



The impact of social-emotional competencies on drama students with dyslexia during the pandemic

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Abstract

During the pandemic, many children around the world were affected by school closures and the suspension of outdoor activities. There are articles reporting the worsening emotional state of children due to many reasons that are linked back to the pandemic. In addition, some research mentioned that children with SpLD were hard hit by the pandemic when compared to their non-SpLD peers in mainstream schools. The research aims to discover the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on students with learning difficulties in the Speech and Drama Arts (SDA) programme in the Dyslexia Association of Singapore (DAS) by exploring the fluctuating children's SEL survey results and the possibility of drama taught online being the protective outlet for children during this challenging period. The results indicate that the majority of students diagnosed with dyslexia encountered challenges with online learning within mainstream school settings. Nonetheless, the research determined that despite exhibiting a decline in their social-emotional scores due to the pandemic, these students showed favourable experiences while engaging in drama lessons via online platforms. Thus, while they encountered challenges in their school's online learning environments, they found enjoyment and satisfaction in the online delivery of drama education.

Keywords: dyslexia, social-emotional competencies, drama, online learning

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INTRODUCTION

Social-emotional competency is becoming increasingly important in the ever-changing educational landscape, especially for students who struggle with dyslexia. It can be defined as knowing how to comprehend and regulate one's own emotions, skillfully interpret and react to the emotions of others, cultivate constructive connections with peers, make well-informed decisions, and adeptly navigate conflicts (Faupe, 2003; Joronen et al., 2011; Darling-Churchill and Lippman, 2016).

Due to the significant changes that the COVID-19 pandemic has brought about in the educational system, economic structures, and societal norms, numerous researchers worldwide have documented the relationship between the pandemic and students' social-emotional health. The pandemic produced conflicting emotions among children, for example, feeling scared, nervous, sad and bored, but they also felt safe and happy with their families (Idoiaga et al., 2020; Soriano-Ferrer et al., 2021; Watts, & Pattnaik, 2023)

In the wake of the pandemic, schools around the world focused their efforts on facilitating a rapid shift to an uncharted realm of online education and assessments. This move had its perceived benefits, such as enhancing students' familiarity with technologies and e-learning tools, allowing students to watch playbacks and access recorded materials, strengthening self-discipline and bolstering self-esteem and challenges such as mixed media and visual readability presented in e-learning platforms, for all students, even more so for students with dyslexia.

According to Li (2022), this shift yielded perceived advantages, including the enhancement of students' proficiency with technological resources and e-learning platforms, enabling access to recorded materials and playback features, fostering self-discipline, and enhancing self-esteem. However, perceived challenges such as technical problems, physical and emotional state when attending online classes, those related to the presence of mixed media, and issues of visual readability within e-learning platforms were encountered, posing significant hurdles for students, particularly those with dyslexia (Gürbüz, 2021; Tay & Asmuri, 2021, Li, 2022).

This paper investigates the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on students with dyslexia enrolled in the Speech and Drama Arts (SDA) program by examining the results of the student's Pupil Checklist from Southampton Emotional and Literacy Scale (SELS) and the data gathered from the interviews with student participants. It also assessed the potential of online drama lessons as a protective mechanism for children amidst this challenging period.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The pandemic has had a big impact on the lives and social-emotional experiences of students (Hamilton & Gross, 2021). In March 2020, the world was hit by the COVID-19 pandemic. Schools were unexpectedly shut down, and social activities came to a halt. Educators and schools had to unexpectedly find ways to meet the needs of the students. Students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds faced the most difficulties with remote learning, this was projected in the measure of their academic progress (Kuhfeld et al., 2020; Tay & Asmuri, 2021; Li, 2022). In addition to being excluded from hands-on learning, in-person discussions, and collaborative learning, students were unable to communicate with their teachers and peers. Simultaneously, many students were also dealing with other personal issues, such as mental health issues, space constraints and family financial difficulties (Ogurlu, et al., 2020; Ramirez, et al., 2021). On the other hand, some students thrived during the pandemic as they did not have to face peer pressure or bullying, whereas another group of students enjoyed spending more time with their families and bonded well, boosting their sense of security (Hamilton & Gross, 2021; Idoiaga et al., 2020; Soriano-Ferrer et al., 2021; Watts & Pattnaik, 2023).

Dyslexic Learners and the Social-Emotional Impact

The International Dyslexia Association (2023) defines dyslexia as:

“ a specific learning disability that is neurobiological in origin. It is characterised by difficulties with accurate and/or fluent word recognition and by poor spelling and decoding abilities. These difficulties typically result from a deficit in the phonological component of language that is often unexpected in relation to other cognitive abilities and the provision of effective classroom instruction. Secondary consequences may include problems in reading comprehension and reduced reading experience that can impede growth of vocabulary and background knowledge.”

