

Chapter 8

Blended Social Skills Intervention for Students Identified as Emotionally and Behaviorally Disturbed

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to evaluate a nine-week blended learning social skills intervention for high school students identified as being at risk for emotional and behavioral disorders. Exploring how social skills interventions improve students' social and emotional deficits aids in the development of an engaging curriculum. This quantitative study utilized a pretest-posttest method. High school students identified as being at risk for emotional and behavioral disorders and their special educators were invited to complete the researcher-designed social skills intervention with a corresponding pre- and post-test. There were no statistically significant differences between the pre- and post-test scores for the students or the special educator. The SEARS' social-emotional domains were all found to be statistically significant predictors of the students' total composite score. Gender was found to be a significant predictor of the student's total composite score. Implications of the study include strategies for developing interventions at the high school level.

INTRODUCTION

Low self-concept, low self-efficacy, poor relationships with teachers and peers, and behavioral challenges can create lasting effects on the post-school personal and professional experiences of students with emotional and behavioral disorders (Tidmore, 2018). Mihalas, Morse, Allsopp, and Alvarez (2009) reported that, as compared to students without disabilities, students identified as Emotionally and Behaviorally Disturbed (EBD) “fail more courses in school, are retained more frequently, have lower grade point averages, drop out of school more frequently, and are less likely to graduate high school” (p. 109).

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Feelings of inadequacy result in the poor wellbeing of students and lead to behavioral concerns, such as persistent failure, negative social-emotional development, and aggression (Taylor, Davis-Kean, & Malanchuk, 2007).

Poor relationships between students identified as EBD and their teachers and peers often lead to undesirable classroom environments (Tidmore, 2018). Developing and delivering cohesive social skills interventions that combine social and academic skills in new and technologically innovative ways (such as online or blended learning) may help reduce emotional outbursts and behavioral concerns in students identified as EBD (Lo, Loe, & Cartledge, 2002; Morgan, 2012). Instructional social skills interventions are needed at the high school level; however, there is limited evidence on the effectiveness of current school-based social skills interventions (Lake, Al Otaiba, & Guidry, 2010).

Educators must implement additional social skills intervention strategies in conjunction with standard curriculum practices in order to effectively improve students' social, emotional, and behavioral deficits. Furthermore, educators should embrace new and engaging online programs to reach current students' interests, to support engagement and student autonomy. While initial research shows the effectiveness of social skills interventions for elementary and middle school students, current high school level interventions fail to adequately address the academic, social, and emotional needs of students identified as EBD (Bullis et al., 1993; Morgan, 2012). The purpose of this study was to evaluate the social, emotional, and behavioral impact of a nine-week blended learning social skills intervention for high school students identified as being at risk for EBD.

BACKGROUND

Emotional and Behavioral Disorders

More than 410,000 children and adolescents received services for emotional disturbances in the 2013–2014 school year alone (USDE, 2016). Students with emotional and behavioral disabilities struggle with low self-perception, poor relationships with teachers, behavioral challenges, and dropout, often leading to a rise in incarceration and dropout (Lane et al., 2009).

Federal Definition

The United States Department of Education (USDE, 2010) federally defined EBD as a condition in which students met at least one or more of the following criteria over an extended period of time:

- An inability to build or maintain satisfactory interpersonal relationships with peers and teachers;
- Inappropriate types of behavior or feelings under normal circumstances;
- A generally pervasive mood of unhappiness or depression; or
- A tendency to develop physical symptoms or fears associated with personal or school problems” (p. 1).

Emotional and behavioral disorders include several social-emotional disabilities such as anxiety disorders, bipolar disorders, eating disorders, obsessive-compulsive disorders, conduct disorders, and psychotic disorders (IDEA, 2004).

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