of the fact that actions entail an intentional aspect of behaviour (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2000). Participant children's statements on their actions helped me understand and interpret their intentions. In addition to that, I was not their real teacher, but I behaved as an extra teacher as opposed to a butterfly on the classroom's wall (Hatch, 2002). I communicated, talked, and interacted with them in order to learn their experiences during the SEL Activities.

Method

The methodological design I used was phenomenology (Hatch, 2002; Moustakas, 1994). The fundamental assumption of phenomenology depends on the notion that there is an active relation between perception and its object. On the other hand, human consciousness is an active organizer of experience related to an object or an event (Creswell, 2007; Holstein & Gubrium, 1994; Patton, 2002). In the present research I assumed that the participant children are active organisers in constructing their experience about the SEL Activities and making their experiences meaningful. Phenomenology is used to reveal lived experience. Silverman (1984) stated that there are two kinds of phenomenology: descriptive phenomenology and hermeneutic phenomenology. I aimed to describe such the participant children's lived experience related to the SEL Activities and have chosen descriptive phenomenology. Descriptive phenomenology is based on Husserlian transcendental phenomenology claiming that phenomenological research is a way of describing lived experience (Van Manen, 1990).

Sampling

Phenomenological research requires inclusion of participants who experience the phenomenon being studied. My aim was to describe and understand children's experiences of the SEL Activities rather than generalize from a population. Therefore, my sampling strategy was purposeful; I used criterion sampling to include participants experiencing the phenomenon in order to understand participant children's experience about SEL Activities. I

handpicked a classroom in which there were no behavioural problems among the primary school children. I visited primary schools after I received official permission from the local educational authority. I met primary school teachers and primary school children to explain the aim of the study and to ask if they would voluntarily participate. I chose one classroom which included 12 primary school children at the age of 10 because that classroom environment was convenient for conducting the SEL activities and because the teacher said that there had been no primary school child who had behavioural problems. As a result, 12 primary school children who were 10-years-old and who voluntary accepted to take part were included in sample of the study. Seven of them were female children and five were male children. The school where the SEL Activities were conducted is a public primary school in which all of the participant children came from middle socioeconomic class families (Creswell, 2007).

The Classroom Setting

The classroom setting had been embellished by the participant children's hand works and their drawings. Their teacher also had hung panels on which rules of the classroom were written and explained. There were 12 desks so each of the participant children had one desk. Desks were arranged in a U-shape and there was some space in the middle of the U-shape. The U-shape design made the interaction between the teacher and students easy. This design allowed the teacher to monitor them. The U-shape design helped me effectively communicate and interact with them.

Recruitment of the Participant Children in Accordance with Ethical Considerations

I consulted the participant children, their primary school teacher, and their parents. In order to catch a complete landscape of their experience about the SEL Activities the participant children were recruited based on the criteria of voluntary consent to participate and receive the SEL Activities.

After I had received official permissions from local authorities, approval from the participant primary school children, their teacher, and parents, I launched the project. I gave pseudonyms to the participant children such as "*Child 1, Child 2*" in order to keep their names anonymous. Recorded and transcribed data were shared with the participant children, their teacher, and parents. Voluntary participation, pseudonyms, and sharing recorded and transcribed data helped me to obey ethical considerations

The Process

I designed and carried out the SEL Activities. I prepared the SEL Activities along with existing interactions among the participant children and gave individual feedback. The participant children were given instructional scenarios of criticism, a sense of being defeated, a sense of being ignored by teacher and peers, excitement, and anger. At the end of each session all student's responses were discussed in the light of self-regulation and I provided personal feedback. This way of instruction helped them realize their reaction and thought patterns about the instructional cases because of the fact that responses of the participant children in the sessions allowed them to ruminate on their actions. The SEL Activities consist of eight classroom based activities. Therefore, discussion of participant primary school children's responses and behaviours, providing feedback about their actions and responses established sincerity and close relationship between the children and myself. Candidness and a close relationship are the main difference between the SEL Activities and other SEL

