



An evaluation of the effectiveness of using drama as a tool to build social-emotional development of children with dyslexia in Singapore.

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Abstract

Literacy is not the only struggle that children with dyslexia face every day. For many years, researchers have reported that children with dyslexia have poorer levels of social-emotional development, due to personal experiences with failures, perceptions of their literacy abilities and failing to receive appropriate emotional support from adults around them. This study explores the efficacy of a speech and drama programme in developing the social-emotional literacy of children with dyslexia. The participants were students aged 7-11 years old, enrolled in the speech and drama programme in Dyslexia Association of Singapore for the whole year of 2016. The Southampton Emotional Literacy Scales (SELS) for the appropriate age group was used for this study. Pre and Post programme questionnaires were collected from students, parents and drama teachers. Semi-structured interviews with parents were conducted in order to provide in-depth insight into the research. The results are discussed and suggestions provided with recommendations for future research.

Through this study and the data presented, it is hoped to encourage teachers, educators, education policy makers and parents to see that there is more at stake in dyslexia than just acquiring literacy (reading, spelling and writing) skills and achieving good grades. There is also a need to develop our children's social-emotional literacy so that they can adapt and be ready to meet the current demands of society.

Keywords: Drama, dyslexia, social-emotional literacy

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INTRODUCTION

Social-emotional development is the knowledge, disposition and skills to be able to understand and manage our own emotions, to be able to decode and respond appropriately to the emotions of other people, to be able to establish positive relationships with others, to be able to make informed decision and to handle conflicts effectively (Faupel, 2003; Joronen, Hakamies and Astedt-Kurki, 2011).

The realm of social-emotional development of children with learning difficulties, especially those diagnosed with dyslexia, has received attention for many decades and is still an area that intrigues researchers. Many researchers have attempted to identify and evaluate the relationship of success to the social-emotional competencies of these children through numerous studies, outlined below. Most documented findings urge schools, educators and even the government to step in and promote social-emotional learning as part of the school curriculum (Humphrey, 2002; Faupel, 2003; Thom, 2010; Joronen, Hakamies and Astedt-Kurki, 2011; Adams, 2013; Casserly, 2013; Antonelli et.al, 2014).

According to Faupel (2003), developing social and emotional competencies in schools or classrooms involves a 3-stage intervention, based on a modification of the ABC model of behaviour; i) changing the environment - this is not limited to changing the physical environment of the classroom itself, how it is organised, the teacher's character and classroom management but also includes revision of the curriculum with more directed and purposeful skills for the pupils to learn; ii) consequences - the importance of rewarding acceptable behaviours to encourage co-operation; and iii) getting the children to practice - most schools stop at consequences when it comes to social and emotional behaviour; teachers have to ensure that the students know what to do, how to do it and to have numerous tries using the skills they have been taught to handle their emotions and behaviour.

The importance of social-emotional development competencies of a child is well-established by some researchers as the predictor of academic success. (Joronen et.al, 2011; Ashdown and Bernard, 2012; Casserly 2013), helping to increase the self-esteem and confidence level as the child develops a strong sense of self (Faupel,2003), peer relations (Humphrey 2002) and protecting the child in his later years from violence and crime, teenage pregnancy and drugs and alcohol abuse (Joronen et. al, 2011).
Paradigm shift in the education landscape

As researchers have established the importance of social-emotional literacy and its effects on academic success, self-esteem, personal and professional development (Greenberg, Weissberg, O'Brien, Zins, Fredericks, Resnik, & Elias,2003), the Singapore government initiated a collective paradigm shift in the education landscape in 2016 - moving towards a holistic education. A more holistic education would mean schools in Singapore would have a robust curriculum with a combination of academic and non-

academic subjects. Between 2017 and 2018, the Ministry of Education has been implementing a revised secondary school curriculum which includes more hands-on subjects like Electronics, Computing, Exercise & Sports Science, Drama, Smart Electrical Technology, Mobile Robotics and Retail Operations which are offered for N-level and O-level tracks (Teng, 2016). In the Ministry Of Education (MOE) FY 2016 Committee of Supply Debate speech, Mr Ng Chee Meng, Acting Minister of Education (Schools) proposed the need to review and refine the Direct School Admission (DSA) quota and selection process so that students can be admitted into secondary schools that offer distinctive programmes (MOE, 2016).

This importance of holistic education has also been extended to polytechnic students where Acting Minister for Education (Higher Education and Skills) Ong Ye Kung, highlighted in his speech the advantages of matching students to the courses of their interests; through Direct Polytechnic Admissions (DPA), an aptitude-based admission (Ministry of Education, 2016). In addition to the Polytechnics, the aptitude-based admissions expand opportunities for talented students in secondary school, Institute of Technical Education (ITE) and the Universities to pursue their interests. The Singapore government is putting in a great deal of effort to recognise and include 'talents' as achievements.

DYSLEXIA

One of the main obstacles to academic achievement is dyslexia, a learning difficulty that affects reading, spelling and writing abilities (Everatt et al., 2008; Marzocchi et al., 2009; Thomson, 2009), and is often combined with other co-occurring difficulties such as attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), dyspraxia, dyscalculia and social, emotional and behavioural disorder (SEBD) (Everatt et al., 2008 and Thomson, 2009). According to Frederickson and Cline (2009), dyslexia could affect gross and fine motor skills, working memory, literacy acquisition and the social-emotional function of a child, and these are in addition to phonological deficits (Everatt, Weeks and Brooks, 2008) and attention processes impairment (Marzocchi, Ornaghi, Barboglio, 2009) that children with dyslexia are already facing.