As dyslexia is a condition that affects the reading, spelling and writing abilities of a person (Everatt et al., 2008; Marzocchi et al., 2009; Thomson, 2009, Soriano-Ferrer et al., 2021), most times, the social and emotional ramifications of dyslexic learners are not regarded as primary attributes of the condition. Ever since COVID-19 hit the world, there has been extensive literature on dyslexia and its social-emotional impact.

Researchers have noted that certain children diagnosed with dyslexia exhibit subpar social-emotional development attributed to their experiences with personal setbacks, particularly within academic realms (Casserly, 2013; Antonelli et al., 2014). It's widely acknowledged that academic struggles significantly contribute to this phenomenon. Interestingly, even fundamental aspects such as forming and maintaining friendships can impact this facet of development. These findings have remained relevant, albeit much

worse, throughout the pandemic. Recent studies indicate that the pandemic has been associated with heightened rates of mental health challenges, including anxiety and depression, as well as difficulties in emotional regulation, behaviour, and interpersonal relationships, which also align with studies in the same period involving children who do not have learning differences (Idoiaga et al., 2020; Soriano-Ferrer et al., 2021; Ramirez et al., 2021; Brow, 2023).

Sako (2016) mentioned that one of the most commonly missed areas in individuals with dyslexia is the social-emotional aspect. Educators often prioritise assessing and teaching children in areas like reading, spelling, and writing due to the tangible outcomes and observable errors. However, this focus may overlook crucial aspects such as self-awareness and motivation, which are pivotal for holistic development. Research indicates that schools can effectively instil social-emotional learning competencies in students. Integrating components of drama pedagogy, such as tableaux, role-play, and improvisation, is essential for implementing effective social-emotional learning intervention programs. (Ebert et al., 2015).

Goleman identified that emotional intelligence holds equal significance to cognitive abilities and may be strengthened and developed (Hamzah, 2019; Brow, 2023). His theoretical framework presented five fundamental factors of emotional intelligence, which are classified into two overarching domains: Personal Competence and Social Competence. Within Personal Competence, self-awareness, self-regulation, and motivation are encompassed, whereas empathy and social skills are encompassed within Social Competence.

Self-Awareness

Dyslexia is a learning difficulty, which affects spelling, reading and writing skills (Snowling, 2020). With this learning difficulty, it may affect an individual's academic ability such as solving math problems sums, reading between the lines in comprehension passages and writing a narrative essay. This learning disability may interfere with social-emotional development (Rahmawati et al., 2019). Self-awareness is the capability to recognise emotions and distinctive urges, and their influence on individuals (Goleman, 2011). Therefore, there is a need to increase self-awareness in children with dyslexia to improve their social-emotional development.

In a study by Rahmawati et al., (2019), a technology was developed to help children with dyslexia increase their self-awareness. The study develops CISELexia (Computer-Based Method for Improving Self-awareness in Children with Dyslexia) technology, which utilises a gamification approach that caters to children with dyslexia. The study was carried out on five children diagnosed with dyslexia, with an age range of 7-13 years old. A pre-test was conducted on self-awareness capability before using the CISELexia system and a post-test was conducted on self-awareness capability after using the CISELexia system.

Based on the findings, it was derived that the data showed an increase in self-awareness in children with dyslexia, the results showed an increased mean score of self-awareness of about 10%. With this result, it shows that children with dyslexia do have the motivation to improve themselves and the potential to increase their self-awareness.

Self-Regulation

Executive function allows self-regulation and the enactment of focusing on the desired goals and ignoring distractions, using and coordinating various cognitive processes over time (Smith et al., 2016). It includes a superior level of cognitive capacity such as self-monitoring, thinking through verbal responses, problem-solving, and retrieving information from long-term memory in a direct and adaptable way (Miyake et al., 2012). Executive functioning (EF) deficits are seen in children with dyslexia (Smith-Spark et al., 2016). The executive function deficits in children with dyslexia were investigated in a study by Akyurek and Bumin (2019), which sampled 158 dyslexic children and 167 children without learning disabilities. The results showed that children with dyslexia had more issues with executive functions and were falling behind their peers in this area. When comparing both sets of scores from the two different groups, the average score of the executive functions of children diagnosed with dyslexia in terms of inhibition, emotional control, initiation, working memory and self-monitoring appeared to be particularly low and the differences between both groups were significant in statistics. In terms of self-control in emotions, children with dyslexia tend to be adversely affected as compared to typical children with no learning disabilities. Executive functions such as self-regulation do play an important part in a child's life, it is necessary to assess executive functions for the development of programs to help our children with dyslexia (Akyurek & Bumin, 2019).