programs that were previously designed and conducted. These were developed for Turkish primary school children and in line with the fact that candidness and close relationships with primary school children are natural characteristics of primary school teachers under Turkish culture. There are wide range of the SEL Activities around the world such as SEAL, PATHS, and CASEL. Those programs take more time than the SEL Activities so their impact and influence are remarkable on primary school children while the SEL Activities needs less time and evaluation of its influence is aim of the research. SEAL, PATHS, and CASEL are school-based and comprehensive approach to promote social-emotional skills of self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills that are components of Goleman's (1998) emotional intelligence model (Greenberg & Kusché, 1998; Humphrey et al., 2008; Payton et al., 2000). SEAL, PATHS, and CASEL consist of curricular activities. Due to family involvement and inclusion of wide range of social-emotional skills, they require more time. On the contrary, The SEL Activities are small scale and aim to develop only self-regulation skill of the participant children. The SEL also has interventionist aspects rather than curricular activities and does not entail family involvement. Therefore, the SEL Activities need a shorter time to conduct.

The first activity I taught the participant children was how to label emotions as negative and positive. The learning outcome of the second activity was to develop an awareness of the relationship between emotion and behaviour. In the third activity the participant children were allowed to remember and contemplate which negative emotions they had experienced in the past and how they behaved. In the fourth activity the participant children were taught to be aware of what emotions they experienced against criticism and how they should behave and respond. In the fifth activity, they were instructed on how they could cope with anger and distress and respond under the impact of those emotions. Strategies and ways of controlling anger and distress were demonstrated in the sixth activity. Ways of using excitement so as to be motivated were instructed in the seventh activity; the participant children were made aware of negative results of over-excitement. The eighth activity included instructional strategies to teach the skill of how they should behave whether they were either a loser or winner. I conducted the SEL Activities with the help of the classroom teacher. The SEL activities lasted for one month and 24 lessons.

Data Collection

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews because the semi-structured interviews allow the use of dialogue in knowledge-producing ways (Brinkmann, 2016). Furthermore, semi-structured interviews enable the researcher to gather deeper information from the participant children and encourage them to express their experiences during the SEL. All 12 participant children were interviewed with each of the interviews lasting about 5 minutes; all interviews were recorded and then transcribed. I shared written transcriptions with the participant children, their parents, and classroom teacher to inform them of what the children answered. Sharing transcriptions and informing parents and teachers were part of the ethical rules and procedures.

Self-regulation skill necessitates being aware of the relationship between behaviours and emotions, and possession of strategical insight in how to control emotion. On the other hand, I mainly aimed to understand how the participant children perceived the relationship between emotions and behaviours, and constructed knowledge about self-regulation. Consequently, I decided to ask two questions in the semi-structured interviews. I asked the participant children what they thought about the relationship between emotion and behaviour, and how they were influenced from the SEL Activities in terms of controlling emotions.

Data Analysis

Data were analysed through phenomenological data analysis developed by Moustakas (1994) because of the fact Moustakas (1994) is one of the most prominent proponents of transcendental phenomenology and offered a very systematic way of analysing data analysis in phenomenology. According to Moustakas (1994) data analysis is conducted via five steps: making data horizontal, clustering significant statements into themes, textural description, structural description, and composite description. In my data analysis, I used four steps as suggested by Moustakas due to integrating textural description with structural description (1994) because I presented textural description and structural description together in order to present a relation between experiences of the participant children and the circumstances in which their experiences occurred.

Horizontalization.

Transcribed data were iteratively read line by line and as I read, I identified significant statements which occurred repeatedly. Those significant statements were labelled and coded. Meanings of those statements were formulated and consequently formulations as *"Awareness on Influence of Emotions on Behaviours, "Realization of Influence of Emotions on Behaviours Through Experiencing More Emotions," "Reflective Ball," "Focus on Influence of Positive Emotions," "Mark of the SEL Activity," "As Red Alert Signal of Emotions," "Practical Knowledge in Controlling Emotions," "Reference to Others,"* "*Situational Cue on Necessity of Controlling Emotions"* and *"Relational Cue on Necessity of Controlling Emotions"* were extracted from the data (see Table 1). As result of data horizontalization, chunks of data were reduced into a more manageable size (Miles & Huberman, 2002).

Table 1: Formulated Meanings of Selected Significant Statements.