This struggle somehow manifests into negative perception of themselves, as they experience academic failures and challenges throughout their schooling years (Humphrey, 2002; Burden and Burdett, 2005; Casserly, 2013). For more than a decade researchers have documented that children with dyslexia have poorer levels of social-emotional development than their peers, due to personal experiences with failures, perceptions of their literacy abilities and failure to receive appropriate emotional support from parents, teachers and people around them (Bryan, Sullivan-Burtsein and Mathur, 1998; Humphrey, 2002; Burden and Burdett, 2005; Casserly, 2013; Antonelli, Bilocca, Borg, Borg, Boxall, Briff, Debono, Falzon, Farrugia, Gatt, Formosa, Mifsud, Mizzi, Scurfield, Scurfield & Vella, 2014).

Recognising the struggles of children with dyslexia with literacy and the need to develop their social and emotional competencies, the SDA programme was introduced in DAS in 2013 as a platform for DAS students to learn to express their inner feelings and emotions, to boost their confidence level, to demonstrate their talents and to discover their strengths in a fun and safe environment.

Thomson (2009) suggested that if children with dyslexia could overcome the "I am dyslexic and I can't do it" attitude, then it would increase their self-esteem and determination to succeed. For these children, having an improved perception of self could give them a better chance to succeed in school and life (Humphrey, 2002), hence, they need to feel supported (Eadon, 2005; Casserly, 2013).

With that, this paper aims to explore the effectiveness of using drama as a tool for building social-emotional development in primary school children in Singapore. My research questions for this study are:

1. Do children with dyslexia show improvement in Social-Emotional Literacy Scales (SELS) score after a year in the drama programme?
2. What are the social-emotional difficulties that may be present in children with dyslexia, who participated in this study, as identified by parents?
3. Can Drama be the tool to develop social-emotional literacy?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Children with learning difficulties often refer to themselves in a very negative way due to the discouraging messages such as "you're too slow", and "you still can't read" from many sources such as parents, siblings, teachers and even peers on daily basis (Bryan, Sullivan-Burtsein and Mathur, 1998; Humphrey, 2002; Burden and Burdett, 2005; Eadon, 2005; Casserly, 2013; Antonelli, Bilocca, Borg, Borg, Boxall, Briff, Debono, Falzon, Farrugia, Gatt, Formosa, Mifsud, Mizzi, Scurfield, Scurfield & Vella, 2014). Burden (2005), pointed out that negative perceptions proliferated in dyslexic individuals, not limited to the perception of being incompetent academically, but extending to even intrapersonal and interpersonal growth.

Humphrey (2001 & 2003) noted that such maladaptive self-references for these children eventually leads to poor self-concepts and lowered self-esteem. He further explained that self-concept and self-esteem have implications for motivation, academic achievement and relationships with others. The findings of the study suggest, for example, that some of these children with poor self-concept and self-esteem may even exhibit greater emotional and behavioural difficulties when compared to children without reading problems.

DRAMA AND CHILDREN WITH DYSLEXIA

Since children with dyslexia have low self-esteem and poor perceptions of themselves, Eadon (2005) and Winston (2012) claimed that drama can be a powerful tool to learn literacy and build self-confidence, which in turn can lead to a more positive self-concept for individuals.

Children with dyslexia can learn language through an interactive and participatory process offered by drama classes, which engage learners emotionally and playfully (Winston, 2012). According to Winston (2012), drama is a multimodal form of pedagogy that engages students' interest at different levels of entry. A multimodal form which combines visual, aural, verbal and kinaesthetic language allows students to retain a particular learning experience firmly in their minds (Chang, 2012). Also, the 'malleability' of the learning process enables teachers to swiftly respond and adapt to any student's comments, questions or ideas (Chang, 2012).

Chang (2012) suggested the playful nature of drama in classroom is advantageous in preparing students to express their thoughts and learn to take risks. Drama, being a multimodal pedagogy, uses props, body language, facial expressions, sounds and images along with words to convey meaning (Palechourou and Winston, 2012). Within the drama experience, these children are given the opportunities to draw on and construct meaning, not only from their spoken language, but also from the physical context combined with visual and aural cues.

Drama activities such as role-play give the students an opportunity to become physically and linguistically part of the story by assuming the roles of the characters and imagining they are facing the similar problems. At the same time, they can re-consider their thoughts, attitudes and feelings in the light of shared experience with their peers, learning to work together, to cooperate and contribute, and to listen to and accept the viewpoints and contributions of others (Palechorou and Winston, 2012).

METHOD

Participants

A total of 6 students, 6 parents and 2 DAS Speech and Drama teachers participated in this study. The pre-requisites for the participants were as follows.

Pre-requisites for student-participant:

The following criteria must be met before seeking parental consent for the study: the student must be new to the DAS Speech and Drama programme in Term 1, 2016, the child has to be within the age group 7 years old - 11 years old, officially diagnosed with

dyslexia and have completed the programme for one year (from Term 1 – Term 4, 2016).

Pre-requisites for parent-participant:

The only criteria a parent needs to fulfil in order to be able to participate in this research is simply being the parent, legal guardian or care taker of a participating student. The main reason for this criterion was to gather data from people who live in close proximity with the student, have an established parent-relationship with the student who are able to observe changes in the student's behaviour.

Pre-requisites for teacher-participant:

The teacher-participants must be an Educational Therapist (EdT) at DAS who provides literacy intervention to students with dyslexia. The teacher, must be based at the same centre as the new student-participants.

Informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to the participation in the questionnaires and the interview sessions.

Instrument

In order to explore the effectiveness of using drama as a tool for building social-emotional development in primary school children in Singapore, this paper will be using the Southampton Emotional Literacy Scales (SELS) for students, parents, teachers and interviews with parents. (See Table 1) The domains of SELS are divided into Personal Competence and Social Competence (Goleman,1996).

