

Kansas SBAE Teacher Perceptions of Social, Emotional, and Character Development

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Introduction/Theoretical Framework

Schools have long been tasked with more than delivering academic instruction. Over time, additional responsibilities have been added to educators' roles, often centered on addressing students' basic needs. For example, schools have taken on health-related screenings for hearing, dental, and vision (Kansas 2023-2024 Legislative Sessions, 2022; Kansas Office of Revisor of Statutes, n.d.). In the early 20th century, teachers and administrators were expected to provide counseling services focused on economic challenges (Gysbers, 2010), and by 1938 they were also required to observe and report signs of eye strain and visual dysfunction in students (Appelboom, 1985). These responsibilities have only continued to expand, with educators today playing a critical role in supporting not just students' academic growth, but also their mental health and overall social well-being (CASEL, n.d.).

Many schools have implemented social and emotional learning (SEL) as a structured approach to supporting student well-being to meet these evolving demands. SEL helps students develop skills to navigate interpersonal and intrapersonal situations, enhancing their ability to think, feel, and act (CASEL, n.d.; Yopp et al., 2017). Competencies such as communication, teamwork, and empathy are not only essential for student development but are also highly valued by employers (Yoder et al., 2020).

States like Kansas have adopted SEL standards backed by research conducted by the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL), giving schools a framework to help students develop critical skills such as self-awareness, empathy, and responsible decision-making (CASEL, n.d.). The Kansas' Social, Emotional, and Character Development (SECD) standards, which operate within a competency-based model, integrate SEL into academic curricula and aim to foster personal, social, and character development, preparing students to navigate life effectively while promoting a positive school culture. Despite nationwide debates about SEL's role in education (Abrams, 2023), many states remain committed to its integration, recognizing that it supports academic, social, and emotional growth.

School-Based Agricultural Education (SBAE), recognized for its emphasis on character and citizenship, presents an opportunity to integrate these interpersonal and intrapersonal skills into existing curricula (Akers et al., 2004; Marlatt et al., 2003). The structure of SBAE lends itself to student development through its unique blend of academic instruction, leadership development, and work-based learning. Organized around career pathways aligned with industry standards, SBAE prepares students for both workforce certification and post-secondary education in agriculture-related fields (Thoron & Barrick, 2022). Within this framework, SBAE teachers serve in multifaceted roles as instructors, advisors, and work-based learning supervisors.

These responsibilities allow teachers to build strong relationships with students, providing consistent mentorship and holistic support throughout their educational journey.

Given the demands on educators to support not only academic achievement but also students' overall well-being, it is important to understand how teachers perceive and implement SECD in their classrooms. This research focuses on the perceptions of SBAE teachers regarding the importance of SECD and how they integrate these competencies into their classrooms. By examining these perspectives, the study aims to understand how SBAE teachers contribute to fostering supportive learning environments that address students' social and emotional needs.

Theoretical Framework

The Kansas SECD Model Standards address the need for students to acquire, practice, and exemplify habits that contribute to their academic, career, and personal success (KSDE, 2018). These standards draw from the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) research, offering a structured foundation for schools to integrate social-emotional and character education (KSDE, 2018).

The CASEL framework served as the theoretical framework for this qualitative study. CASEL was established to provide evidence-based social-emotional learning as an essential part of preschool through high school education (CASEL, n.d.). The CASEL framework addresses five broad and interrelated areas of competence: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making (CASEL, n.d.). Schools use the CASEL framework to foster social and emotional knowledge, skills, and attitudes (CASEL, n.d.). The five competencies are outlined below:

Table 1

Five Competencies of the CASEL Framework

A. Self-Awareness	ability to understand one's own emotions
B. Self-Management	ability to manage one's own emotions
C. Social-Awareness	ability to understand the perspectives of and empathize with others
D. Relationship Skills	ability to establish and maintain healthy relationships
E. Responsible Decision-Making	ability to make caring and constructive choices about personal behavior and social interactions

Purpose and Objectives

The purpose of this study was to investigate how teachers perceive and integrate SECD.

1. How do Kansas SBAE teachers perceive the importance of SECD?
2. How often do Kansas SBAE teachers integrate SECD into their program?