Selected Significant Statements	Formulated Meanings
I know our emotions influence our behaviours, but I have become more aware of the relationship between emotion and behaviour. For instance, I realized that I act more slowly if I am upset. On the contrary, I behave more quickly if I feel myself as anxious.	Awareness on Influence of Emotions on Behaviours
During the activities we experienced different emotions and in turn behaved in different ways. I have learnt from the activities that if our emotions change, our behaviours can be different. For example, when I am happy, I smile my friends but if I am furious, I frown.	Realization of Influence of Emotions on Behaviours through Experiencing More Emotions
When I am angry, I aggressively behave, criticize my friends, complain about them. When I am angry, I am not easily resilient.	Reflective Ball
Thanks to the activities I realized that my emotions have an influence on how to behave. For instance, when I am happy, I share my belongings with my friends.	Focus on Influence of Positive Emotions
I have loved the activities so much. I remember that in the puzzle activities, I was so excited that I did not manage to remember answers of the questions on the puzzle. I could not in turn complete the puzzle. Therefore, I know over-excitement prevents me from achieving.	Mark of The SEL Activity

I learnt to use positive and negative emotions appropriately. I experienced so many emotions during the activities. My behaviours varied according to emotions which I felt. I realized that as soon as I feel anger, one of the negative emotions, I need to control and regulate my anger.	As Red Alert Signal of Emotions
When I am angry, I count silently from 1 to 10. When I am thrilled, I try to keep something bad away from my mind, think about good results.	Practical Knowledge in Controlling Emotions
When I am happy, I try to hide my happiness because my over-happiness may hurt my unhappy friends.	Reference to Others
Those activities taught us how to control our emotions such as anger, excitement, cope with unhappiness and sadness. Now I can control anger, happiness. For example, when I am defeated, I can control my anger or unhappiness; congratulate the winner instead of being surrendered by anger. Furthermore, when I win the game, I try to hide my happiness. Because I know my friends, my rival, might be distressed.	Situational Cue on Necessity of Controlling Emotions
Before the activities I would quarrel with my younger sister. Now I have begun not to get angry with my sister because I know how to control anger. For instance, I have been together my desk mate since kindergarten. Although he has been my friend for a long time, we often argue with each other. However, these days we have begun to get on well with each other. Mutually we avoid having a quarrel.	Relational Cue on Necessity of Controlling Emotions

Clustering significant data into themes.

In the second step, similarities were sought and found among the significant statements and then clustered into themes, which are larger units. After I had found formulated meanings, formulated meanings required me to cluster them into themes which are broader term than formulated meanings. When I was determining broader concepts, common characteristic among the formulated meanings were found. Commonality among the formulated meanings helped to cluster them under themes. As a result, the data were reassembled. Finally the commonalities enabled themes to appear. *"Awareness on Influence of Emotions on Behaviours," "Realization of Influence of Emotions on Behaviours through Experiencing More Emotions," "Reflective Ball,, "Focus on Influence of Positive Emotions," "Mark of the SEL Activity," "As Red Alert Signal of Emotions"* were clustered into Correspondence Between Emotion and Behaviour Theme because of the fact all of them meant to interaction between emotions and behaviours. *"Practical Knowledge in Controlling Emotions," "Reference to Others," "Situational Cue on Necessity of Controlling Emotions," "Relational Cue on Necessity of Controlling Emotions"* were clustered into Strategic Insight in Controlling Emotions Theme due to the fact that all of the formulated meanings highlighted strategies on controlling emotions. Table 2 includes clusters emerged from the formulated meanings.

Table 2: Theme Clusters with Their Subsumed and Formulated Meanings

Themes Cluster	Formulated Meanings
Correspondence between emotion and behaviour	Awareness on Influence of Emotions on Behaviours
	Realization of Influence of Emotions on Behaviours through Experiencing More Emotions
	Reflective Ball
	Focus On Influence of Positive Emotions
	Mark of The SEL Activity
	As Red Alert Signal of Emotions
Strategic insight in controlling emotions	Practical Knowledge in Controlling Emotions
	Reference to Others
	Situational Cue On Necessity of Controlling Emotions
	Relational Cue on Necessity of Controlling Emotions

Textural and structural description.