Table 1: Different type of SELS questionnaire for different group

SOUTHAMPTON EMOTIONAL LITERACY SURVEY		
PUPIL CHECKLIST	PARENT CHECKLIST	TEACHER CHECKLIST
25 questions to be completed by the pupil	25 questions to be completed by parent or primary care taker at home	20 questions to be completed by teacher in the school
Will represent the child's view of himself/herself	Will represent the parent's view of the child at home	Will represent the teacher's view of the child in school

Apart from the SELS questionnaires, a parent of each student participating was interviewed at the end of 2016 and early 2017. Using a script of 4 open-ended questions, their thoughts were gathered on the progress of the children in terms of their behaviour and social-emotional aspects.

Interview Questions:

1. Why did you enrol your child into the SDA programme?
2. Can you tell me more about your child's level of confidence, social skill and maybe self-awareness or self-regulation, that is how is he/she managing his/her own emotions, before joining the programme?
3. Can you tell me more about your child's level of confidence, social skill and maybe self-awareness or self-regulation, that is how is he/she managing his/her own emotions, after joining the programme?
4. In your opinion, do you think it is important to develop the social-emotional aspects? Why?

RESULTS AND FINDINGS

Before presenting the outcomes of each individual checklist, here is a comparison of pre-SDA and post-SDA SELS scores from Pupil Checklist, Teacher Checklist and Parent Checklist.

In Figure 1, students scored an average of 66.83 points for their pre-SDA Pupil Checklist questionnaire run in Term 1. This average score increased to 80.5 points in Term 4. The difference between these two average scores is 13.67 points and it is equated to a 20.45% leap in the Pupil Checklist. This leap reflected an improved average score Pupil Checklist for all the students who participated in this study. Therefore, this is an encouraging outcome that signified students are seeing themselves more positively, which means, their social-emotional aspects are improving.

The average pre-SDA score for the Teacher Checklist was 56.5 points in Term 1 and it went up to 71.19 points in Term 4, which was a 25.64% increase. This slight increase revealed that on average the teachers were able to report observable changes through the Teacher Checklist.

The average pre-SDA Parent Checklist score was 60.17 points in Term 1 and the average post-SDA score in Term 4 went up slightly to 65.5 points, that was only an 8.8% increase. There could be various factors that contributed to this slight increase, which will be discussed later in this paper.

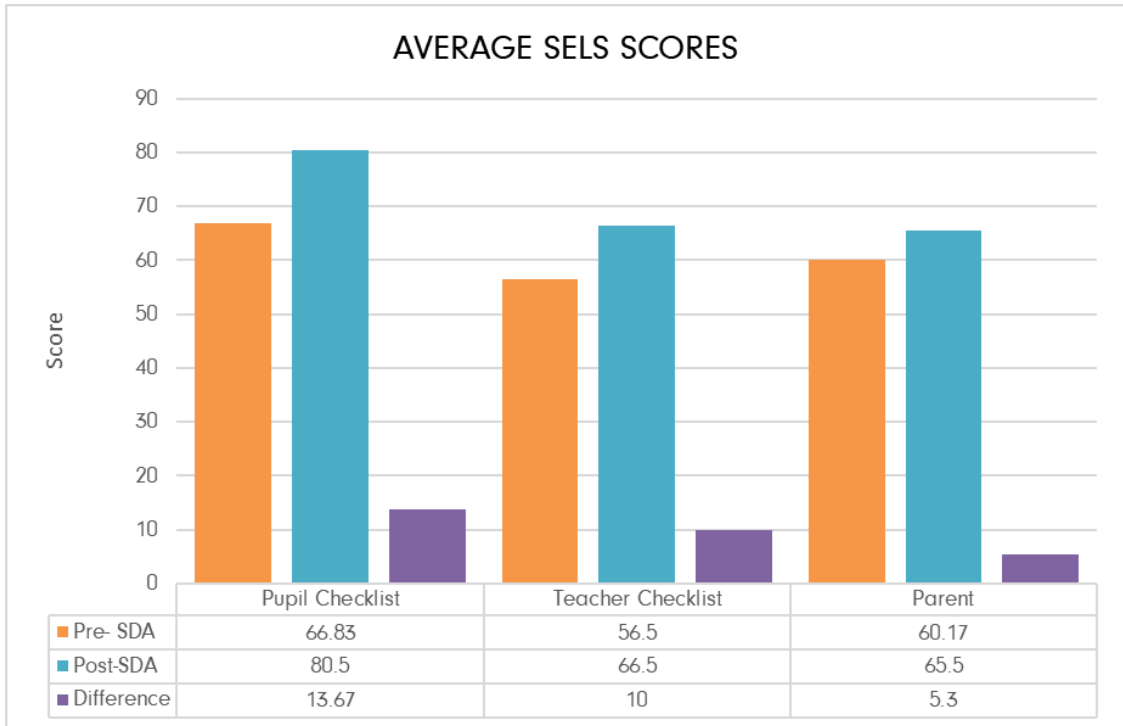


Figure 1: Comparison of pre-SDA and post-SDA of SELS scores. Average scores of 3 checklists were compared.