Motivation

From the early stage of education, children with dyslexia often experience failures in several areas, due to their struggles (Lowdygowska, 2017). They are unable to meet the academic requirements or meet their goals in other developmental milestones, hence facing disappointments at an early age (Bajaj & Bhatia, 2019). Children with dyslexia may struggle with reading, writing and spelling (Barnett, Connelly & Miller, 2020). Since spelling, reading and writing encompass the core dimensions of subjects at schools, they may struggle in examinations, leading to failure for some. As a result, a child may feel that he or she cannot succeed and may perceive him or herself negatively (Livingston, Siegel & Ribary, 2018). The situations and challenges presented to the child and how he or she perceives himself or herself influence the motivation to take action or avoid the situation (Lowdygowska, 2017). According to Bandura's social cognitive theory (2021), it anticipates that internal and external reinforcements affect an individual's motivation (Bandura, 2012). External reinforcements (e.g. environment) and attaining favourable outcomes of one's actions (e.g. obtaining a desired score, achieving a set goal etc.)

can have an impact on forming and reinforcing motivation in replicating similar behaviours (Bandura, 2012). In Internal reinforcements, the child then gains the belief that he or she can reach the set goals and this understanding provides fulfilment, thus motivating him or her to take the same steps in the future (Lowdygowska, 2017).

On the other hand, experiencing failure can cause an individual to feel negative about one's self (Livingston, Siegel & Ribary, 2018). Children with dyslexia often experience setbacks from an early age in school, thus creating negative emotions (Gibby-Leversuch, Hartwel & Wright, 2021). Hence, they may start to identify school events with negative consequences, thus making them anxious and hampering their ability to conquer difficulties induced by a lack of motivation (Kim & Lorschbach, 2005). In a study by Polychroni, Koukoura, & Anagnostou (2006), which aims to explore motivation for students with dyslexia as compared to their peers, it was found that children with dyslexia who experienced failures at educational institutions begin to doubt their potential to learn, which leads to their motivation being strongly affected.

Empathy

In addition to literacy difficulties, students with dyslexia often face social-emotional difficulties, such as affective symptoms that occur in non-academic settings (Carroll & Iles, 2006). Affective symptoms may present impairment of fundamental systems that induce emotions (Etkin, 2010). Emotions do play a part in influencing an individual's actions and behaviour (Levenson, 2003).

Individuals with dyslexia display inactivity in the left lateralised language systems, however, inactiveness in one part of the brain can be accompanied by prominent activeness in the right hemisphere of the brain, where emotional sensitivity is heightened in individuals with dyslexia (Palser et al., 2021). In a study conducted by Sturm et al., (2021), emotional reactivity was measured in 32 children with dyslexia and 22 without dyslexia, ages 7-12, where they were asked to watch emotion-inducing films and underwent magnetic resonance imaging. Children with dyslexia showed prominent reactions in emotional facial behaviour, respiration rate and skin conductance as compared to those without dyslexia. Prominent emotional facial behaviour in children with dyslexia may relate to negative symptoms of mental health such as depression and anxiety, but also be associated with greater interpersonal skills (Sturm et al., 2021). Interpersonal skills may constitute an area of resilience and strength in children with dyslexia, if developed, it may aid in cushioning individuals with dyslexia from the probable disadvantage of their learning differences (Haft, Myers, & Hoef, 2016).

In a study by Palser et al., (2021), 24 children with dyslexia and 24 children without dyslexia, ages between 7-12, were tasked to watch an empathy-based film, where the autonomic nervous system activity was measured both during film viewing and at rest. It was found that the cardiac deceleration during the empathy film-based task was

significantly higher in those with dyslexia. Individuals with dyslexia exhibited increased facial expressions of concentration during the film-based empathy task as compared to those without dyslexia. Children with and without dyslexia were able to recognise the emotions in the films, however, children with dyslexia had lower word consciousness as compared to those without dyslexia. The results suggest that activity in the resting parasympathetic nervous system and reactions to others' emotions are elevated in dyslexia.

The role of drama in social-emotional development

The use of drama can also be a crucial tool for aiding children with dyslexia to increase their self-awareness. According to Davidson (2012), people have varied emotional styles and these styles can be altered, shaped and shifted by using mindfulness exercises. Mindfulness exercises can modify brain patterns that encompass an individual's emotional approach, and which can enhance one's determination and self-awareness (Davidson, 2012). Drama is a multimodal form of pedagogy that engages students at different levels of entry (Winston, 2012). A multimodal format integrating visual, auditory, verbal, and kinesthetic elements enhances students' ability to deeply internalise a learning encounter. Drama, serving as a multimodal approach, uses props, bodily gestures, facial expressions, sounds, and visuals in conjunction with language to communicate concepts. Through engaging in dramatic activities, students are given the chance to derive significance not solely from verbal cues but also from the environmental setting intertwined with visual and auditory prompts.