Writing a description on what the participant children experienced during the SEL activities is textural description. This description was made along with data horizontalization. Textural and structural description refers to moving to description experiences of the participant children. Textural description includes verbatim examples from the data. I described how the participant children had experienced the phenomenon during the SEL activities. Settings and contexts in which the participant students experienced the phenomenon were contemplated and described. This description is called "structural description." Textural and structural description were conducted together in the third step. Thanks to textural description and structural description I understood and revealed the process and the progress which the participant children had undergone. Furthermore, both of the descriptions helped me unpack data again. Textural and structural description are detailed below.

> I know our emotions influence our behaviours, but I have become more aware
> of relationship between emotion and behaviour. For instance, I realized that I
> act more slowly if I am upset. On the contrary, I behave more quickly if I feel
> myself as anxious. (Child 9)

The above statement was formulated as *"Awareness on influence of emotions on behaviour."* The SEL activities helped the participant children to realize the influence of emotions on behaviours. Furthermore, the SEL Activities might have offered opportunity for the participant child to focus and observe what she feels and how she behaves. This kind of self-observation and self-focus made her more competent in realizing emotion determines how she can behave.

> During the activities we experienced different emotions and in turn behaved in
> different ways. I have learnt from the activities that if our emotions change,

our behaviours can be different. For example, when I am happy, I smile my friends but if I am furious, I frown. (Child 4)

This significant statement was coded as "*Realization of influence of emotions on behaviours through experiencing more emotions.*" During the SEL Activities the participant child was offered instructional opportunities to encounter different kinds of emotions. This immersion developed a realization correspondence between emotions and behaviours.

When I am angry, I aggressively behave, criticize my friends, complaint them. When I am angry, I am not easily resilient. (Child 8)

This statement was formulated as *"Reflective ball."* The participant children seem to have realized that anger leads to aggressive behaviours. Anger triggers aggressive behaviours: quarrel with his friends, complaints. Those behaviour patterns in turn support his anger, and he has a problem in becoming resilient. During the SEL Activities instructional applications were conducted through interactions between the participant children. Focusing interaction with his friends may have helped him to realize anger leads to several aggressive behaviours.

Thanks to the activities I realized that my emotions have an influence on how to behave. For instance, when I am happy, I share my belongings with my friends. (Child 3)

Above statement was coded as "*Focus on influence of positive emotions.*" In the SEL Activities, the participant child realized that positive emotions help her behave kindly such as sharing her belongings. She appeared to have found a causal relationship between emotions and her way of behaviours.

I have loved the activities so much. I remember that in the puzzle activities, I was so excited that I did not manage to remember answers of the questions on the puzzle. I could not in turn achieve to complete the puzzle. Therefore, I know over-excitement prevents me to achieve. (Child 2)

This statement was formulated as *"Mark of the SEL Activity."* The SEL Activities helped the participant child develop awareness on results of over-excitement and establish a relationship between excitement, way of behaving and results. The Puzzle, one of the SEL Activities, provided a real environment and stimulus to be excited, and the participant child realized over-excitement has disruptive effects on the task.

I learnt to use positive and negative emotions appropriately. I experienced so many emotions during the activities. My behaviours varied according to emotions which I felt. I realized that as soon as I feel anger, one of the negative emotions, I need to control and regulate my anger. (Child 5)

The above statement was coded as "*As a red alert signal of emotions.*" The participant child experienced many emotions during the SEL Activities and realized that his behaviours varied according to emotions which he felt. Experience about anger may be most striking for him because he tends to deal with anger as a trigger of self-regulation.

I learnt a lot of information about how to control excitement and anger. For instance I am excited very often. I try to keep excitement away from my brain

> when I am excited. I have also learnt that feeling excitement is very normal
> and natural what the important is to keep my emotions under control. (Child 1)

This significant statement was formulated as *"Necessity of controlling emotions and normality of having emotions."* The participant child realized that she is often excited that she has to keep excitement under control. During the SEL Activities the participant child became aware of her inclination to be excited, hence she focused more on the SEL Activities related to keep excitement under control and developed an understanding how to control excitement.

> When I am angry, I count silently count from 1 to 10. When I am thrilled, I try
> to keep something bad away from my mind, think about good results. (Child,
> 9)

The above statement was coded as *"Practical knowledge in controlling emotions."* In the SEL Activities the participant child realized that excitement and anger should be controlled. During the SEL Activities the participant children may have witnessed her experience about those strategies were more practical and interesting.