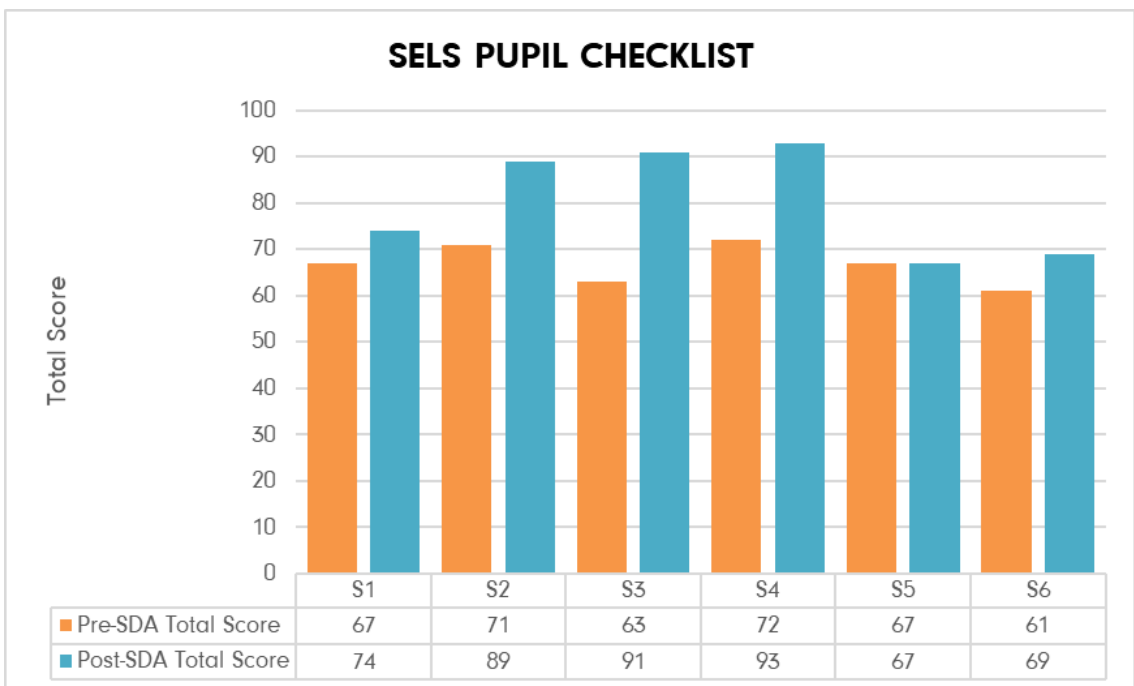


Figure 2: SELS Pupil Checklist Score

The next set of data that we will be looking at will be the Pupil Checklist, as shown in Figure 2. It was tabulated to reveal the number of students that actually perceived themselves more positively after one year in SDA programme.

From the Pupil Checklist’s data, 5 out of 6 students gave an improved SELS score after attending SDA programme for one year. In terms of statistical significance, a t test was conducted showing a significant effect of drama, $p=0.02$, with an effect size of 1.67, indicating a strong effect of the support. What stands out in the chart is Student 3’s score at the beginning of 2016 when he first joined SDA and his scores at the end of Term 4, 2016. His score was 63 when he attempted the questionnaire in Term1. In term 4, his score was 91. There was an increase of 28 points, the highest among his peers. In contrast to that, Student 5 did not seem to have any improvement on his perception of himself. There was no change to both his pre-SDA and post-SDA scores. There could be many reasons that contributed to such outcomes, which will be unravelled from the parents’ interviews in the later part of this chapter. Hence, evaluating and revealing the scores of the Pupil Checklist can provide useful information about the general effectiveness of the drama programme in building social-emotional development, which was translated through the students’ perception of self.

Next, Figure 3 shows the results of the Teacher Checklist. This is where the drama teachers gave their perception with regards to the students’ social-emotional level at the beginning of Term 1 and towards the end of Term 4.

