

Developing Social-Emotional Learning Competencies during the COVID-19 Pandemic in Freedom Schools

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Introduction

Abstract

My observational study was conducted to view the Freedom Schools scholars' experiences of learning during the COVID-19 pandemic and understand how social-emotional learning competencies are developed. Due to the recent outbreak of COVID-19, the education system has been modified in a way that has changed the academic environment nationwide. Learning through this pandemic has altered the way we make connections, socially engage, and manage emotions. Social-emotional learning provides scholars with the chance to explore how to be self-aware, manage themselves, be socially aware, make responsible decisions, and make and maintain healthy friendships. My study will focus on how each competency is essential to the learning environment and scholars during the pandemic.

Aims of the Research

Freedom Schools strive to create an environment that encourages elementary scholars to believe in their ability to make a difference in their families, school, community, country, and the world with hope, education, and action. These schools provide curriculums that promote both social awareness and reading confidence. This six-week summer program is filled with cultural and socially relevant themes that enlighten and empower scholars.

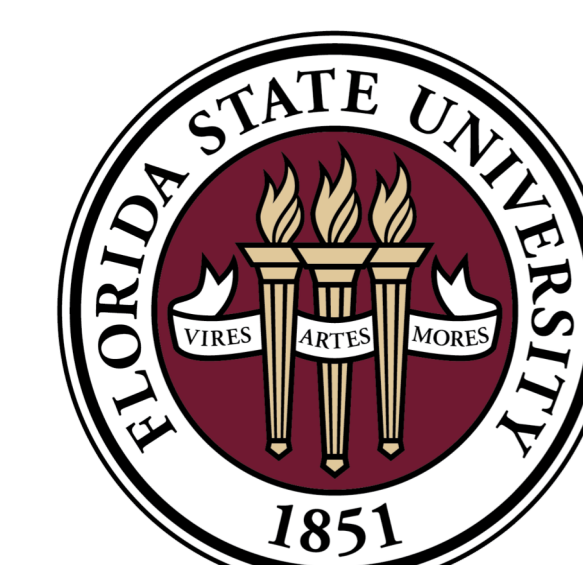
My focal point as a researcher is to understand how social-emotional learning competencies presented through the Freedom Schools influence how scholars learn and interact with their peers during the pandemic. Also, I would like to see how scholars form bonds and make healthy connections while observing COVID-19 safety measures like masking and social distancing.

Research Questions

1. Are Social-Emotional Learning competencies being developed in the classroom during COVID-19?
2. Do scholars in Freedom Schools engage with peers, connect, and bond with each other during COVID-19?

SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING COMPETECIES

Self-Awareness (SLF-A)	Self-Management (SM)	Responsible Decision-Making (DM)	Social-Awareness (SOC-A)	Relationship Skills (RS)
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Method

Research Design

This observational research study was designed to explore Social-Emotional Learning Competencies and how they were developed in scholars at Freedom Schools. The constructs of my study include each social-emotional learning competency: relationship skills, social awareness, responsible decision-making, self-awareness, and self-management. I collectively focused on how each student interacted with one another. I was able to document each relevant stimulus, the scholars' responses, and their reactions. Observations were structured and conducted through zoom. I collected data over the course of six days.