> When I am happy, I try to hide my happiness because my over-happiness may
> hurt my unhappy friends. (Child 3)

This statement was formulated as *"Reference to others."* The participant child found over-happiness to be kept under control and regulated because of the fact that over-happiness may have led to negative results in her relationships with others. Therefore, the participant child tended to regulate her emotions based on others.

> Those activities taught us how to control our emotions such as anger,
> excitement, cope with unhappiness and sadness. Now I can control anger,
> happiness. For example, when I am defeated, I can control my anger or
> unhappiness; congratulate the winner instead of being surrendered by anger.
> Furthermore, when I win the game, I try to hide my happiness. Because I
> know my friends, my rival, might be distressed. (Child 4)

The above statement was coded as *"Situational cue on necessity of controlling emotions."* The participant child perceived being defeated or winner as a trigger of anger and happiness, and situational cue to regulate anger or happiness. Therefore, the participant child used situational cue so as to trigger self-regulation process.

> Before the activities I would quarrelled with my younger sister. Now I have
> begun not to get angry with my sister because I know how to control anger.
> For instance I have been together my desk mate since kindergarten. Although
> he has been my friend for a long time, we often argue with each other.
> However, these days we have begun to get on well with each other. Mutually
> we avoid having a quarrel. (Child 6)

This statement was formulated as *"Relational cue on necessity of controlling emotions."* Lack of self-regulation had led to conflict with her sister and friend. The participant child may have matched interactions with her sister and friend with anger and conflict. The SEL Activity taught how to control anger and diminish conflicts with her sister and friend. The SEL Activities have made progress in her relationships with her sister and friend. As a result

of the SEL Activities, the participant child refrained from quarrelling and conflicting with her sister and friend to activate self-regulation, hence she dealt with the interactions as alert to of activation of self-regulation.

Composite description.

Before writing the composite description, I unpacked the data and found the statements which occurred repeatedly. I labelled the events repeated steadily and revealed the formulated meanings. After finding the formulated meanings, I categorized them so as to cluster under broader terms called themes. As a result, I identified two themes: "*Correspondence Between Emotions and Behaviours,*" "*Strategic Insight in Controlling Emotions.*" I described the Textural and Structural processes in order to move beyond description and understand the contexts and settings in which the participant children experienced the phenomenon.

Composite description is the final step; it is the essence of the experience and indicates conclusive aspect of the present phenomenological research. Composite description of the phenomenon was written and formulated the progress and the process which the participant children experienced. In composite description, I detailed what the participant children experienced and the context of their experiences through detailed explanations, reassembled findings of textural and structural description and turned the experience of the participants on the SEL Activities into conclusion statement.

Results

The SEL Activities allowed the participant children to realize influence of their emotions over their behaviours and establish a connection between their emotions and behaviours. To illustrate, one of the participants stated that *"During the activities we experienced different emotions and in turn behaved in different ways. I have learnt from the activities that if our emotions change, our behaviours can be different. For example, when I am happy, I smile my friends but if I am furious, I frown."* On the other hand, as a result of the SEL Activities practical strategies of self-regulation were constructed and developed by the participant children as counting from 1 to 10, referencing to others, and relational and situational cues. For example, one participant child said that *"Those activities taught us how to control our emotions such as anger, excitement, cope with unhappiness and sadness. Now I can control anger, happiness. For example, when I am defeated, I can control my anger or unhappiness; congratulate the winner instead of being surrendered by anger. Furthermore, when I win the game, I try to hide my happiness. Because I know my friends, my rival, might be distressed.*"

Discussion

As a result of the data analysis, I concluded that the SEL Activities made the participant children more competent to label their emotions, establish connection between their emotions and behaviours; those competencies, in turn, allowed them to gain strategic insight on how self-regulation.