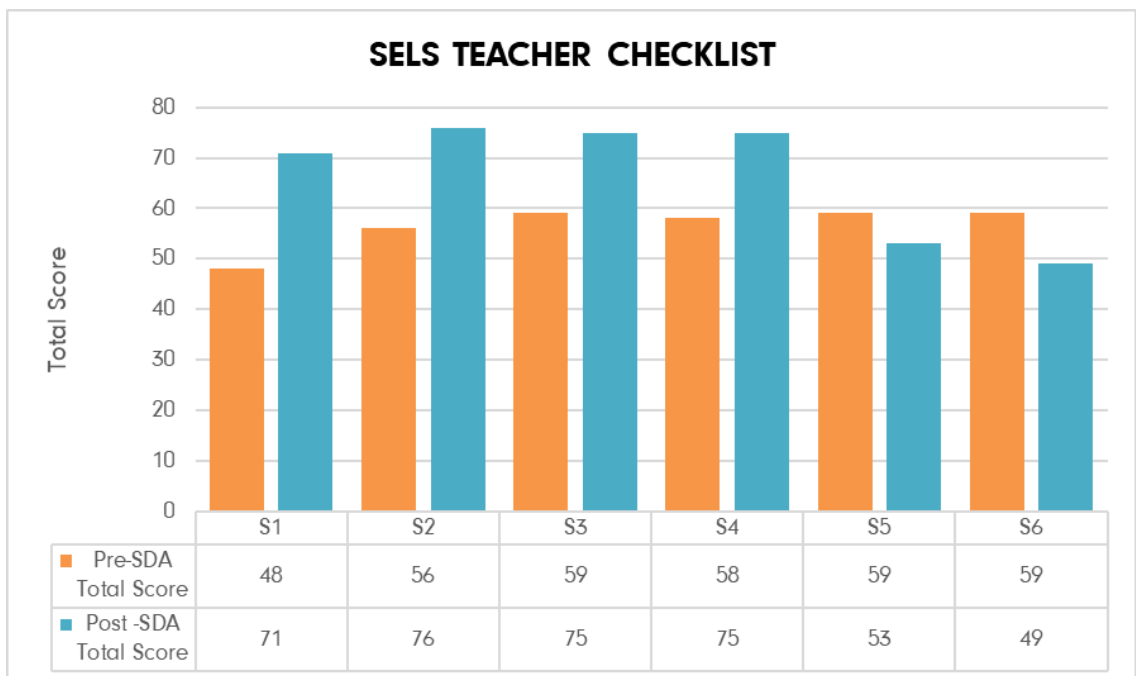


Figure 3: SELS Teacher Checklist Score

From the Teacher Checklist, only 4 students were perceived to have an improved SELS score, and two showed a deterioration. In terms of statistical significance, a t test was conducted showing no overall significance, but with an effect size of 1.67, indicating a strong effect of the support on teachers' views of the participants. From this data, Student 1's scores went up by 23 points, and that is the highest peak among his peers. This shows there was a tremendous perceived improvement by Student 1's drama teacher. Unlike the scores of Student 1, the scores dipped for Student 5 and Student 6 in comparison to their Teacher Checklist scores collected in Term 1; with Student 6's scores reduced drastically by 10 points.

Lastly, Figure 4 is the final set of quantitative data that we will be looking at. This data represents the perceptions of parents towards their children, who were at the same time the participants in this study. This the most interesting set of data among the 3 checklists. This data gave me a brief overview of how the child is perceived at home by his/her parent and could be supporting assumptions of children behaving differently at home and in the classroom if the data is being used to compare with the Teacher Checklist.

In terms of statistical significance, a t test was conducted showing no significance for parental ratings of the effect of drama, with an effect size of 0.6, however, indicating a medium effect of the support. In this Parent Checklist, Student 1, Student 5 and Student 6 scored 10 more points in Term 4. This was closely followed by Student 3 with an increase of 8 points. And there was a reduction of 1 point and 5 points for Student 2 and Student 4, respectively.

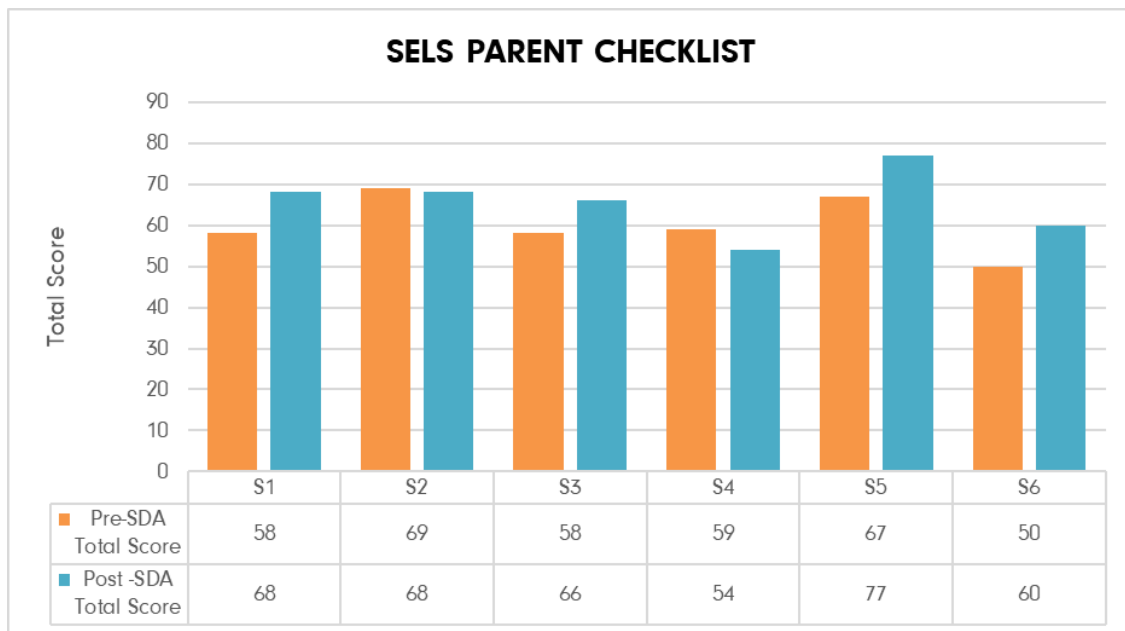


Figure 4: SELS Parent Checklist

Apart from the SELS checklists, interviews with parents were conducted to unravel their intentions in registering their children onto the speech and drama programme, how the child's behaviour rated before and after joining the programme and the parent's opinion on the importance of social-emotional development. Each interview was transcribed verbatim and analysed for coding purpose. The responses were coded into categories and later grouped into a bigger theme.

In Table 3 below, the apparent reason for a parent to enrol his/her child into SDA was the perceived 'benefits of drama classes' that a child could reap from the programme, for example, builds confidence, helps in expression and encourages social interaction, as reflected in the coded categories.

Table 3: Responses to 'Why did you enrol your child into the SDA programme?'

Qn 1: Why did you enrol your child into the SDA programme?		
EXEMPLAR QUOTES	CODED CATEGORIES	THEMES
"... I wanted the social communication with other children to improve his social skills." - P1	Encourages social interaction	Benefits of drama class
"... helps in confidence level." - P1 "... always feel speech and drama would give someone confidence you see." - P2	Builds confidence	Benefits of drama class
"...lacks vocabulary to express himself."- P3 "...I think speech and drama will help her to express herself better."-P4	Helps in expression	Benefits of drama class
"...she is very shy and never speak up." - P2 "...a bit shy type of girl." - P4	social skills	Social-emotional difficulties

In Table 4, most students who participated in this study have some level of social-emotional difficulties. These difficulties are identified as the following; behavioural issues, being emotional, lack of confidence and lack of social skills. These were present before the students join the SDA programme.