Participants

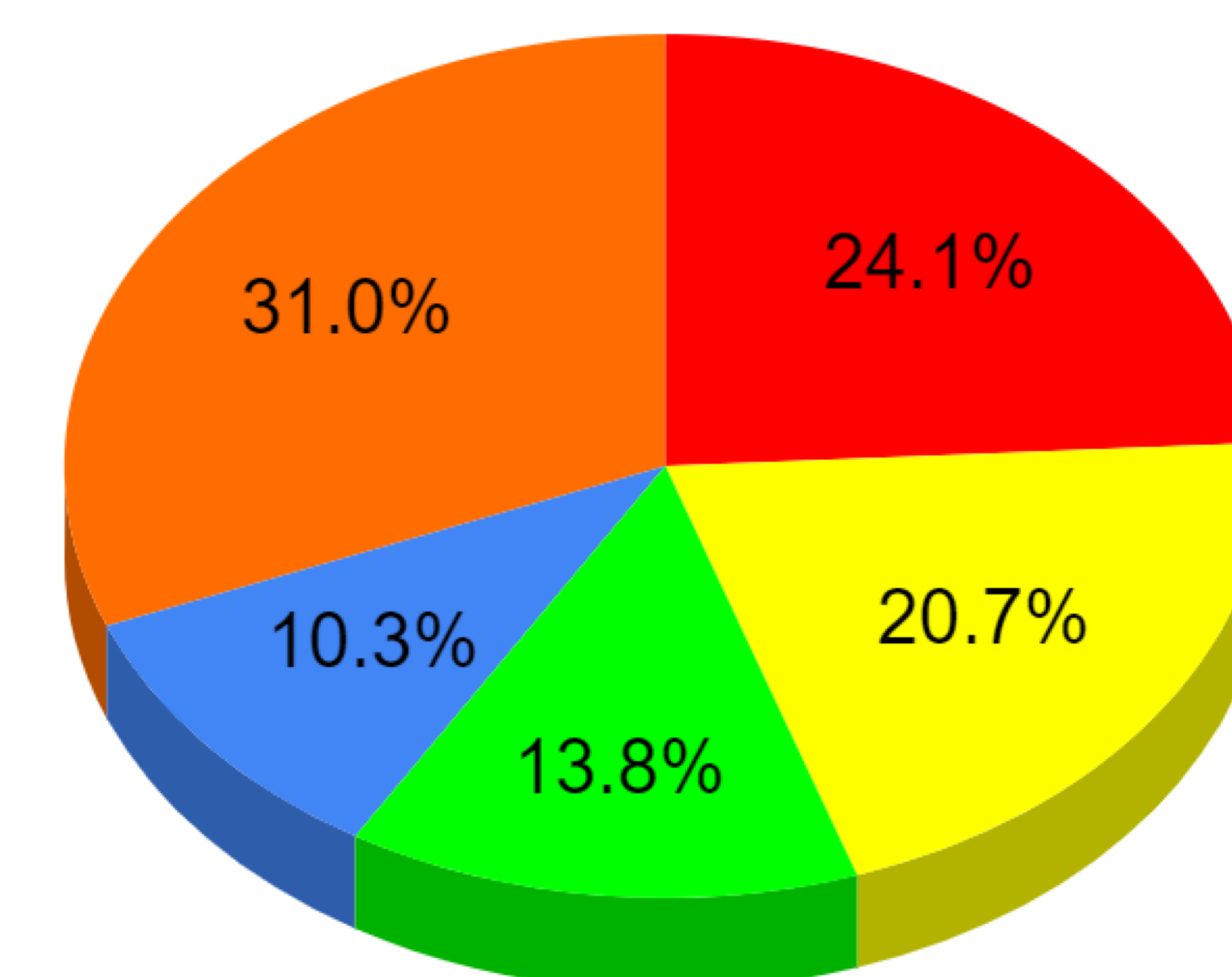
Data for this study were collected at Florida A&M's Developmental Research School (FAMU DRS), located in Tallahassee, Florida. This specific Freedom Schools program is geared toward scholars at the elementary level. There were six consented scholars from the level-two group. Level-two scholars are grades third through fifth grade, both male and female, ages ranging from 8-11 years old.

Data Collection and Analysis

Scholars were observed via zoom in a classroom setting. This happened over a span of a few weeks with six days' worth of data. Thorough notes were taken specifically for six scholars and coded based on the social-emotional competency their behavior or responses best reflected. Data were coded and trends were identified.