Methods

This study investigated Kansas SBAE teachers' perceptions and integration related to SECD. The population for this study was current Kansas SBAE teachers ($N = 295$) as of November 2024. Researchers attempted to conduct a census to survey every Kansas SBAE teacher (Dillman, et al, 2014). There was a 36% response rate, with 100 SBAE teachers completing the survey. The effective sample size was 277 when factoring in unusable emails.

A Qualtrics survey adapted from the School-Based Staff Survey on Schoolwide SEL Implementation (CASEL, 2018), containing 20 questions, was used to assess Kansas SBAE teachers' perceptions and integration related to SECD and was approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB). Dillman et al. (2014) emphasize the importance of testing surveys to ensure functionality. To develop the survey, researchers consulted a team of experts including three SBAE teacher educators and one university counseling faculty member who reviewed the questions and format for clarity and validity. They also provided insights on presenting questions in ways that encourage responses (Dillman et al., 2014).

Researchers piloted the survey with SBAE teachers from a different state to determine reliability. The pilot yielded a reliability coefficient (Cronbach's alpha) of .867, indicating reliable scales (Huck, 2015). After confirming reliability, researchers distributed the survey to Kansas SBAE teachers to explore their perceptions and integration of fostering interpersonal and intrapersonal skills through SECD. Survey items addressing SECD align with CASEL's five areas of competence: self-awareness, social awareness, self-management, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making (CASEL, n.d.). The survey contained six constructs assessing teachers' experiences and perceptions of SECD. The first four constructs used Likert-type scales: one measured agreement (5 = *strongly agree* to 1 = *strongly disagree*), and the other measured frequency (5 = *always* to 1 = *never*).

A list of current teacher contact information was obtained from the Kansas FFA Executive Secretary. An initial email invitation was sent to all Kansas SBAE teachers, indicating they would receive a follow-up email from Qualtrics with a link to take the survey. All teacher email addresses were uploaded to Qualtrics, making it easier to filter the individuals who had completed and had not completed the survey. Using Qualtrics, a follow-up email was sent to teachers who had not completed the survey at the mid-way point of the survey window, and one final request was sent three days before the survey closed. The survey was designed, and all data were stored on a password-protected Qualtrics account. Data collected from the Qualtrics survey were downloaded and analyzed in IBM's Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). Researchers used descriptive statistics to examine the study's research objectives.

Results

Survey participants were predominantly female ($n = 56$, 56%). The average experience as an SBAE teacher was 9.66 years ($SD = 8.44$). Most teachers were traditionally certified ($n = 64$, 73.6%) and taught in the smallest classification of schools in Kansas ($n = 26$, 29.9%).

The first objective examined how Kansas SBAE teachers perceive the importance of SECD. Descriptive statistics were used to analyze SBAE teachers' levels of agreement with various statements regarding SECD's importance. Overall, SBAE teachers reported high levels

of agreement with the value and need of SECD, indicating they believed it plays an important role in fostering students' academic, personal, and professional success. Teachers strongly agree that promoting SECD in their teaching practices is important ($M = 4.02, SD = .68$). SBAE teachers expressed a strong connection between SECD academic success ($M = 4.14, SD = .69$), civic engagement ($M = 4.15, SD = .72$) and career preparation ($M = 1.08, SD = .78$). While still positive, SBAE teachers expressed slightly lower agreement that SECD should be taught in the classroom ($M = 3.81, SD = .96$).

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics for SBAE Teacher Perceptions About the Importance of SECD

Construct	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
It is Important to Promote SECD in Teaching Practices	4.02	.68
SECD Competence is Related to Student Academic Success	4.14	.69
SECD Competence is Related to Student Civic Engagement	4.15	.72
SECD Competence is Related to Student Career Preparation	4.08	.78
SECD Should be Taught in the Classroom	3.81	.96

Note. Mean limits scaling constructs 5 = *strongly agree*, 4 = *agree*, 3 = *neither agree nor disagree*, 2 = *disagree*, 1 = *strongly disagree*.