Table 4: Coded responses to 'Can you tell me more about your child's level of confidence, social skill and maybe self-awareness or self-regulation, that is how is he/she managing his/her own emotions, before joining the programme?'

Qn 2: Can you tell me more about your child's level of confidence, social skill and maybe self-awareness or self-regulation, that is how is he/she managing his/her own emotions, <i>before</i> joining the programme?		
EXEMPLAR QUOTES	CODED CATEGORIES	THEMES
"...some tantrums in school." -P1 "...he will be very frustrated and keeps to himself."-P3 "...he is very hot tempered...throw tantrums..."-P6	Display of behavioural issues	Social-emotional aspect
"...she is very emotional, a bit and she'll start to tears." -P2 "...she will keep everything to herself." - P4	Emotional	Social-emotional aspect
"...she's quite bad you know, she'll bend down her head and will talk so soft(ly) that you could not hear."-P2 "...lacks confidence when it comes to academics."-P3	Confidence	Social-emotional aspect
"...she will not approach friends..... during recess times, sometimes she will sit alone." - P4 "...he has problems communicating with people." -P5	Social skills	Social-emotional aspect

Table 5 below provides an insight into the students' social-emotional capacity after joining the programme for one year, through the parents' interviews. Improvements in confidence level, expression, social skills and development in social-emotional aspects were the changes observed by parents.

Qn 3: Can you tell me more about your child's level of confidence, social skill and maybe self-awareness or self-regulation, that is how is he/she managing his/her own emotions, <i>after</i> joining the programme?		
EXEMPLAR QUOTES	CODED CATEGORIES	THEMES
"...helped in confidence level."-P1 "...she will look at you and then answer you when you post a question at her."-P2 "...it's getting better."-P3 "...improvement in confidence level...she can open up a bit."-P4	Builds confidence	Benefits of drama class
"...able to express himself better."-P1 "...more or less expresses himself better."-P3 "...he has more expressions....talks more."-P5 "...more proper expression."-P6	Helps in Expression	Benefits of drama class
"...improvement inas well as communications."-P1 "...there's slight improvement ."-P4	Social skills	Social-emotional aspects
"...improvement in managing emotions."-P4	Emotion	Social-emotional aspects

Table 6: Coded responses to 'In your opinion, do you think it is important to develop the social-emotional aspects? Why?'

Qn 4: In your opinion, do you think it is important to develop the social-emotional aspects? Why?		
EXEMPLAR QUOTES	CODED CATEGORIES	THEMES
"...yes...(if) otherwise how are they going to live in a community."-P1 "...definitely (important). ...we grow in the world where we need to interact with everyone."-P3 "...it is very, very important. ...in future when she grows up, interacting with her friends or maybe at work."-P4	Future interaction with members of the society	Preparation to adulthood
"...of course! If you don't understand people, then it would be bad."-P2 "...of course! ...even as an adult, you (wouldn't like) if you get shooed away when you are talking."-P5 "...yes... most of the times he couldn't control his temper...if I can teach him all these, it will help a lot... (always) ended up with lots of argument with people."-P6	Social skills	Social-emotional aspects

In Table 6, the parents were interviewed to give their opinions on the importance of social-emotional development, and the responses collated indicated their concern with preparing the students for adulthood, for example how would he/she interact with other members of society.

DISCUSSION

Although the data collected indicates improvement, the SELS checklists are insufficient to provide an explanation for the outcome of the scores. We know that some students did show a trajectory of improvement while some may stay the same or even show a decline. However, the reasons were not there to fully explain this pattern of results. Therefore, we will explore the possibilities that may have contributed to those quantitative outcomes through analysing them with the qualitative data collected.

Since this study is evaluating the effectiveness of using drama as a tool to build social-emotional development of children with dyslexia in Singapore, we have to consider how the students score on SELS Pupil Checklist. At the same time, taking into account what their parents have to say about their children – their behaviour, their social-emotional state before and after the programme. From this study, I would like to elaborate on the findings focusing on the identified students' progress in the SDA programme, supplemented by the findings from the parent interviews and the Teacher Checklist data. Also, the responses from the Parent Checklist will be scrutinised as interesting findings were made when supplemented by the parent interviews.

It was encouraging to observe the increase in the SELS scores across all 3 checklists. It is an indication that children with dyslexia showed improvement in SELS scores after attending SDA programme for one year. In order to give a good insight, the scores are linked to observable changes seen by parents. There are 3 students from the group that stood out in one of the instruments used in this study and they will be highlighted in the next section in the form of a short case study.

Students' Progress in Pupil Checklist

The scores from the Pupil Checklist will provide a quick overview of how the students are coping in social-emotional aspects.

Firstly, we will look at Student 3. Referring back to the Pupil Checklist data in Figure 2, Student 3 scored the highest in the Pupil Checklist. It is very encouraging to see 23 points jump in his SELS score by the end of Term 4. This indicates that the programme has in some way or another affected his social-emotional growth. To supplement this finding, the interview with his parent revealed that Student 3 was initially a boy who lacks confidence, especially when it comes to academic work. Student 3 was 8 years old and attended Primary 2 in a mainstream school when he participated in the study. He struggled with reading, could not express himself well and his frequent replies when asked about school were, "I don't know" and "I'm stupid." According to Casserly (2013), children who fell into the 'swamp of negative experiences' (p.81) would have lower motivation and therefore greater difficulty in achieving proficient reading. Student 3 felt negatively about himself when he was in Primary 1 and Primary 2. Children like Student 3 can deem themselves as failures in any learning environment as they are aware they cannot do something, for example, reading, as well as other children can (Terras, Thompson, Minnis, 2009; Thomson, 2009; Casserly, 2013). Student 3's Pupil Checklist score went from 63 points to 91 points by the end of Term 4, which is truly encouraging. It was assumed that he was more positive and more confident towards the end of Term 4. Referring to the interview conducted, his mother revealed that he was more interested in reading, expressed himself better and was more able to cope with school work after being in the programme for 1 year. She also shared how supportive his teachers were, who would continuously encourage him.