Drama methods do play a role in mindfulness, they not only encompass visualising ideas in their minds but also create moments for individuals to express the ideas formed in their brains with the use of their bodies and movements (Van de Water, 2021). A relationship with drama, from a young age, could potentially affect people's emotional style (Van de Water, 2021).

Given the potential that drama lessons can offer, the Dyslexia Association of Singapore (DAS) has a drama program for the same reason. The Speech and Drama Arts (SDA) programme aims to transform students into confident communicators, as well as to empower them to be inquisitive and compassionate individuals. The programme's main objectives are to build language skills, social-emotional skills, drama skills and critical thinking skills. While developing the main objectives, it is evident that many of the drama activities conducted in SDA classes serve to improve a child's motivation, self-awareness, self-regulation, and empathy. For example, in the SDA curriculum, hot-seating is used to help deepen our students' understanding of the characters and motives. In this activity, it requires the student to put him or her in the character's shoes and to be questioned of the choices made in the story. Therefore, it requires students to think and explore various outcomes, experiences and perspectives, hence building on their empathy and self-awareness. In SDA classes, group work is central to the lessons, with many activities

requiring students to collaborate to achieve a common objective. Consequently, students learn to function effectively in a group, regulate their responses, and enhance their motivation within a team environment.

During the pandemic, drama classes were not excluded from the online delivery wagon. Learning is social, very much so in a drama class. Many drama teachers struggled to transform many drama elements, including teaching methods and techniques into online education (Gürbüz, 2021; Karaosmanoglu, 2022). The reason for this is that in-person activities do not translate well in an online environment. However, the Speech and Drama Arts (SDA) team in the Dyslexia Association of Singapore (DAS) had many discussions on whether online drama classes and virtual performances were feasible. SDA's curricula were first reviewed, then followed by adapting drama activities to digital platforms, and modifying those that can be carried out by students independently at home. Among the games that were modified were "Simon Says," "Rock Paper Scissors," and "Guess Who Am I?" These activities helped students focus and improve their listening comprehension while also adding fun to their online learning experience. By engaging in activities like "Rock Paper Scissors," "Simon Says," and "Guess Who Am I," students were not only building on their quick thinking and problem-solving skills but also developing their self-regulation, self-awareness, empathy, and motivation. In games like "Rock Paper Scissors" and "Simon Says," the need for quick decision-making provided a platform for students to practise managing their emotions and behavior, especially when faced with challenges, hence working on their self-regulation. By openly discussing emotions in these contexts, students were able to develop a deeper understanding of empathy by learning how to relate to one another. Similarly, "Guess Who Am I" fostered a sense of self-awareness and motivation among students as they worked together to help their classmates succeed. Overall, these games are examples that aided in creating an enriching learning environment where students developed their social-emotional learning skills.

During the pandemic, students may experience a sense of longing for their friends, educators, and the communal atmosphere, potentially impacting their social-emotional competencies. With the SDA curriculum, social-emotional learning serves as a significant element in the lessons. Online SDA classes integrate various aspects of social-emotional learning; for instance, establishing routines is seamlessly transitioned into the virtual setting, and educators consistently cultivate a supportive environment by regularly checking in with students regarding their well-being. Most importantly, all students are provided ample opportunities to interact with one another during the online classes. With pieces of literature on the social-emotional condition of students during the pandemic and drama as a tool to build social-emotional skills, the SDA teachers embarked on this study to unravel the impact this disruption has had on drama students with dyslexia.

METHODOLOGY

This research employed both qualitative and quantitative research methodologies. Results of pre-tests and post-tests of the Southampton Emotional Literacy Scale (SELS) Pupil Checklist for age 7 - 11 years old (Faupel, 2003) were analysed, followed by interviews with each participant. The interview questions were based on their experience and recollection of the lockdown, attending drama class online and their experience performing virtual showcases during the pandemic.

Research Question

This study sought to answer the research question: What is the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the social-emotional competency of students with dyslexia in the Speech and Drama Arts programme?

Ethics Protocol

The proposal for this study was accepted by the research committee and this study complied with the ethical protocols set by DAS where the study was conducted. Once the participants were identified, their parents were briefed over either a phone call or a WhatsApp message on the nature of the study. This was followed by a hard copy of the Study Information Sheet given to parents, to seek written consent. The research objectives and procedures were mentioned and matters about consent, anonymity, confidentiality and the right to withdraw were explicitly addressed.

Participants

They were selected from among students with dyslexia who attended the Speech and Drama Arts programme (SDA) in Dyslexia Association of Singapore (DAS) learning centres located at Bedok and Bishan. Like students worldwide during the pandemic, SDA students attended drama classes online. In total, these selected SDA students attended 23 online drama classes from March 2020 to Oct 2021. There were staggered returns to the classroom in between those periods as the government closely monitored the COVID-19 situation. As students transitioned in and out between 2020 and 2021, seven students aged 9 to 11 met the requirement of participating in the program since the onset of the 2020 lockdown, engaging in both online and in-person classes throughout 2020 and 2021.