Frequency of Social-Emotional Learning Competencies in Freedom Schools

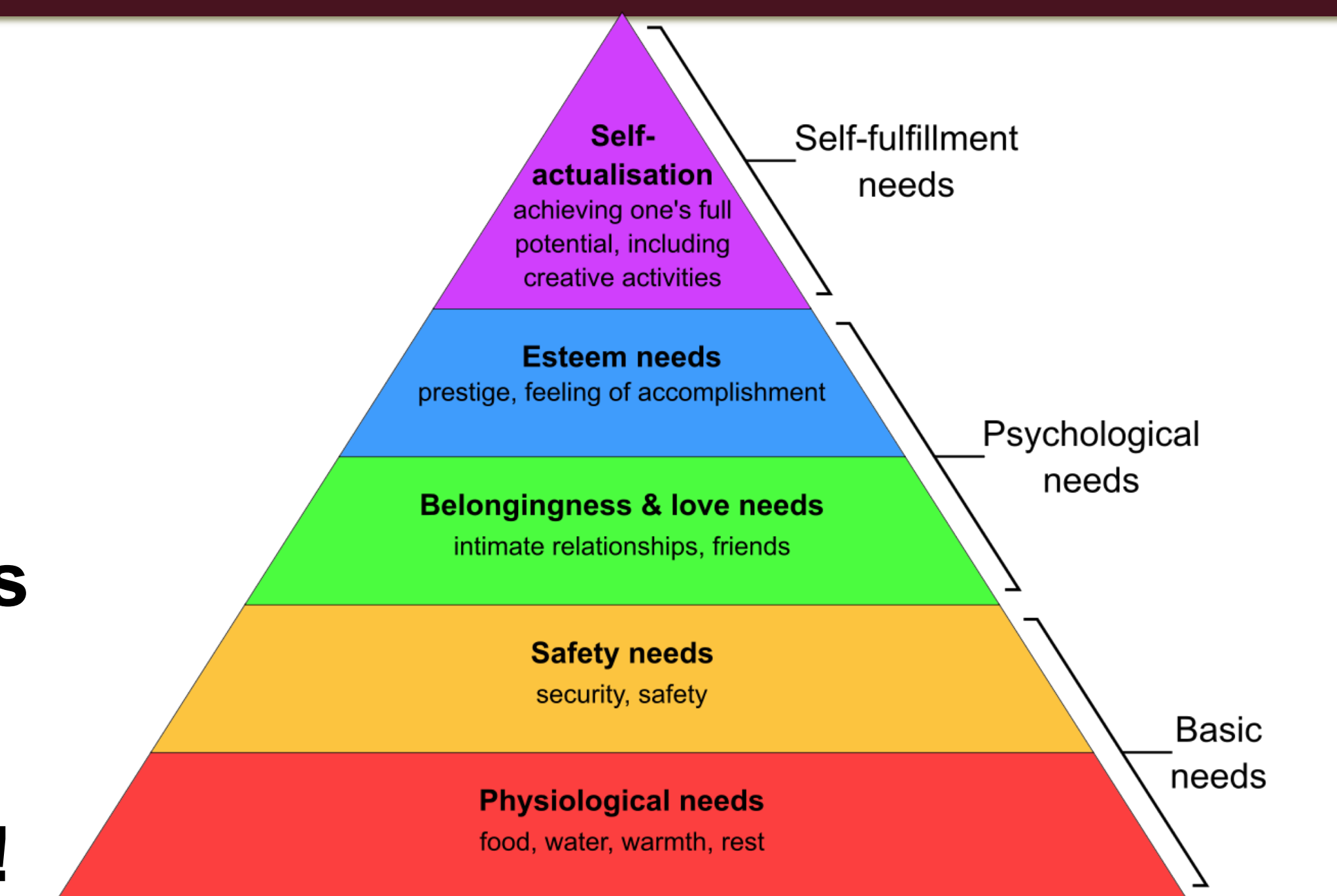
- Self-Awareness
- Self-Management
- Responsible Decision-Making
- Social Awareness
- Relationship Skills



"Come on guys, we can do it!"

Results

Scholars developed social-emotional learning competencies and found a way to be motivational!



Conclusion

The most dominant social-emotional learning competency identified was Relationship Skills (31%). Self-Awareness (24.1%) was the second most common competency. Both competencies work together to support social-emotional development and better the overall experiences of scholars in the classroom during COVID-19.

My findings most closely resonated with the importance of self-awareness. Jones (2020) highlights that children must learn by themselves how to manage and express their emotions essentially to build and maintain healthy relationships. Self-Awareness is also closely related to Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. Belongingness is a human emotion closely in relation to intrapersonal skills, connectedness, and feeling as one.

Discussion

The hardest competency to identify was Social-Awareness. I believe the zoom observations were limiting because Social-Awareness is *not* always identifiable with observation. An in-person observation could have been better so I could read and understand the emotions of the scholars. There was a small disconnection with remote data collection. Also, due to social distancing and school guidelines, I could not participate in the observation and make that connection with scholars.

Key References

Millheim, K. (2012). Toward a better experience: Examining student needs in the online classroom through Maslow's hierarchy of needs model. *MERLOT Journal of Online Learning and Teaching*, 8, 159-171.

Jones, S., Barnes, S., Bailey, R., & Doolittle, E. (2017). Promoting social and emotional competencies in elementary school. *The Future of Children*, 27(1), 49-72.

Economic Policy Institute. (2020). *COVID-19 and student performance, equity, and U.S. education policy: Lessons from pre-pandemic research to inform relief, recovery, and rebuilding*. The research reported here was supported by the Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education, through Grant R305B170017 to Florida State University. The opinions expressed are those of the authors and do not represent views of the Institute or the U.S. Department of Education.