Next, we will take a look at Student 5's Pupil Checklist scores. Both pre-test and post SDA scores remained the same. He was 8 years old and attending Primary 1 in a mainstream school when he participated in this study. Mother shared the background of Student 5 in the interview. Student 5 was born premature and received medical attention from various specialists in the early years. Mother could not recall which other specialists that Student 5 met except for a psychologist. Mother enrolled him in the SDA programme because of a doctor's recommendation. According to Mother, Student 5 has a pleasant personality but due to lack of vocabulary, he had problems communicating with people. He would use the 'power of pointing' as his means of communication. And after a year in the

programme, he was seen as more expressive and no longer points to communicate. From the Parent Checklist, there was an increase of 10 points in Term 4 when compared to Term 1. This could be a reflection of his mother's satisfaction with the programme through her observations of her child's improvement.

Student 1's progress in Teacher Checklist:

In the Teacher Checklist, Student 1 scored 48 points in Term 1 and leapt in Term 4 up to 71 points. This trajectory was an indication of good improvement from his teacher's observations in both terms. Student 1 is 7 years old and attending Primary 1 in a mainstream school. His mother shared how he used to throw tantrums when he was in childcare. It was assumed by his parent that this could be due to his weak language ability. As the researcher is Student 1's drama teacher, it was observable how Student 1 had improved in many areas towards the end of Term 4. From a teacher's point of view, Student 1 stood out because when he first started out, he was all over in class, not able to wait for his turn to speak, not able to stay on task, would withdraw from the group if the task was daunting and would always be bickering in class during group work. As the terms passed, he learned to raise his hand when he needs to speak, he was able to stay in role during presentations, showing initiative, able to memorise the scripts and movement taught, and able to respond to his peers appropriately. These observations were supported by his mother's observation that he had made improvement in the area of communication and confidence level.

The outcome of the Parent Checklist & Parent Interviews.

From Figure 4, Parent 4 gave conflicting responses when the Parent Checklist and the interview were being analysed. In Term 1, Parent 4 gave Student 4 59 points and at the end of the programme, the score dipped to 54 points. There was a reduction of 5 points. This is an indication that this parent did not see any progress from the child hence had responded accordingly to the questions in the Parent Checklist. Interestingly, the parent interview with Parent 4 reflected the opposite. From the interview, Parent 4 mentioned the child was 'more cheerful and independent' but the next few responses could be the reflection of the Parent Checklist getting lower scores, "...there's slight improvement but I would prefer her to improve more", and on confidence and managing her emotions, "...also improvement on that... sometimes she will speak up and sometimes she will keep to herself". If parent of Student 4 saw her as not showing much improvement, the Pupil Checklist score of Student 4 showed otherwise. In Term 1, her pre-SDA score was 72 points and later at the end of Term 4, her post-SA score went up to 93 points. That was the next highest post-SDA score of the Pupil Checklist. This data may suggest that Student 4 feels more motivated, has more friends and is able to regulate her emotions better through her post-SDA responses in the questionnaire. It may well be that her parent is more aware of her difficulties since focussing on them for questionnaires and interviews and has become more critical of the fact that her

progress, although improved, could be better.

Other than the students' progress in the SELS checklists, the interview evidence suggests that children with dyslexia do go through some level of social-emotional difficulties. According to Terras et al., (2009), many well documented studies suggest there is a connection between dyslexia and disruptive behaviour disorder (Humphrey 2002; Burden 2008). Such disruptive behaviour is aggressive in nature, for example, throwing tantrums, bullying, vandalism, class truancies (Chen and Tan, 2006; Cooper, 2012; Woo et al., 2007; Gu et al., 2011). Interestingly, there are also behaviours that could go unnoticed by adults like parents and educators, such as depression and withdrawal (Chen and Tan, 2006; Woo, Ng, Fung, Chan, Lee, Koh, Cai, 2007).

From the interviews conducted, most parents mentioned 'tantrums', 'frustrations', 'hot-tempered', 'start to tear up', 'keeps everything to herself', 'problem communication with people' when asked to share about their child's behaviour before joining the programme. These responses suggest that children with dyslexia do not have the knowledge, the disposition and the skills to cope with emotions, are weak at recognising non-verbal cues to even respond appropriately to other people's emotions, are not able to make and keep friends, not able to make decisions and inefficient at handling conflicts. (Faupel, 2003; Joronen, Hakamies and Astedt-Kurki, 2011). This answered my second research question, 'What are the social-emotional difficulties that may be present in children with dyslexia, who participated in this study?'

If we look at the Parent Checklist, this is the only checklist that appeared to be conservative data, unlike data found in the Pupil Checklist and the Teacher Checklist. Being Asian parents where harsh parenting was hypothesised (Chang et al., 2004), it could mean that the parents have higher expectations of his/her child when giving the scores in the Parent Checklist. Ironically, the interview revealed that all parents are satisfied with the programme and somehow could see some level of improvement in their child's social-emotional aspect. See the extracts below.