Data Collection

When the school closure happened in 2020, there were so many changes as we transitioned to conducting classes online. Like other educators during the COVID-19 pandemic, teaching online was something new. SDA teachers were unable to collect any

data when they began teaching online. The data was collected at the beginning of 2021 for the pre-test when online classes had started a few months prior. It was collected once again in 2022 for the post-test.

Procedure

The Southampton Emotional Literacy Scale (SELS)

The Southampton Psychology Service created the SELS checklists by thoughtfully adapting American psychologist, Goleman's classification of abilities and skills that are pertinent and will support children's social and emotional growth. The domains covered in SELS are Personal Competence (motivation, self-awareness and self-regulation) and Social Competence (empathy and social skills).

For this research, only the Pupil Checklist was used. This checklist comprises 25 items that evaluate students' emotional literacy based on the opinions of the individuals themselves. When administering the checklist, researchers will ensure that the participants understand how to complete the checklist by going through the example on the form before they start. Participants will complete the checklist independently once they understand how to fill it up. Each participant's emotional literacy score will be tabulated with the use of the scoring key for each item in the checklist. A higher score indicates better emotional literacy.

Student Perspective Interview

In addition to the SELS Pupil Checklist, the participants were interviewed between May and July 2023. The interviews provided insight into the students' perspectives on the pandemic, the online drama lesson and any challenges they faced during that period. The researchers chose to use a semi-structured interview style because it gave them the opportunity to ask follow-up questions, seek additional information, or simply express interest in what they were saying. It also gives the participants the freedom to express their views on their own terms. The semi-structured interview was in three main parts: first, the child's overall experience during lockdown in Singapore; second, the child's overall experience of online learning (school) and thirdly, the child's perspective of attending drama lessons online. The interview for each participant was scheduled 30 minutes before or after SDA class, depending on both parties' availability.

Interview Questions:

Part 1: Your experience during the lockdown

- ◆ Do you remember what it was like when there was a lockdown in Singapore? Yes/No
If yes, can you describe it to me and how do you feel about it?

Part 2: Your experience with online learning (school work)

- ◆ Generally, how do you find online learning for school work?

Part 3: Your experience attending drama lessons online

- ◆ Do you remember attending drama lessons online? Yes/ No
- ◆ If yes, can you describe it to me?
- ◆ Did you feel connected with your teacher and friends during online learning?
- ◆ What challenges did you face when attending drama online lessons?
- ◆ Do you prefer physical or online drama lessons? Why?

The interview data was transcribed verbatim. The data analysis focussed on an ecological perspective, such as online learning and emotional association with the changes that were brought about by COVID-19 that might mediate the child's experiences.

RESULTS

Both the pre-test and post-test results of the SELS Pupil Checklist were tabulated and analysed to evaluate if the disruptions to classes caused by COVID-19 had an impact on SDA students. See Figure 1.

The 7 students who participated in this study are identified in the data with this label in the chart accordingly; S1 (Student 1), S2 (Student 2), S3 (Student 3), S4 (Student 4), S5 (Student 5), S6 (Student 6) and S7 (Student 7). In this group, 5 students showed a decline in their post-test scores. These results are expected, as many recent studies have reported students' social-emotional aspects deteriorated due to the pandemic and the disruptions that it brought along, for example, less social interaction, lack of support from teachers and less motivation (Soriano-Ferrer, 2021, Tay & Asmuri, 2021; Li, 2022).

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An intriguing observation arises from the post-test results indicating improvement for Students 5 and 6. This suggests the potential for enhanced emotional literacy scores among students amidst the pandemic context, particularly in the context of participating in online drama classes. Some students thrived during the pandemic as they did not have to face peer pressure or bullying, whereas another group of students enjoyed