For research objective two, descriptive statistics were used to examine how often SBAE teachers integrate SECD in their teaching practices. Teachers indicated that they provide opportunities for students to learn or practice SECD competencies some of the time ($M = 3.71, SD = 0.81$). Teachers also reported moderate agreement with integrating SECD into academic lesson plans, indicating they do so some of the time ($M = 3.15, SD = 0.99$). Teachers expressed the strongest agreement with incorporating real-world experiences into their instruction, reporting that they do so most of the time ($M = 4.54, SD = 0.62$). Teachers indicated that they frequently incorporate real-world experiences in their lesson plans, but less frequently integrate real-world experiences along with SECD concepts into academic content ($M = 3.72, SD = 0.76$).

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics for SBAE Teacher Integration of SECD

Construct	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Act on Opportunities for Students to Learn about SECD Competencies	3.71	.81
Integrate SECD into Academic Lesson Plans	3.15	.99
Integrate Real-World Experiences into Academic Lesson Plans	4.54	.62
Integrate Both Real-World Experiences and SECD into Academic Lesson Plans	3.72	.76

Note. Mean limits scaling constructs 5 = *Always*, 4 = *Most of the Time*, 3 = *Some of the Time*, 2 = *Hardly Ever*, 1 = *Never*.

Conclusions, Implications, and Recommendations

This study examined the perceptions and integration of SECD of Kansas SBAE teachers. The teachers who completed the survey indicated they believe SECD influences student

academic success, civic engagement, and career preparation. While they acknowledged SECD's importance, there was slightly less agreement on whether SECD should be explicitly taught in the classroom. Teachers reported frequent efforts to integrate SECD competencies into student learning. Teachers emphasized consistently incorporating real-world applications in their teaching practices; however, they less frequently embedded explicit SECD into lesson plans.

While teachers act on opportunities to teach SECD competencies and integrate real-world experiences, teachers may disconnect in explicitly integrating SECD into their lessons, implying that SECD might be taught implicitly through activities and projects, but not always with defined learning objectives. Teachers' hesitancy to explicitly teach SECD highlights the importance of examining the factors contributing to this reluctance, which can then inform the development of appropriate supports and resources. The high frequency of teachers integrating real-world applications in their courses presents an opportunity to connect these experiences to specific SECD competencies explicitly.

Recommendations span teacher preparation, current teaching practices, and professional development to enhance SECD in SBAE. Teacher preparation programs should highlight how foundational teaching skills like student rapport, safe environments, classroom management, modeling, and student-centered learning inherently foster SECD (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). Additionally, teacher educators should integrate targeted SECD strategies into coursework, such as reflective journals and experiential learning (Donahue et al., 2019). They should also provide pre-service teachers with tools to enhance their own well-being by incorporating mindfulness activities that foster their social and emotional well-being (Donahue et al., 2019; Jazaieri, 2017).

Current SBAE teachers are encouraged to integrate SECD into daily teaching practices by enhancing good teaching practices. This can be accomplished by establishing positive, safe, and empowering classroom environments with clear routines and consistent rules students (CASEL, n.d.; Maslow, 1943; Darling-Hammond & Cook-Harvey, 2018). It also involves fostering collaboration among students (CASEL, n.d.; Maslow, 1943; Darling-Hammond & Cook-Harvey, 2018). Teachers should also acknowledge students' unique identities and provide diverse experiences like using multicultural examples, guest speakers, and field trips to develop student empathy (Darling-Hammond & Cook-Harvey, 2018). They can promote personal development skills like self-awareness and self-management by modeling these behaviors and incorporating reflective activities (Darling-Hammond & Cook-Harvey, 2018; Durlak et al., 2011; Durlak et al., 2022; Progress Learning, n.d.).

Finally, schools should offer ongoing SECD training and support for teachers to help them find resources tailored to their curriculum and make time for professional learning communities to allow teachers to adapt lessons, discuss, and evaluate their practices (Darling-Hammond & Cook-Harvey, 2018; Durlak et al., 2011; Kendziora & Yoder, 2016). SECD naturally aligns with the hands-on, real-world, and leadership experiences of SBAE. Through agriculture classes, FFA, and SAEs, students develop critical social, emotional, and character skills such as responsibility, teamwork, and decision-making (Akers et al., 2004; Marlatt et al., 2003).

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