Extracts of Parent's Responses on Child's Improvement:

Parent 1: *"But I think over the course of last year, when in P1, he has made quite a bit of improvement both in terms of literacy as well as communication."*

Parent 2: *"Yes, yes, she will look at you then she'll answer you when you post a question at her. She is still soft you see, but there is improvement."*

Parent 3: *"Ok probably after the speech and drama, he is more or less expresses himself better. And in terms of reading wise, it helps him quite a fair bit."*

Parent 4: *“Nowadays she is opening up a bit ,but improving.”*

Parent 5: *Ever since he joined Speech and Drama, I find that he has more expressions, more words and I don't know whether it's because he is growing up. He talks more (laughs).*

Parent 6: *After he joined, I realised he could remember his script without reading at home for the performance. Previously if I asked him to read or do self-spelling, there'll be difficulties. But then when he joined already, I realised without teaching him or telling him to study right, he will actually memorise it.*

Those extracts suggest that the changes observed by parents are positive and it is a good indication that drama can be a tool to develop social-emotional literacy; and that answered my third research question.

CONCLUSIONS

Across the globe, social-emotional learning has begun to become mainstream and orthodox in the education industry: with the US government revising their education policy to include extensive budgets for social-emotional literacy training and professional development for teachers (Biggert, Kildee and Ryan, 2011).

Since social-emotional learning is such a phenomenon, it had made its way into Singapore much earlier with the emphasis on 'holistic education' as mentioned in the introduction. Moving on the holistic education trail, the MOE would not want schools in Singapore to settle with just the Desired Outcomes of Education (DOE); a confident person, a self-directed learner, an active contributor and a concerned citizen. Making a paradigm shift is an arduous task hence the introduction of the 21 Centuries Competencies (21CC) framework which has now become the pillars of any school curriculum and activities.



MOE's 21 Century Competencies

Source: <https://www.moe.gov.sg/education/education-system/21st-century-competencies>

With that, the aims of this study were to provide insights into the social-emotional level of children with dyslexia and how drama can be a tool to enhance that level in the Singapore context as the education field here begins to embrace children with learning difficulties such as dyslexia in the mainstream schools. These children require more support in order to be successful in school and in life. Through this study and the data presented, hopefully teachers, educators, education policy makers and parents are able to see there is more than just acquiring literacy (reading, spelling and writing) skills and achieving good grades but also there is a need to develop our children's social-emotional literacy level.

From the data, it can be seen that children with dyslexia who had attended one year of drama programme show improvement in their SELS scores. The most interesting finding was from the data collected from the Parent's Checklist. There could be numerous factors accounting for why parents' scores were very 'modest'. One of them would be parent's expectations. Hence, supplementing this portion with an interview gave a deeper insight.

These findings are also intended to reduce the misperception of drama as unimportant in comparison with Mathematics or other academic subjects, and to open doors to more such research in the Singapore context.

LIMITATIONS & FURTHER RESEARCH

Firstly, this research was conducted with a small group of students, parents and teachers. The findings of this research may not be transferrable to other settings as its variability is not known. The standard deviation of the population was not provided in the data analysis. Also, a small sample size such as this may lead to an involuntary response bias. The participants were students, parents and teachers of SDA programme. Therefore, the data collected were reflections from these participants who have exposure to the drama programme and also the potential benefits that drama can provide to improve the social-emotional development of children with dyslexia. This research did not include the responses of a control group of children with dyslexia who did not attend SDA programme to substantiate the current findings.

Secondly, the ambiguity and confusion of the concept and the term 'social-emotional development'. According to Hoffman (2009), this term was commonly used in prevention programmes that involved mental health, character and moral education.

In addition to that, Humphrey (2013) highlighted the lack of clear interpretations especially in relation to 'cultural transferability' (pp.136). Humphrey (2013) stated that social-emotional literacy takes different forms in different countries and cultures.

Thirdly, there was a limitation on the tools used for this research. Although the data from the questionnaires has been quantified and used to evaluate change, there were some disadvantages. For this case, the SELS questionnaires have too many questions for students, parents and teachers to complete. There are 25 statements in the Pupil Checklist that a facilitator, in this case, the drama teacher, had to explain to the students. This explanation may vary from teacher to teacher as it is dependent on the teachers' interpretation of the statements in the Pupil Checklist. Similar to the Teacher Checklist and the Parent Checklist, the interpretations of the statements are very much dependent on the individual. In addition to the SELS questionnaire, an interview method was used as qualitative data. Despite its significance, the interview method has its weaknesses too. For example, there was no attempt to brief parents on the term 'social-emotional' again prior to the interview, apart from the consent form that was disseminated one year ago. Hence, the interpretation of the term 'social-emotional' may have varied from parent to parent. It is also time consuming as it involved the scheduling of interview session for each parent, the collection, analysis and interpretation of data that are not straightforwardly numerical. Nevertheless, the methodology adopted here lends itself well to investigating the role of drama in personal development.

With drama being a potential tool to build social-emotional development of children with dyslexia, further research should take into consideration the following recommendations:

1. involving larger sample size so that more data can be evaluated and later be compared to the population size
2. participants involved in such interviews should be provided with the definition of terms and the interview questions 2 or 3 days before the interview
3. The choice of research tools can be further explored

While social-emotional development in children with dyslexia promises a better chance to succeed in school and life (Humphrey, 2002; Hoffman, 2009; Greenberg et al., 2003), until the education system, education policies and educators acknowledge and celebrate 'achievement' in wider areas not limited to just academic success, these children need to be supported (Eadon, 2005; Casserly, 2013).

In a Singapore context, as much as we are moving towards a holistic education and preparing our students to be 21st century ready and acknowledging that social-emotional development is essential for lifelong success in this fast-changing world, families, schools and community and youth organisations need to be 21st century ready as well (Casel.org, n.d.). For a start, the education system here needs to ensure that the new and existing teachers are 21st century teachers as well. They are the ones who can be the agent of change or the catalyst of this paradigm shift.

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