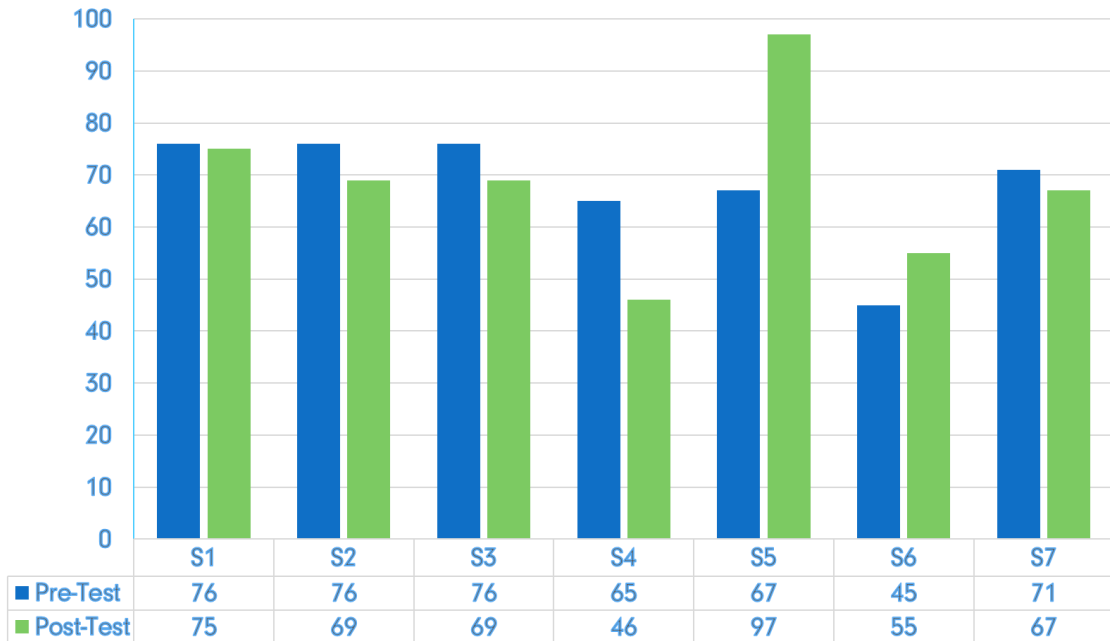


Figure 1. SELS Pupil Checklist Pre-Test and Post Test Results

spending more time with their families and bonded well, boosting their sense of security (Hamilton and Gross, 2021) and online drama lessons could increase interest and motivation ((Gürbüz, 2021).

In a similar study by Hamzah (2019) using the Southampton Emotional Literacy Scale (SELS) to explore the effectiveness of drama as a tool to build social-emotional development in children with dyslexia. It should be noted that one of the authors of the current research was involved and employed the same intervention method. In the study conducted in 2019, 6 drama students with dyslexia, between the ages of 7-11, completed the Pupil Checklist from the Southampton Emotional Literacy Scale (SELS).

The checklists were given to students at the beginning of Term 1 2016 and these scores will be recorded as pre-test scores. Then, the students had to complete the same checklist at the end of Term 4 in the same year, and this time the scores were recorded as post-test scores. The findings showed an improvement in emotional literacy scores after attending the drama programme for one year; with the difference between the pre-test and post-test average scores of 13.67 points and it is equated to a 20.45% leap in the Pupil Checklist. This result was derived in 2017, when students did not face any global circumstances, such as the pandemic that occurred in 2020. Using the same programme and the assessment methodology, the results suggest the pandemic exerted an adverse impact on the social-emotional competencies of students with dyslexia.

The quantitative findings presented are corroborated by qualitative evidence obtained from student interviews, which is imperative for examining whether the fluctuations in emotional literacy scores are associated with the online drama learning environment.

The interviews conducted with student participants yielded significant insights into their perspectives and emotions regarding the pandemic, online learning in educational settings, and SDA drama classes. Subsequent paragraphs categorise the interview responses into positive and negative perspectives for detailed examination.

Part 1 Your experience during the lockdown

In Table 1, 6 out of 7 students remembered there was a lockdown in Singapore. Many felt comfortable and content during the lockdown as they didn't have to go to school. Only 1 student out of 7 mentioned that he felt worried and scared of the pandemic. Student 5 linked his experience to spending time with home-based learning given by school.

Table 1: Experience During Lockdown

Themes	Code	Notes and examples
Emotions	E	Feelings during the COVID-19 lockdown
Positive emotions	E+	S2: Liked staying at home, S3: Felt happy as I didn't have to wake up early to go to school. S5: relaxed S7: It was okay
Negative emotions	E-	S1: felt worried, scared
Experience	Ex	Experiences during the COVID-19 lockdown
Positive	Ex+	S2: I could play with my toys and play with my sister. I helped my mummy with cooking S3: ...as I didn't have to wake up early to go to school. S7: I didn't have to wake up to go to school and stuff.
Negative	Ex-	S1: we couldn't buy food and see anyone. S5: sadly I had to do Home-Based Learning (HBL) at home. It was annoying me.

Part 2 Your experience with online learning (school work)

In Table 2, 3 out of 7 students felt positive about online learning. These 3 students mentioned that they were unable to understand the concepts taught online. However, one student out of the seven had mixed outcomes in regards to online learning, the student felt that he was able to learn online but could not follow through during some of the lessons. Whereas another 3 students had negative experiences with online learning as they felt lost and were often distracted or bored.