Results of the present study are coherent with other researches, which were conducted through correlational research, and experimental research. On the other hand, other research has addressed emotional intelligence, emotion recognition in self and others, empathy, decision making skills, motivation, mental health, social skills and relational skills while the present study dealt with solely emotion regulation skill. Research findings from the literature

reported that the SEL has wide range of positive outcomes from academic achievement to emotional intelligence, recognizing emotions in self and others, empathy, decision making skills, motivation, mental health, social skills, relational skills (Baron-Cohen, Golan, & Ashwin, 2009; CASEL, 2003; DfES, 2005; Domitrovich, Cortes, & Greenberg, 2007; Elias, 2003; Hromek & Roffey, 2009; Márquez, Martin, & Brackett, 2006; Payton et al., 2000; Pickens, 2009), the presents study deals with self-regulation and evaluates impact of the SEL Activities. Majority of the previous research in the relevant literature on evaluation of the SEL activities were designed in quantitative research design while the present study addresses evaluation of the SEL activities through phenomenological study, one of the qualitative research designs in order to evaluate experience of the participant children during the SEL Activities. Hallam (2009) reported that the Social Emotional Aspect of Learning (SEAL) Program improved children's behaviour management related to self-regulation. Wyman et al. (2010) found that classroom based intervention improve self-regulation skill among pre-schoolers and primary school children. Similarly, interpretation of the research finding indicates that the participant children become more competent in knowing influence of emotions on behaviours and strategic ways of controlling emotions thanks to the SEL Activities.

Instructional SEL Activities requires caring, organised, participatory learning environment (Zins & Elias, 2007). During the SEL Activities the participant children needs were responded to and they were encouraged to actively participate the activities. They were helped to contemplate and reflect on emotions, and their impact on behaviours, emotions, their behavioural results, and interactions with their friends. This kind of instructional approach made their experience of the SEL Activities more tangible and helped them better to recognise and label emotions. Furthermore, the participant children were helped to give examples from relationships with each other.

This finding can be associated with the Experiential Learning developed by Kolb (1984). The Experiential Learning views learning as a process in which a learner acquires knowledge through experiential transformation. The Experiential Learning suggests that learner should be open to and reflect on experiences, identify the experience through comparison with in terms of similarities and difference (Kolb, 1984). During the instructional process of the SEL Activities the participant children contemplated on relationships among emotions, environments in which they had felt them, and behaviours as a result of the emotions, hence they had opportunity to envisage their behaviours in different, express their emotions in different ways, hence they managed to make their experience more tangible.

Findings of the study revealed that strategic ways of regulating emotions reduced conflict with their friends and produced positive outcomes for their relationships. This finding can be based on operant conditioning, one of the radical behaviourism concepts. Skinner (1984) claimed that human behaviours are determined by its immediate result. On the other hand, repetition of certain behaviours depends on whether the certain behaviour generates desired and useful results. The participant children experienced that the practical and strategic knowledge about regulation of emotions, which had been learnt in the SEL Activities, could have produced positive outcomes and those outcomes in turn enforced usage of the practical and strategic knowledge.

Emotion regulation is a skill that can be improved through the SEL. Emotion regulation is also skill which enables the participant children to determine which emotions to feel, control magnitude, rise time and intensity of the emotions (Gross et al., 2011). During the SEL Activities, the participant children were instructed on different emotions and their different behavioural consequences, to focus on their interactions and reflect on different emotions and their different behavioural consequences, hence they managed to establish relationship between emotions and their behavioural consequences. In addition, they were

trained in practical and strategic knowledge to reduce magnitude and density of emotions and gained practical and strategic insight into reducing their emotions' magnitude and density. As a result of the SEL Activities the participant children were more competent to regulate and cope with their emotions.

Limitations of the Study

Outcomes of the learning are classified as cognitive, affective, and motor. SEL is the concept which explains how to develop affective aspect of humans. SEL addresses integration of cognitions, emotions, and behaviours. Therefore, it includes variety of the skills such as emotion recognition, regulation of emotions, problem solving, and decision-making (Zins & Elias, 2007). However, the present study was limited to self-regulation.

The SEL Activities had been developed for 10-year-old children and were conducted within one classroom setting. Getting necessary consents from children, their parents, and teacher restrained application of the SEL Activities in different classroom settings. As a consequence, results of the study are limited to the classroom setting where the SEL Activities were carried out. Besides experience during the SEL Activities were restrained to the classroom context. Therefore, it is not possible to generalize results of the study due to phenomenological research characteristics.

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Author Note

Kerem Coskun is an assistant professor at the Artvin Coruh University. He earned his Ph.D. from the University on 19 May from the Institute of Educational Sciences Department of Primary Teaching. His research interest is about socio-emotional development among primary school children. Correspondence regarding this article can be addressed directly to: keremcoskun@artvin.edu.tr.

Article Citation