Table 2: Experience with online learning (school work)

Themes	Code	Notes and examples
Lesson Content	LC	Student able to understand content taught online
Positive Lesson Content	LC+	S1: I was able to understand what was being taught online. S2: I was able to learn online, but ...
Negative Lesson Content	LC-	S3: I had no idea what was going on in Chinese (lesson). S5: Boring.
Application	A	Ability to follow through and apply what you have learned
Positive Application	A+	NIL
Negative Application	A-	S2:...but I wasn't able to follow through with the lessons at times. S7: you get distracted by the games that you are playing.

Part 3 Your experience attending drama lessons online

In terms of drama lessons conducted at the DAS, all 7 students experienced positive experiences, many mentioned that they enjoyed playing games and doing the activities online. See Table 3, below. However, 1 out of the 7 students mentioned that the home environment might have been a distraction as he couldn't follow through with writing activities and would often forget the instructions given. In terms of social connections during online drama lessons, 5 out of 7 students experienced positive feelings, many were happy to see their peers and interact with them online. On the other hand, 2 out of 7 students felt otherwise, they often felt disturbed by their friends talking and felt online learning lacked physical activities, a platform where they could connect with their peers. In terms of the technical side, 4 out of 7 students did not face any issues in regards to the platform used. On the other hand, 3 out of 7 students faced technical difficulties, such

as internet connectivity issues, space constraints and unfamiliarity on how to use the platform. In general, most of the students prefer to attend in-person drama classes.

Table 3: Experience Attending Drama Lessons Online

Themes	Codes	Notes and examples
Experience drama online	ExD	Students' experiences
Positive	ExD+	S1-Playing games, performing online and learning new words. S2-I remembered playing I spy with my little eye. I also remembered playing a lot of games. I remembered performing online and learning the lines online. I used my own microphone to perform. S3-Moving about. Don't have to go out. Can sleep in. S4- I saw my teacher and my friends online. I don't remember anything else. S5- It was fun. Because I was acting myself and I just stayed home. We learned our lines and said it out online. S6- There were google slides and we played games where we could play online or at home. S7- Played games.
Negative	ExD-	S1 -Sometimes I forget the instructions. I cannot follow, especially in the writing part. Getting distracted by siblings at home.
Social Connection	SC	Students' perspective on being connected during online drama class.
Positive	SC+	S1-Focusing on what the teacher was saying and listening to what my friends were saying. Sometimes Student B would help me online. I also enjoyed playing the games. I also performed online. S2- I enjoyed talking to everybody online. I enjoyed seeing my friends and teacher. I also enjoyed playing with my friends online. S4- I felt connected. I liked seeing my teacher. S5-I felt connected to my friends. Student B makes me laugh. The lessons were fun.
Negative	SC-	S3- Student A kept on talking. S7-No. Because it is boring as there is a lack of physical activity.

Table 3: Experience Attending Drama Lessons Online (Cont)

Themes	Codes	Notes and examples
Technology	T	Platform / Hardware
Positive	T+	S4- I didn't face any issues. S5-No challenges. S6- No, because I fixed my wifi before going online.
Negative	T-	S2-I accidentally clicked on the wrong buttons, like muting myself. Also, sometimes I don't know who was talking and a bit noisy with the background noises. S3-Internet lagged. Shouting at my siblings: asking them to keep quiet. Lesser space. S7-Trying to log in. Sometimes trying to understand as the internet is lagging.
Drama Lesson Delivery	DD	Notes and examples
In-Person	DDIP	S1 -Physical. I can learn more drama stuff in person, easier to learn to pronounce words and enjoy seeing my friends. S2- Physical. I can play more here. Easier for me to learn about the talking sounds, pronunciation and long words. With the paper, I can learn how to pronounce. Can try my best. Performance: easier for me to learn in person and I enjoy going on stage. S4 - Physical. I prefer to go out. S5- Physical. So that I can interact with my friends and just be cool there. S6- Physical. Because I want to see my teacher and friends. S7- Physical. Because I can move around and talk with my friends.
Online Class	DDO	S3- Online. Don't have to go in the sun. But I couldn't benefit as compared to physical lessons, for example, grandma footsteps game. I benefited more from physical but I still preferred online class.

DISCUSSION

The current study sought to evaluate the impact of social-emotional competencies on drama students with dyslexia during the pandemic. The research findings revealed that some drama students with dyslexia encountered heightened uncertainty as they grappled with challenges of online learning, compounded by external factors like the COVID-19 and the home environment. Prior studies have generally noted negative impacts of the COVID-19 on overall socio-emotional and educational well-being of students with dyslexia and also consistent with students with no learning differences (Idoiaga et al., 2020; Soriano-Ferrer et al., 2021). There were not many responses gathered from the interview with S4 that could support the significant drop in the post-test score. It was noted that S4 remembered attending online drama lessons, saw familiar faces online, felt connected and mentioned preferred to attend in-person drama classes.

Conversely, the post-test results indicated that two students flourished amidst the pandemic, effectively transitioning to remote learning settings and experiencing enhanced emotional literacy level. During the COVID-19 pandemic, numerous students globally faced perceived risks and life stressors. However, in this study, students with dyslexia who thrived amidst these challenges could have potentially demonstrated socio-emotional resilience by adeptly reframing and effectively responding to adversity (Marks et al., 2022). In addition to the interview responses mentioned below, a significant post-test score for S5 could be attributed to the individual's socio-emotional resilience in dealing with the COVID-19 and learning online.

Extracts from the interview with S5:

1. Feelings during the COVID-19 lockdown – “relaxed”
2. Student's experience with drama lessons online – “It was fun. Because I was acting myself and I just stayed home. We learned our lines and said it out online.”
3. Social connection during online drama class – “I felt connected with my friends. Student B makes me laugh. The lessons were fun.”

During online drama classes, S5 appeared relaxed and calmed. He was determined to read his lines and participated well in all the activities. He interacted well with his classmates. This was unlike S5. In a classroom setting, he would say unkind words to his friends as he got it wrong when playing drama games. He would appear anxious and unsettled.

Many studies have shown that social-emotional competencies might mitigate the correlations between risk factors or adverse stressors and academic achievements (Mark et al., 2022). Therefore, building social-emotional skills is essential, especially so in students with dyslexia. Most students with dyslexia exhibit diminished social-emotional

development attributable to factors including personal encounters with setbacks, navigating external perceptions of their capabilities (maladaptive characteristics), and lacking adequate support from parents, educators and peers. Researchers suggest that children in this demographic stand to enhance their academic and life outcomes through a boosted self-perception (Humphrey, 2002). Consequently, it is imperative for them to receive adequate support (Eadon, 2005; Casserly, 2013).

As educators, ensuring the social-emotional needs of our students are met is crucial for their overall well-being and academic success. Apart from their parents, educators are the next group of adults that spend many hours together with the students at school. Numerous educators may overlook the significance of students' socio-emotional growth while prioritising the delivery of exam-focused content.

Educators have the capacity to impart social skills like communication, conflict resolution, empathy, and teamwork through explicit instruction. Utilising role-playing and cooperative learning methods within drama classes can prove to be efficacious in this regard. However, due to curriculum constraints, such endeavours may be deemed beyond the scope of the educators' instructional responsibilities. An alternative approach would be taking time to get to know each student individually to foster strong teacher-student relationship - pay attention to the emotional needs of students and provide them with support whenever required - validate their feelings, offer encouragement, and provide a safe space for them to express themselves. These could serve as pivotal foundations for nurturing social-emotional competencies within the classroom environment, whether it be in-person or online.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

The present study is not without its limitations. The small sample size utilised in this research may limit the generalisability of the findings, as it may not accurately represent the entire population of drama students with dyslexia.

Additionally, the absence of insights gathered from parents poses a notable limitation. By neglecting to explore the parent-child relationship and parents' stress levels, crucial factors affecting students' Pupil Checklist scores may have been overlooked (Marchetti et al., 2020). Furthermore, incorporating the perspectives of parents on the impact of COVID-19 on their children's social-emotional well-being is imperative. By gaining insight into parental perspectives and home environments, researchers can develop a more comprehensive understanding of the challenges faced by students and their families during unprecedented times.

Data collection (pre-test) did not commence immediately following the onset of school closures in 2020. The late data collection may have impacted the baseline results, potentially obscuring the full extent of the benefits expected from the SEL portion of the

curriculum. Interviews were conducted several months after participants had returned to in-person classes in 2023, presenting challenges for researchers in contextualising the pandemic, school closures, and minimising potential influence on participant responses. Future research will require an effective data collection schedule to uphold the authenticity of findings.

In addition to the aforementioned points, future investigations could explore the dimensions of social-emotional resilience within the intricate dynamics involving dyslexia, social-emotional learning, and external stressors that potentially affect the social-emotional well-being of students.

CONCLUSION

The present findings demonstrate that students' social-emotional competencies were impacted by the pandemic to a certain extent. It is pleasing to note from the interviews with the participants that the Speech and Drama Arts (SDA) programme was effective in bringing positive online drama learning experiences. All students enjoyed the adapted activities and some even thrived despite the challenges they faced during the period. During that time, teaching drama online required careful review of the curricula and activities to ensure suitability. The educators discussed and addressed any setbacks encountered, thereby allowing the Speech and Drama Arts (SDA) online drama classes to be implemented successfully. During times of global disruptions such as a pandemic, educators play an essential role in supporting students' social and emotional needs. Learning about the experiences and challenges faced by the students in this study confirms this. Despite the challenges posed by the pandemic, it provided us with an opportunity to learn and explore new things as students and educators.

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